

The Air Force Diversity Climate: Implications for Successful Total Force Integration

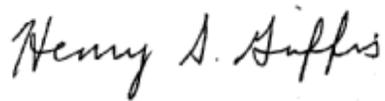
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry S. Griffis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H'.

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Executive summary

The U.S. Air Force (USAF) has adopted two important initiatives: Total Force Integration (TFI) and Smart Operations for the 21st Century, or AFSO21. TFI is the Service's strategy to create a more capable, but also smaller and more affordable, force by purposefully balancing the expertise and experience of personnel from all its components. AFSO21 is a management strategy designed to increase efficiency through process improvements and cultural change. Combined, these initiatives create an operating environment that both increases workforce diversity along structural and organizational lines and makes this diversity potentially more difficult to manage. Research indicates that structural diversity—when managed well—can improve an organization's responses to and implementation of change. The research also indicates, however, that these benefits are difficult to achieve during personnel downsizing and/or when cost-cutting efficiency is a primary goal.

In this context, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Strategic Diversity Integration (SAF/MRD) asked CNA to evaluate how the USAF's climate, culture, and management practices facilitate or hinder successful TFI. Using information collected in 41 focus groups with USAF active duty, reserve, and civilian personnel, this research memorandum addresses the following questions:

- Do USAF personnel describe policies or aspects of the USAF culture and structure that facilitate TFI?
- Do USAF personnel describe their leaders as having and using the leadership competencies that are associated with good diversity management?
- Do USAF personnel describe mentoring practices that contribute to retaining and developing the right people for the new leaner force?

The climate for TFI

The focus groups confirmed the findings from the corporate literature. The outcomes they described were more negative than positive in terms of teamwork, engagement, and morale; however, these outcomes are largely subject to management and the increased workgroup familiarity that time brings as shared experiences replace traditional stereotypes. Waiting for that to occur, however, may take more time than the Air Force has. Thus, it may wish to adapt lessons learned in regard to demographic diversity to managing structural diversity.

The focus groups reinforced the value of a common mission in supplanting work-irrelevant social categorizations. Also, participants expressed a desire for more knowledge about components other than their own. Notably, resentment over component differences in the shape of the workweek, pay and benefits, and accountability was common; mutual understanding was not. These dissatisfactions are reinforced when policy integration lags force integration.

TFI also creates a conflict between component hierarchy and tenure/expertise. This conflict is exacerbated by incentives for active duty officers to make their mark in what, to members of other components, is a short-term assignment. As the regularity of rotation replaces supervisors and commanders, this repeating conflict creates resistance to change among members of the other components.

Managing structural diversity

The focus groups indicate that managing a structurally diverse force is something new for USAF leaders, and civilians in particular have issues with active duty leadership. For instance, an essential ingredient in successful TFI is integrating decision-makers by component, rather than simply integrating the components that decisions will affect. Focus group participants gave many examples of how the component hierarchy can introduce needless inefficiencies by excluding reservists or civilians from deliberations that apply to their work. Others gave examples of the value of including multiple perspectives to develop more innovative solutions to problems.

The rank system is the dominant culture of the Defense Department and sets the tone for valuing diverse ideas. Rank is also associated with command and control, and this presents a challenge in a structurally diverse context. Uniformed personnel who are accustomed to managing by giving orders find that they need a range of carrot/stick tools to manage across components. In particular, active duty officers who led by giving orders instead of actively managing failed to leverage the experience and expertise of structurally diverse groups.

Mentoring

As the USAF downsizes, it is important to retain the most productive personnel, especially in key functions. Effective mentoring is one way to achieve this goal because it can both identify such people and give them the coaching they need to be successful. Mentoring in cross-component units can be problematic due to a lack of shared identities, experiences, and perspectives.

Within components, the same context that enhances the value of mentoring is making it harder to do. The terms "do more with less" and "one deep" recurred throughout the focus groups. Protégés were aware that time pressures can constrain senior personnel's mentoring capabilities, and many are figuring out that it works to be proactive in seeking out mentoring. Note, however, that relying on mentor seeking by protégés, rather than proactive protégé seeking by mentors, risks substituting protégé self-selection for mentor identification of talent. Perhaps the USAF has decided that this type of self-selection is a useful filter for retention because proactive individuals are the kind of people it wants. However, if other useful characteristics are found among entering personnel who fail to be proactive, the USAF may be missing out on talent that it could develop in some other way.

Similarity of any type promotes comfort between mentor and protégé, and participants agreed that such identification is founded not on demographic similarities but on personality, work style, and a shared vision of success. Participants used the word "random" to describe how they found their ideal mentors. In consequence, focus group members were uniformly skeptical that assigning mentors, rather than informally connecting with them, could be effective.

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Introduction

Background and tasking

To simultaneously address new, post-cold-war security challenges, the need for new weapon systems, and tighter budget and endstrength constraints, the U.S. Air Force has adopted two important initiatives. The first, Total Force Integration (TFI), is the Service's strategy to create a more capable, yet smaller and more affordable, force by purposefully balancing the expertise and experience of personnel from all USAF components: active duty members, reservists, and civilians. The second initiative, Smart Operations for the 21st Century (AFSO21), is a management strategy designed to increase efficiency through process improvements and cultural change.

Combined, TFI and AFSO21 create an operating environment that increases workforce diversity along structural and organizational lines while making this diversity potentially more difficult to manage. Background research indicates that structural diversity—when managed well—can improve an organization's responses to and implementation of change. The research also indicates, however, that these benefits are difficult to achieve during personnel downsizing and/or when cost-cutting efficiency is a primary goal. In this context, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Strategic Diversity Integration (SAF/MRD) asked CNA to evaluate how the USAF's climate, culture, structure, and management practices facilitate or hinder successful TFI.

Issues and approach

In November and December 2005, CNA analysts and SAF/MRD staff conducted 41 focus groups with USAF active duty, reserve, and civilian personnel to get their insights about the diversity climates at their installations and in the USAF overall. The facilitators asked questions

about (a) mentoring and career development, (b) cultural values and structure, and (c) missing contributions, innovation, and risk. Using the information collected in these focus groups, this research memorandum addresses the following questions:

1. Do USAF personnel describe policies, aspects of the USAF culture, or aspects of the USAF structure that facilitate TFI?
2. Do USAF personnel describe their leaders as having and using the leadership competencies that are associated with good diversity management?
3. Do USAF personnel describe mentoring practices that contribute to retaining and developing the right people for the new leaner force?

Using transcripts of the focus group sessions, we analyze the qualitative data using a coding scheme that is motivated by the empirical literature on diversity management and USAF guidance on leadership competencies and core values.

Outline

The “theoretical background” section begins with a description of a USAF-specific diversity/capability model that provides the analytical framework for the study. It includes a discussion of the research background that informed the development of the model and how it directs the analysis that follows. More background is provided in the next section, which describes the qualitative research design for the study. The three analytical sections that follow address each of the main research questions in turn. These three sections all provide:

- Narratives that illustrate respondents’ perceptions about the issue at hand
- Summaries of these perceptions
- Discussions of the implications for successful management of structural diversity.

We conclude with a summary of results and recommendations.

Theoretical background

The USAF approach to workforce diversity is strategic and focused on understanding and managing the relationship between *force diversity* and *force capability*. Within this framework, force diversity is broadly defined to include any characteristics that affect how people function in a work group and what they bring to the mission; force capability is defined in terms of combat readiness and asymmetric advantage.

Diversity broadly defined

A multidisciplinary empirical literature has found that the traditional variables of race/ethnicity and gender do not account for the major share of diversity-related impacts on work outcomes [1]. Rather, a broad range of characteristics covering organizational demography as well as demography per se produce the meaningful differences in identity within the work group or organization that call for diversity management, whether to reduce the costs of diversity or to enhance its benefits.

The major measured impact of diversity is the distinct negative effect of in-group/out-group dynamics on retention and group processes. These results hold not just for women and racial/ethnic minorities (including white men when they are the minority in the work group) but also for other differences in worker characteristics, such as age, functional specialty, and time of entry into the group or organization. This means that unmanaged diversity along structural organizational lines can impose significant costs even in the absence of demographic diversity.

The major positive impact of diversity is more difficult to measure, but the empirical literature finds that differences in identity, when managed appropriately, can enhance creativity and innovation. Work groups with diverse membership can bring more ideas to the table, and the increased communication efforts required to share them

with people who have different knowledge, background, and perspectives lead to more careful scrutiny and deliberation of the issues at hand. However, reaping this benefit requires that managers have the skills to facilitate the constructive conflict and effective communication that translate diversity into value.

The important organizational and strategic changes taking place within and around the USAF reinforce the choice of a broad range of diversity variables to examine. In particular, TFI efforts are likely to lead to teams that are more diverse in terms of both Service component and other diversity dimensions. For example, in our analysis of recently deployed Servicemembers' perceptions of the diversity/capability relationship [2], respondents described scenarios in which component diversity increased functional diversity because active duty, reserve, and National Guard units tend to work on different platforms and perform different missions. Respondents in [2] also identified an interesting interaction between organizational and population diversity: The integration of guard and reserve with active duty units unintentionally made age a particularly salient demographic variable.

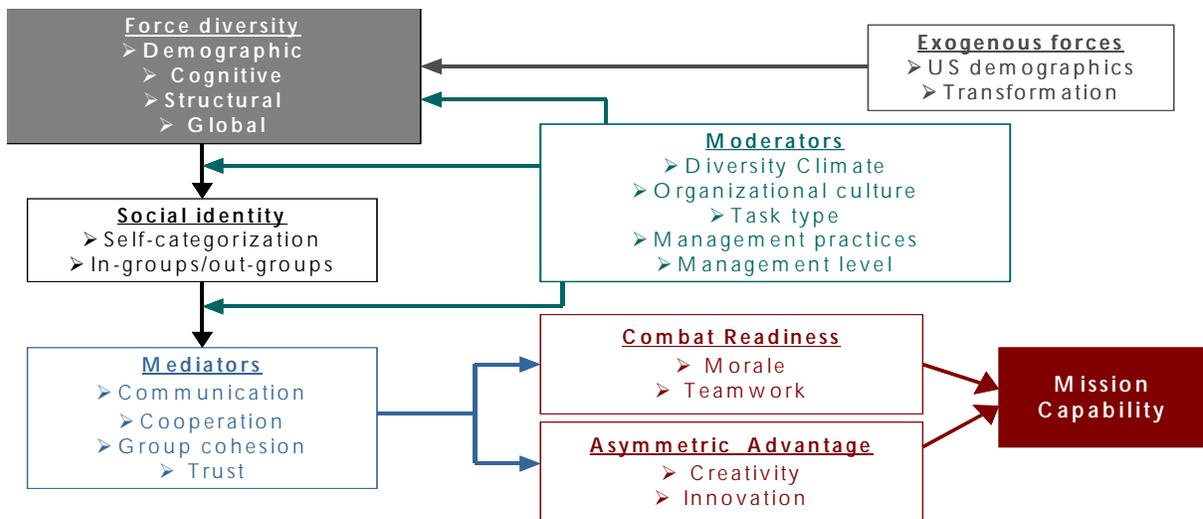
More broadly, [2] found that, of the four diversity types investigated (structural, demographic, cognitive, and global), structural diversity was the only one that respondents were more likely to perceive as having a negative (versus a positive) impact on mission capability.¹ Thus, the current focus on thinking in terms of the total force leads to a need for managing cultural and institutional differences by Service component. Furthermore, as the transformation process leads to more emphasis on joint operations, not only at leadership and planning levels, but also at operational levels, the need for managing the cultural differences that exist across the Services grows. As [2] discussed, the same issues arise in the context of interagency and coalition activities.

1. In [2], structural diversity included not only Service component but also Service branch and occupational specialty.

A conceptual model of force diversity and mission capability

Figure 1 is a conceptual model of the relationship between force diversity and mission capability, hereafter referred to as the Diversity Model. Initially developed by USAF staff, it has been modified slightly by CNA for the purposes of empirical investigation (see figure 1's footnote). Before discussing each element of the model in detail, we call attention to three important points.

Figure 1. Strategic framework: Model of the diversity-capability relationship^a



a. Adapted from the model developed by Major Joseph Sanders III, USAF, and Dr. Willie Hopkins, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore.

First, the relationship between force diversity and mission capability is indirect, occurring through mediators and affected by moderators. Second, external forces that affect the amount and nature of diversity in the USAF workforce are important. In [3], we addressed relevant changes in U.S. demographics; in this investigation, we focus specifically on the TFI context. Third, the model identifies two aspects of mission capability: improving combat readiness and asymmetric advantage. Improving combat readiness by improving morale and teamwork relates most closely to the corporate need to use diversity management to mitigate the negative effects of diversity. Creating or

improving the USAF's asymmetric advantage by increasing creativity and innovation relates most closely to the corporate need to manage diversity to reap real benefits in terms of better decisions.

Elements of the model

Diversity dimensions

The model separates force diversity into four different but not necessarily unrelated types: demographic, cognitive, structural or organizational, and global. This study focuses largely on Service component as a dimension of structural diversity, which also includes Service branch and such structure-related personal attributes as position/rank, work function, and tenure.²

Social identity

Social identity theory provides the connection between social structures and individual identity through the meanings people attach to their memberships in identity groups, such as demographic trait or occupational specialty.³ These identity groups then shape behaviors and perceptions in different settings.⁴

Specifically, people are more likely to bond and identify with those in the workforce who are most similar to them. This fundamental and powerful human process then creates in-groups and out-groups within a given work unit or organization, which in turn affect group processes. Such self-categorization and the formation of in-groups and out-groups can occur based on any diversity dimension, even when the characteristics associated with “otherness” are trivial with respect to the tasks being performed. Based on this theoretical

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2. Reference [2] uses the term *structural diversity*, in accordance with the terminology of the model. Here we use *organizational diversity* and *structural diversity* interchangeably.
 3. Many participants in the focus groups noted that USAF personnel are more likely to identify themselves by their specialty (e.g., pilot, aircraft maintainer, acquisitions) than by a generic USAF affiliation, and that this tendency is not characteristic of other Services.
 4. For example, see [4] and [5].

construct, the Diversity Model hypothesizes that the relationship between work-group diversity and work-group performance is a mediated relationship, and the primary mediators are group processes.

Mediators

A mediated relationship implies a causal chain. For example, if variable A is demonstrated to cause variable B, which in turn causes variable C, variable B is said to mediate the relationship between variables A and C.

The Diversity Model includes four group process variables that mediate the relationship between diversity and mission capability. They are communication, cooperation, group cohesion, and trust. These variables are mediators because they are hypothesized to be directly affected by the social identity variables, on one hand, and to directly affect group performance on the other hand. In other words, diversity is assumed to affect these group processes, which in turn are assumed to affect group outcomes.

Moderators

A moderated relationship is characterized by interaction among variables. For example, if variable A affects variable C depending on the level of variable B, variable B moderates the relationship between variables A and C.

The model hypothesizes that organizational characteristics, such as management practices and organizational culture, moderate actual levels of diversity by affecting both recruiting and retention.⁵ The same variables also affect how diversity affects group processes. Specifically, management and culture can affect both social identity formation and the way social identities determine group processes.

5. For example, several focus group participants indicated that they joined the USAF over the other Services because of its reputation for treating its people well.

Outcomes

The model proposes that two particular aspects of group performance are the main links between force diversity and mission capability. The first performance factor is combat preparedness. The model hypothesizes that better relational processes will result in improved morale and teamwork in work groups. In turn, groups with higher levels of member morale and teamwork are assumed to be better prepared for combat than units that are not as positive in these areas. The second performance factor is asymmetric advantage, which is defined in terms of creativity and innovation. The model proposes that well-managed work groups with diverse ideas and approaches to problem-solving are more creative and innovative than homogeneous groups or diverse groups that aren't well managed.

The diversity/capability relationship described by the model

The model's logic implies the following chain of events: First, it proposes that diversity directly affects the social categorization process. In turn, this process directly influences relational processes at work. Specifically, the more people identify with their work groups, the more likely the work group is to manifest productive relational and other group processes (e.g., high levels of communication, cohesion, and trust.). Alternatively, the more group members identify with subsets of others (both within and outside the work group) according to diversity-related variables, the more likely the group is to manifest unproductive relational and other group processes. Finally, productive relational and group processes are hypothesized to be associated with better group performance, while impaired relational processes are expected to be associated with worse group performance.

How the Diversity Model directs this study

Outcomes of interest

Our earlier work [1] concluded that, overall, the organization-level evidence does not make a strong quantitative case for demographic diversity as a mission-essential requirement for high performance. In some respects, however, the USAF fits the profile in which managed

diversity, whether defined narrowly or broadly, is productive at the organization level. The USAF's collective, mission-based culture lends itself to creating the conditions in which workforce members can create work-relevant social categories that supersede nonrelevant personal categories. Furthermore, the transformational emphasis on change itself, as well as on innovation strategies, indicates that a need for flexibility and nontraditional thinking may make diversity particularly valuable, if it is managed well.

There are other aspects of the USAF culture, however, that are not conducive to gaining benefits from diversity, such as its competitive, up-or-out promotion process for active duty forces and the fact that group membership is in constant flux as members rotate from assignment to assignment. In addition, although the USAF is seeking innovation and creativity, there are times when decisions need to be made quickly and people need to be ready to act on command.

Using mission capability as the bottom-line outcome of interest provides a framework for assessing the positive and negative impacts of diversity and identifying ways to manage them productively. "Combat readiness" translates empirical findings about the impact of diversity on morale and teamwork in civilian organizations into a USAF context. The empirical literature finds that unmanaged diversity tends to impede work-group functioning due to misunderstandings or other communication problems, failure to confront or otherwise resolve conflicting points of view, or lack of attention to motivational issues.

In the context of TFI, such process losses can negatively affect both unit morale and teamwork. For example, in [2], respondents identified lack of trust between members of the Active and Reserve Components (AC and RC) as a barrier to mission achievement. Specifically, there was a perception that members of the AC tended to doubt whether members of the RC were equally dedicated to the mission: the perception of reservists as "weekend warriors" still exists and can inhibit unit cohesion and limit the contributions of RC members. At the same time, several respondents noted that members of the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve brought extra skills to the mission via their civilian experience. In these cases, members of the RC

were seen as “force multipliers.” These conflicting results at once highlight the promise of TFI and the difficulty of actually achieving it.

“Asymmetric advantage” translates the empirical findings about the impact of diversity on innovation and creativity. The empirical literature has found abundant evidence that diversity is valuable for cognitive, creative tasks. The model builds on this evidence to propose that well-managed workers with diverse ideas and approaches to problem-solving are more creative and innovative than homogeneous groups or diverse groups that are not well managed. The USAF’s increased focus on resource efficiency via process change (AFSO21) broadens the need for innovation and creativity because this organizational strategy challenges a wide array of work groups with both initiating change and managing their response to it.

Of course, both combat preparedness and asymmetric advantage encompass other factors than those identified in the model. Similarly, mission capability is a function of many other aspects of performance. However, the relationships called out in the model are the aspects of mission capability that were considered to be most directly related to the issues associated with diversity and diversity management, as identified by the underlying theoretical and empirical research.

Importance of moderators, especially aspects of climate and management

The empirical literature has found that, from an organizational perspective, diversity is linked to performance by various mediating and moderating relationships. We have already described mediating relationships; they are essentially group process variables, such as communication and cooperation. Moderating relationships tend to be more organizational in scope, such as organizational climate and strategic context.

According to [6], organizational climate is defined as the relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organization that (a) is experienced by its members, (b) influences their behavior, and (c) can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics (or attitudes) of the organization. Organizations can have

multiple climates.⁶ For instance, different USAF bases have different climates, as do different USAF occupations, while the USAF as a whole has a unified set of core values. These climates are all capable of moderating the relationship between diversity and the outcome of interest, whether positively or negatively.

Recent diversity research has focused on the moderating impact of organizational context, such as strategic orientation. For instance, [7] found that diversity tended to have a positive impact in banks that were pursuing a growth strategy compared with banks with similar levels of diversity that were pursuing a no-growth or downsizing strategy. The former strategy requires creativity and entrepreneurial risk-taking, while the latter seeks to avoid incurring coordination costs. Other studies suggest that diversity adds value in the context of a transformation strategy, when flexibility becomes more important than managerial efficiency. However, gaining the positive impact may depend on explicit and effective diversity management.

Empirical research has also found a positive impact from encouraging people to form social categories associated with common work goals, and from fostering strong collective (i.e., participatory and collaborative) cultures when they don't already exist. Such a climate appears to produce the most favorable context for getting a performance dividend from diversity in the workforce.⁷

In short, the moderating effects of organizational context on the impact of diversity suggest a Janus-faced challenge for the USAF. First, such transformational activities as process change and force integration can be more costly than necessary in the absence of good diversity management. Second, such management can reap contributions that will ease and even improve transformation. Thus, diversity management can answer both the positive and negative questions that diversity poses for the USAF.

6. See [4].

7. Many of the interviews analyzed in [2] reported that deployment focused people on the mission, and away from their social differences. In many cases, the novel circumstances forced participatory and collaborative work processes as well.

Diversity management

Empirical and theoretical research into diversity management tends to focus on one of three organizational levels:

- Organization level (= strategic)
- Work-group level (= operational)
- Individual level (= tactical).

Following [1], in this research, we address both the organizational and work-group levels, while noting the existence of the individual level.

At the organization level, research has identified the positive but indirect impact on performance of such formal diversity management practices as developing and maintaining an appropriate organizational culture, including an effective “language” for talking about diversity. Performance results at this level tend to be contingent on corporate strategy, such as innovation-based growth strategies [8]. That is, organizational outcomes depend on so many aspects of organizational performance that it is hard to tease out the specific impact of diversity management. An intensive assessment of diversity management in corporate settings concludes simply that organizations that nurture a learning perspective from diversity, and a supportive and cooperative culture, should outperform other organizations [9].

However, diversity management has had a successful, measurable impact from an organizational focus on practices that improve work-group processes. Reference [9], for example, found that organizational context matters: the authors’ close analysis of four Fortune 500 companies showed that a highly competitive context among teams had a negative impact on the performance of diverse work groups. Their results suggested that managers be specifically trained in the leadership and process skills that facilitate the two key success factors of diversity: constructive conflict and effective communication. In that sense, organization-level diversity management is typically directed at mediators rather than moderators, and the measured impact occurs at the work-group level.

At the work-group level, the empirical research finds a positive impact from developing appropriate process management skills and facilitating effective communication. The literature also suggests that diversity management should focus on group members as well as managers. Reference [10], for instance, summarizes the social psychology literature as showing that cooperation within a group does not come naturally in the normally competitive American society; it must be taught. The authors identify three skills as particularly useful for improving the functioning of diverse groups: listening, helping, and observing/evaluating the group process.

Other research has found that paying attention to the duration of the group's time together makes a difference. It seems that longer joint tenure allows work-group members to develop real knowledge of one another that supplants stereotypes [10].⁸ Instilling mission-specific or other team-specific identities is another proven diversity management tool.

Our analysis of interviews with recently deployed USAF personnel [2] validates these research findings with respect to work groups made up of people with different structural memberships. The deployment context seems to favor replacing potentially hostile structural identities with mission-specific and/or team-specific identities. In contrast, absent frequent interaction and a common work-group goal, personnel reported examples of friction between, for example, AC and RC members.

The interviews also suggested a need for applying the kinds of diversity management tools used for demographic diversity to the structural (and global) diversity encountered in the deployed situation. Respondents repeatedly expressed a wish for more knowledge of the "other," ranging from understanding basic differences (such as the impact of deployment on reservists' civilian employment) to adequate communication of differential policies (rewards, incentives, tours of duty, etc.), if not out-and-out policy harmonization.

8. Replacing intergroup hostility through repeated interaction is dependent on an organizationally positive diversity climate [10].

Mentoring

Although it is not called out specifically in the diversity model, mentoring is an important aspect of diversity management. Particularly in a downsizing environment, mentoring can be a key mechanism for making new personnel combat ready; it can also enhance asymmetric advantage by giving leaders access to new ideas and talent. Thus, this research addresses the role of mentoring as a moderator of mission capability.

The organizational benefits of mentoring include increased commitment and satisfaction of protégés, as well as more efficient identification and promotion of talent [11]. In turn, mentoring reduces turnover—and training costs when used for on-the-job training. At the individual level, mentoring enhances leadership and skill development, thereby improving performance. These benefits are closely aligned with USAF guidance on mentoring, which expressly advocates increasing performance and retention, and improving career development.

Though mentoring as a practice has become popular, the empirical research on mentoring is fairly recent. Reference [12] presented the first framework for the functions and phases of mentoring, and [13] extended this work by documenting the phase-dependence of particular functions. Specifically, [12] defined the phases of mentoring as initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition, which make up a developmental relationship in which mentors and protégés evolve toward becoming peers.⁹ In a longitudinal study, [13] found that proteges received less support in the initiation phase than in the other three phases.

Mentoring functions

In general, researchers sort mentoring functions into two broad categories: career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions include sponsorship, coaching, and protection, as well as helping to increase exposure and visibility and find challenging work

9. Throughout this document, we will refer to the person who provides mentoring as the mentor and the recipient as the protégé.

assignments. Psychosocial functions include role modeling, counseling, and friendship, all of which enhance feelings of acceptance and confirmation.

The coaching function aligns well with the USAF mentoring guidance on performance evaluation and career development that is specific to the protégé's Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) [14]. The USAF also requires mentors to teach protégés USAF history, heritage, and career values, which aligns well with the psychosocial functions of role modeling and counseling. While USAF mentors probably engage in many of the other functions (both career and psychosocial) specified in [12], these four functions are what the policy requires.

Clearly, the USAF cares about many of these other functions. For example, morale is often cited as key to military workforce performance, and it is closely aligned with what [15] describes as employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. Similarly, mentoring reduces turnover (retention) and develops future leaders (promotion) [16 and 17].

Mentoring types

The most traditional type of mentoring is that which occurs via self-categorization or mutual interest; this is known as informal mentoring. Since most USAF leaders are white and male [3], it is probable that they form informal mentoring relationships with other white men, as research in corporate settings has found [11 and 18].

Many organizations have created formal mentoring programs specifically to create opportunities for those left out of informal mentoring networks. These programs assign protégés to mentors. USAF policy does this by requiring supervisors to perform the mentoring functions described in the guidance.

Supervisory mentoring is a particular type of formal mentoring that builds on the supervisor-subordinate relationship. As mentioned, supervisors in most organizations engage in many of the functions [12] described, but there is little research on supervisory mentoring itself, aside from suggestions that the supervisory status of the mentor influences how mentors and protégés interact [12, 18, and 19].

New empirical research on supervisory mentoring yields two findings relevant to the USAF context [12]. First, similarity (of any type) promotes comfort between mentors and protégés. This comfort engenders closer mentoring relationships, which increases the likelihood that protégés will receive additional developmental guidance. In such situations, mentors have a relatively long-term focus and provide opportunities that may benefit their protégés well beyond the current assignments.

In this investigation of structural diversity, Service component defines the primary cultural identities of interest. So reference [10]’s first finding suggests that mentors and protégés who belong to the same component community should enjoy greater comfort, closer mentoring relationships, and more long-term development than mentoring relationships that cross components. As will be discussed in the results section, we found evidence that particularly successful mentoring relationships transcend relocations and changes of status. Such relationships tend to be founded on similarities that go beyond component membership.

Reference [10] also demonstrated that more proactive protégés receive additional developmental opportunities, compared with their less proactive peers. In the USAF context, proactive protégés are often the most visible and often receive the highest evaluation ratings. These Servicemembers are referred to as being “firewalled,” and their increased proactivity and access to prime opportunities is well understood by psychologists. Specifically, employees are more proactive when they have higher self-efficacy and self-esteem and, therefore, feel that they have more control over outcomes.

Research design and methodology

Purpose of focus groups

A number of methods may be employed to investigate the impact of diversity on mission capability. These methods can be adopted alone or in combination using a technique called triangulation. Reference [20] defines triangulation, a term borrowed from navigation and military strategy, in the following way:

The concept of triangulation was based on the assumption that any bias inherent in a particular data source, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods. A combined method study is one in which the researcher[s] uses multiple methods of data collection and analysis.

Triangulation is especially appropriate when the phenomena being studied are complex and not yet well understood. Given the context-dependent nature of the diversity/capability relationship, triangulation is appropriate to ensure a more complete understanding of the diversity phenomenon. Thus, this study is one component of a broader research agenda addressing diversity and mission capability in the USAF. As with most qualitative sources, data collected from focus group interviews offer deeper insights than those arising from quantitative methods. In addition to the ability to delve deeper, conducting interviews of groups also allows respondents to build on each other's thoughts and clarify their thinking.

Motivated by the Diversity Model developed in previous work, the purpose of the focus groups was to evaluate or describe the overall USAF diversity climate, as well as potential subclimates, such as the flight line versus medical transport, or Charleston AFB versus Wright-Patterson AFB. The major diversity dimension of interest was structural diversity, especially in terms of component, but also rank and

occupational function. Sites were selected and focus group membership was determined with this in mind.¹⁰ An equally important and more specific purpose was to investigate the phenomenon of mentoring in the USAF total force. This purpose reflected the role of mentoring in the Plan for Integrating Diversity.

Data collection

Focus group composition

Target populations

To investigate the efficacy of the USAF's TFI efforts, we specifically selected interview sites that allowed us to interview personnel in each category. The bases we visited were Langley, Wright-Patterson, and Charleston. Langley's size as well as its proximity made it ideal as a pilot site. The associate reserve and fighter wings at Charleston were a good source of rich data. Finally, with a large civilian workforce and with several reserve and guard units, Wright-Patterson offered a valuable opportunity to study the total force.

At each site, participants were combined in either cross-base or intra-unit groups, half of the groups for each broad type. The selection of units for specific focus depended in part on the size and organization of each base, as well as the units within it. This two-pronged strategy allowed us to collect data on the overall base culture, as well as to concentrate on units of particular interest, such as blended, associate, and joint forces units. This technique is another use of triangulation, and it allowed us to more accurately assess key aspects of USAF culture. Within this structure, we requested respondents who represented various ranks and functional specialties. Table 1 shows the rank compositions of the different focus groups. While we asked for three to five people in each group, there were typically five or more; in a few cases, though, there was only a single person.

10. Demographic diversity was addressed in some of the focus group discussions, but it was not a factor in determining focus group membership.

Table 1. Rank compositions of focus groups

Rank grouping	Rank composition
Civilian 1	Wage grade employees
Civilian 2	GS9–GS15
Enlisted 1	E1–E4
Enlisted 2	E5–E6
Enlisted 3	E7–E9
Officer 1	O1–O3
Officer 2	O4–O5
Officer 3	O6

Confidentiality strategy

Two key steps were taken to minimize the likelihood that respondents' comments could have adverse career effects. First, in constructing focus groups, the point of contact on each base worked to ensure that respondents were not in the chain of command of any other group member. Second, respondents were instructed to choose code names, typically any first names other than their own. Code names were then used throughout the interviews and in all data analysis and reporting. These steps not only protect confidentiality but also encourage candid responses.

Capturing the data

Interview data were recorded via audio, for transcription and analysis. Video was used as backup and to record nonverbal responses. In two cases, however, recording quality was low and transcription could not be done. The analysis, therefore, is based on results from 39 rather than 41 focus groups.

The sample

Table 2 lists the features of each focus group. Of the 41 focus groups conducted, 6 comprised civilians, 18 comprised AC members, and 17 comprised RC members. Within each component, the focus groups were evenly distributed across base and rank grouping. A total of 183 personnel participated in the focus groups: 79 members of the AC, 78

members of the RC, and 26 civilians. Participation was fairly evenly spread across rank groupings, with an average of 26 total participants in each military grouping and 13 in the two civilian groupings. Participation varied somewhat by base: there were 69 and 66 participants from Charleston and Wright-Patterson, respectively, but only 48 participants from Langley.

Table 2. Characteristics of focus groups

Rank grouping	Component ^a	Number of participants	Base ^b	Type ^c	Protocol	Interview number
Civilian 1	Civ	6	CH	IU	A	FG 16
Civilian 1	Civ	4	LA	CB	A	FG 29
Civilian 1	Civ	4	WP	IU	B	FG 31
Civilian 2	Civ	2	LA	IU	B	FG 4
Civilian 2	Civ	6	WP	CB	B	FG 23
Civilian 2	Civ	4	CH	CB	A	FG 35
Enlisted 1	AC	6	LA	CB	B	FG 27
Enlisted 1	AC	5	WP	IU	A	FG 32
Enlisted 1	AC	5	CH	IU	A	FG 37
Enlisted 1	RC	4	WP	CB	A	FG 20
Enlisted 1	RC	4	CH	IU	B	FG 36
Enlisted 1	RC	6	LA	CB	B	FG 13
Enlisted 2	AC	4	LA	CB	A	FG 9
Enlisted 2	AC	4	WP	IU	B	FG 33
Enlisted 2	AC	5	CH	IU	B	FG 39
Enlisted 2	RC	4	LA	IU	A	FG 14
Enlisted 2	RC	4	WP	CB	B	FG 21
Enlisted 2	RC	5	CH	IU	A	FG 34
Enlisted 3	AC	3	LA	CB	B	FG 12
Enlisted 3	AC	3	WP	CB	A	FG 17
Enlisted 3	AC	5	CH	CB	B	FG 24
Enlisted 3	RC	5	WP	CB	A	FG 1
Enlisted 3 ^d	RC	8	CH	IU	B	FG 41
Officer 1	AC	7	WP	CB	A	FG 18
Officer 1	AC	5	CH	CB	B	FG 19
Officer 1	AC	5	LA	IU	B	FG 28
Officer 1	RC	4	WP	CB	B	FG 5
Officer 1	RC	1	LA	IU	A	FG 10
Officer 1	RC	5	CH	CB	B	FG 25

Table 2. Characteristics of focus groups (continued)

Rank grouping	Component ^a	Number of participants	Base ^b	Type ^c	Protocol	Interview number
Officer 2	AC	3	CH	IU	A	FG 3
Officer 2	AC	1	LA	IU	A	FG 30
Officer 2	AC	6	WP	IU	A	FG 38
Officer 2	RC	5	CH	CB	A	FG 2
Officer 2	RC	5	WP	CB	A	FG 6
Officer 2	RC	4	LA	CB	B	FG 11
Officer 3	AC	4	LA	CB	B	FG 7
Officer 3	AC	4	WP	CB	B	FG 8
Officer 3 ^d	AC	4	CH	CB	A	FG 40
Officer 3	RC	4	LA	CB	A	FG 15
Officer 3	RC	5	WP	CB	B	FG 22
Officer 3	RC	5	CH	CB	B	FG 26

a. Civ = civilian; AC = Active Component; RC = Reserve Component.

b. CH = Charleston AFB; LA = Langley AFB; WP = Wright-Patterson AFB.

c. IU = intra-unit; CB = cross-base.

d. Not included in the analysis because low tape quality precluded transcription.

An additional important feature of the sample is that all participants from the RC were members of the Air Force Reserve (AFR); no participants were members of the Air National Guard (ANG). Therefore, throughout this document, the RC perspective is represented by reservists only.

Focus group protocols

Each group interview was designed to last 45 to 60 minutes, and the focus group interview protocols were organized into five topical sections, each with a set of main questions and followup questions:

- **Leadership perception and vision penetration.** Questions on this topic elicited participants' views of their local leadership as well as top USAF leadership, and explored the extent to which respondents were able to connect leadership's vision with their own contributions to the USAF mission.

- **Mentoring and career development.** Questions on this topic addressed respondents' experiences with mentoring, both formal and informal.
- **Missing contributions, innovation, and risk.** Questions on this topic addressed respondents' perceptions about their leadership's openness to input and whether there are mission contributions that USAF personnel could be making but aren't.
- **Mediators and moderators.** Questions on this topic elicited respondents' perceptions about what helps USAF personnel perform at their best to achieve the mission. Specific items reflected things that researchers have found help organizations make the most of their employees' talents and skills.
- **Cultural values and structure.** Questions on this topic asked respondents to describe what it feels like to work (and live) inside the culture of the USAF.

The protocols were arranged in two tracks, A and B, both of which were designed to focus on mediators and moderators of workforce diversity and on cultural values and structure, but they followed different paths. This was done to allow researchers to probe a larger set of topics than could be addressed in a single interview since including all topics in a single session introduced the risk of overtaxing participants and achieving lower quality responses. The protocols served as guides for conversations between researchers and respondents. Therefore, questions could be paraphrased and followup questions omitted to maintain productive conversation and allow for more detailed interrogation of issues raised by respondents.

The complete focus group interview protocols are provided in the appendix.

Data analysis and coding

The coding scheme is based on the Diversity Model and its match with USAF guidance on culture (i.e., core values), leadership, and mentoring, as well as with learning from empirical research in the corporate setting. According to the model, organizational climate moderates the impact of workforce diversity on organizational

performance. Climates can moderate diversity positively, such that increased organizational diversity produces organizational benefits without creating organizational costs. Climates can also moderate diversity negatively, such that increased organizational diversity generates unproductive conflict and process loss.

Empirical results suggest that the external, competitive environment in which a business operates also affects the way the organization experiences diversity's costs and/or benefits. For the USAF, analogous concepts include such organizational aspects as operations tempo and budget and endstrength constraints. For example, a trend toward "doing more with less" can affect the overall climate.

Moderators

Five broad moderators served as the main coding categories:

- Culture and structure
- Leadership and management
- Mentoring¹¹
- Operating environment
- Policy.

Each of these broad categories encompassed one or more subcategories, selected according to guidance from USAF directives [14 and 21] as well as from the empirical literature.

Culture and structure had five separate moderator codes, each selected to capture an organizational characteristic that might leverage or work against diversity in the USAF:

- Up-or-out promotion
- Rank-based hierarchy
- Component-based hierarchy

11. Technically, mentoring is a subset of leadership and management.

- Long-standing, traditional attitudes
- USAF core values (from [21]):
 - Justice
 - Openness
 - Service
 - Excellence.

Leadership and management had three sets of moderator codes, each with subcodes and, in some cases, sub-subcodes. These codes were largely derived from matching USAF leadership guidance [21] with successful diversity management practices:

- Tactical = personal leadership competencies
 - Inspire trust
 - Assess self
 - Foster effective communication
- Operational = people and team leadership
 - Instill commitment to a common vision and shared values
 - Promote collaboration and teamwork
 - * Facilitate cooperation
 - * Establish group identity through mutual goals, common team practices, and structure
 - Partner to maximize results
 - * Accommodate a variety of interpersonal styles and perspectives to achieve objectives
 - * Leverage cross-disciplinary knowledge
- Strategic = institutional leadership
 - Articulate strategic vision
 - Build consensus

- Embrace change and transformation
 - * Create an environment that supports innovation, continuous improvement, and risk taking
 - * Lead efforts to streamline processes.

Mentoring categories were largely selected from the mentoring literature because USAF guidance beyond basic supervisor training and evaluation functions is not well developed. This is an area that calls for more analysis and consideration, especially for mentors:

- Mentor
 - Extra mentoring of subordinates
 - Mentoring of nonsubordinates
 - Minimum mentoring of subordinates
- Protégé
 - Extra mentoring from nonsupervisor
 - Extra mentoring from supervisor
 - Mentoring impact on career development
 - Minimum mentoring by supervisor
 - Peer mentoring
 - Extra mentoring sought out.

Operating environment had five separate moderator subcategories. The first four represent organizational climate characteristics that are known to affect the impact of diversity, while the fifth addresses the differential impact of specific jobs and tasks:

- Budget and endstrength cuts
- Deployment
- Drive for process change
- Operations tempo
- Task type and AFSC.

Finally, the **policy** moderator category included one subcode, largely as a placeholder for unanticipated diversity concerns, such as those that emerged in discussions that focused on diversity in work schedules or in accountability:

- Emergent things.

Mediators

The eight mediator categories represented the positive and the negative sides of four common diversity mediators:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Individual engagement and morale
- Task type.¹²

The first three are group process variables that affect the relationship between diversity and mission capability, while the fourth allows for a varying impact of task type. For instance, new research shows that the relationship between core self-evaluations and job satisfaction is mediated by perceptions of intrinsic job characteristics, and that this relationship is also mediated by job complexity.

Outcomes

The primary outcomes of interest reflect the two major organizational impacts of diversity: its potentially beneficial impact on creativity and innovation, and its potentially negative impact on efficiency. In the diversity model, these outcomes determine an asymmetric advantage factor that improves mission capability. Thus, there were both positive and negative codes for:

- Creativity and innovation
- Efficiency.

12. Task type functions as both a mediator and a moderator.

Combat readiness is the other component of the model that affects mission capability. These outcomes were also coded in terms of the work group or organization rather than the individual, according to a positive or negative impact.

- Readiness
- Unit and base morale
- Performance
- Retention
- Enlistment.

Coding process

For each focus group, we identified moderators that were discussed in depth, as opposed to simply mentioned. (Most groups lingered persistently on only a few topics, depending on the composition of the group.) We mapped emblematic statements or discussions to the relevant mediators and outcomes, according to the causal relationships described by the model. For example, when one participant described how she broke through diversity barriers, it was important to code with the understanding that the barriers didn't affect her engagement but rather that her high level of engagement led her to break down the barriers.

The process included capturing whether participants were describing their own behavior or the behavior of others. It also included noting the extent to which participants agreed among themselves—that is, whether the phenomenon described was experienced similarly by other participants, or by just one person (and whether it was contradicted by the experience of others).

The coding software (a package called NVivo) enabled us to analyze the relatively free-flowing discussions by retrieving and sorting items coded as mediators and/or outcomes associated with the moderators that were coded as relevant to each research question. This enabled us to identify what kinds of focus groups, whether component or rank, held a particular viewpoint or had a particular experience.

This process permitted the development of general statements about the USAF diversity climate and the likelihood of benefiting and losing from the increased focus on TFI. More specifically, it also allowed us to identify organizational structures, policies, and management practices that are likely to impose potentially unintended costs and/or yield benefits, as well as identify diversity management skills that leaders should have and should use to inform training and doctrine.

The climate for TFI

Analysis question: Do people describe policies, aspects of the AF culture, or aspects of the AF structure that facilitate/hinder Total Force Integration? Specifically, does it appear that the USAF is successfully balancing the experience and expertise of the members of its different components?

This question derives from the important learning about diversity in [1]—the generally negative organizational costs in terms of process loss that occur when diversity is unmanaged. As [2] found, structural diversity was the only one of four diversity types that respondents perceived as having more of a negative than a positive impact. Thus, this analysis addresses the intersection between these two findings.

Components

The USAF has four basic components: three uniformed and one civilian (including contractors). Three of them—AC, RC,¹³ and non-contract civilian employees—provided focus groups for this research. Important component characteristics for structural diversity include the following:

- AC members engage primarily in military-specific activities, as well as some support activities. They have broader based exposure to various aspects of the military due to more frequent changes of station and, therefore, changes of mission and command focus.
- RC members engage primarily in military-specific activities, as well as some support activities. Their participation increases

13. The RC includes two components: the AFR and the ANG. As noted in the section describing the study sample, all focus group participants were members of the AFR.

during periods of high operational tempo. Their annual time commitment ranges from full activation to the traditional weekends plus 2 weeks. They often have more job and locational continuity than AC members and may also bring considerable experience and expertise from civilian careers.

- Civilians engage primarily in support activities. They have specific managerial and technical expertise as well as continuity of experience. Depending on their level, they tend to stay at one base. In some cases, they may be a deployable asset.

Note that both RC members and civilians are frequently former AC members. Also note that civilians may be former or currently participating reservists as well.

In general, USAF discussions of TFI focus on uniformed personnel, as seen in the following quotations:

Today the United States Air Force integrates its three components into a single aerospace force that operates as one team, in both peacetime and wartime. Major capabilities have been assigned to and operate from both the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve. Today all three components have significant capabilities and perform important missions. [22]

Total Force Integration incorporates innovative organizational constructs with a smaller, more capable force structure to leverage increased capability from new technology and capitalize on the wealth of talent inherent in the active duty Air Force, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve components. [23]

In the face of reducing active duty personnel and acquiring new weapons systems to replace legacy ones, budget dollars are tight and must be carefully managed. Combine the fiscal issue with the experience the Reserve component offers and the decision to integrate makes sense....My division is comprised of Active, Guard, and Reserve personnel along with a few contractors—everyone is represented here! [24]

Even though few discussions of integration mention civilians or contractors, this research into the impact of diversity in work groups

necessarily encompasses nonuniformed personnel. Some integration activities include civilians:

A true total-force class was formed for this year's event.¹⁴ Airmen from other major commands and Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve personnel attended. Some civilians from here also attended. [25]

In terms of integration, the USAF has a variety of organizational constructs, with important variables being whether integration includes administrative or operational control and support. No attempt is made in the following discussion to distinguish between these constructs because we do not possess sufficient information about each focus group situation.

Integration and diversity

The USAF strategy of becoming more effective/efficient by integrating its various components into a total force increases structural diversity. Summarized in terms of the Diversity Model, our review of passages relevant to this analysis question is based on the following assumed path. Structural diversity:

- Is a response to transformation
- Is moderated by culture and structure, policy, and operating environment in particular
- Is connected for some groups to meanings they attach to social identity
- Affects combat readiness via such mediators as teamwork and unit engagement/morale
- Affects mission capability in terms of reported outcomes, such as performance, engagement, efficiency, and retention.

14. The event to which the quotation refers was Air Mobility Command's (AMC's) 2006 Phoenix Stripe event. Phoenix Stripe is a professional development program that provides an overview of how AMC operates at the headquarters level and its role in the war on terrorism.

In other words, the very conditions that spur TFI may exacerbate social categorization and thus make TFI less effective. First, efficiency strategies tend to incorporate elements of cost-cutting and downsizing, which tend to have negative impacts on work groups, whether they are homogeneous or diverse. Second, structural diversity requires newly integrated work groups to overcome basic issues of social identity, in much the same way that groups newly integrated in terms of race/ethnicity and gender have had to do. The empirical literature would lead us to expect the resultant impact on work groups to be largely negative, absent effective diversity management.

We address this research question by examining how major moderators affect social categorization based on component membership, and how this affects related mediators and outcomes. In this context, mediators and outcomes can be thought of as proxies for, manifestations of, or examples of effective leveraging of effectiveness and efficiencies from and for all components, even when the groups do not specifically address performance or efficiency related to TFI. Finally, we perform separate analyses of AC/RC integration and military/civilian integration since the issues tend to be substantively different.

Culture and structure

It is not easy or perhaps even necessary to separate USAF culture and structure as they apply to this research question. To a certain extent, the culture is a reflection of the structure before integration. And, as some of the following quotations show, the culture is beginning to change as a result of the new, integrated structure, whether because of greater resource needs on the part of active duty or because of the greater familiarity fostered by shared experiences.

Nevertheless, basic structural differences, such as component time horizons, whether at a particular location or in a particular job, can hinder integration (as subsequent sections will show):

It is a challenging situation that has been created and will not be easy to resolve, nor do I know that we really want to. You got an active duty career track that is designed around a 20-year time frame and they're trying to reach their goals in that 20-year frame. And the other two communities that

we talked about—really there’s three: the Guard, the Reserve, and the Civil Service—have much longer, 30 or 40 or even longer, windows of opportunity for a member to hone his skills, increase his knowledge, and reach his goals.

FG26 CH RC 03

Based on [1], we have hypothesized that USAF culture and structure are likely to affect social categorization in several ways. We have said that the mission-oriented culture is likely to mitigate or decrease social categorization. We have also said that the up-or-out promotion system for officers is likely to exacerbate or increase social categorization, not just for officers but also for those they lead and/or manage. In addition, we hypothesize that the component hierarchy (e.g., active being more “important” than reserve and military more “important” than civilian) is likely to exacerbate social categorization based on structural identities, especially because TFI integrates “lesser” components into the “superior” component, rather than the other way around.

AC/RC integration

Component-based hierarchy

The following impressions from a senior reserve officer with a wide range of component experiences exemplify the challenge for the active duty in leveraging the positive differences that reservists bring to the total force. On one hand, the organizations have parallel structures and a shared mission; on the other hand, they have different mind-sets, different degrees of skill, and different policies, as well as different social identities. These differences complicate AC/RC integration, especially in light of the privileged position the AC occupies in the component hierarchy:

I’ve had the opportunity to actually do traditional reservists, IMAs,¹⁵ and active duty for 10 years in each prospectus, so

15. “IMA” stands for “Individual Mobilization Augementee,” which is a reservist attending drills who receives training and is preassigned to an active component organization, a Selective Service System, or a Federal Emergency Management Agency billet that must be filled on, or shortly after, mobilization.

you'll find that's kind of unique. What I have found, from the active duty perspective, is reserves are more cavalier, more apt to break regulations and rules....But then if you look at the Reserves, they actually get the mission done. So it's a fine line because, from my perspective, the active duty follow regulation to the T and sometimes not to the betterment of the mission. Sometimes they get stuck: "Well we have to follow regulation, we can't do this." Where the Reserve or Guard are, "Let's get the mission done, we'll take care of the rest of it later." So I think it all works. I think Jim was saying, it does work. The Reserve, Guard, and active duty are three distinct groups, so you have a diversity of just who is in the blue uniform. And we're not even talking about race or culture; we're just talking about mind-set. So when you do have—you said scum—there is that perception. I've seen it every day....But then when you get a reservist in there that actually does, or a guardsman, that does the job very well, very talented—oh, by the way that tech sergeant has a doctorate, or has a special degree—they don't realize that. They're bringing people in that, just by the rank you wear on the uniform, there's a perception. Well you know what? When you find out who this person is from the civilian side, you go, "Wow. Wait a minute, this person may have more experience than I could even now as a colonel." In fact, a perfect example: A major that we brought in the Reserves over at AFMC.¹⁶ I'm a colonel, but I found this major is working....He's the president of a company that is over 30 million dollars. I'm like, "Wait a minute, you have more experience than I do with this kind of group dynamic and stuff." So it was difficult though for me to compromise myself and say, "You know what, Major? You've got more experience, share that with me." It's very difficult. We are very rank structured; you don't find that in the civilian world as much. We wear it. But I found in the Reserves, you know what? I was listening to a major. So it was humbling also for active duty folks who said you're scum, but wait a minute, no you're not, because I may be calling you up when I retire for a job. So you have a diverse group just in the sense of within the blue uniform. And based on who you are. Very challenging. *FG22 WP RC O3*

As in almost any large organization, the chain of command is perhaps the most significant structural design element, and failing to observe

16. "AFMC" is the abbreviation for "Air Force Material Command."

it usually has a negative impact on performance. The USAF is no different: Even though teams may work well together, a supervisor's authority and, therefore, effectiveness can be diminished if a supervisor from another component intervenes. The following situation has probably not been uncommon in a nonintegrated force structure, where reservists are part-time and the AC has the primary day-to-day responsibility:

You know, when you're a supervisor, you supervise individuals. But, once again, we are part-time reservists, so next thing I know I come back...and all of a sudden they change something you've done as a supervisor. Higher up had said, "Don't worry about that individual, we've taken care of it." "What??" That's the communication I'm talking about. Granted we're good friends, we get along, we work well as a team. We have to, we do the physicals every single year. But the moment you take things...you follow things you've learned in your schooling and your management course... and you're doing the best you can—the right thing with this individual you supervise—and all of a sudden you come back and say, "The other chief has spoken, don't worry about it. The other things are taken care of." And I go, "What the?" You know, sometimes things interrupt my process to allow me to be the supervisor and finish up with this individual. **FG1 WP RC E3**

In the integrated total force, however, the common mission and experience of working together, especially in deployment, substitutes real knowledge of other components for categorization and thus tempers the impact of the component-based hierarchy:

In the past the active duty people would say, "Well, I'm active duty, I'm in charge." They don't care if you're Guard or Reserve. I think I've seen that change a lot recently. Especially nowadays, because you could be in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and the person next to you could be a Reserve, a National Guard, and active duty, and nobody knows. And so you have to really look at it and base it on, well how is the person performing? As opposed to are they active duty or whatever. **FG14 LA RC E2**

Long-standing attitudes, including lack of knowledge

Several reservist focus groups said they felt that the active duty viewed them negatively based on stereotypes rather than real understanding. Such lack of understanding across Service components contributes to a culture that can decrease engagement and morale. In addition, it may result in failure to leverage the other component:

I remember hearing (I don't know if they're rumors, but they're pretty substantial rumors) of active duty with the senior officials—probably on the DO¹⁷ level, vice commander level—really talking negative terms against the Reserves because they didn't understand. And I didn't understand when I was in active duty and I heard the reserve people standing up. I had no idea what it meant to be a reservist, who comes in and works one weekend a month and two weeks out of the year. *FG10 LA RC 01*

Just work, they don't want me to help them. They'll try to do my job for me because, you know, I guess they think, "Oh he's a reservist, they don't know what they're doing," or I can't learn it or something. *FG20 WP RC E1*

However, this long-standing categorization of reserve inferiority is belied in instances that suggest that a cross-component structure can provide performance-improving diversity due to the different temporal structure of the AC and the RC. In these quotations, reservists' greater experience and maturity are seen as rectifying AC limitations:

In my active duty time, I counted on my reservists because my reservists were my experience base. I was in an associate unit as an active duty guy and I knew I would not have been able to do my job; I had 17-, 18-, 19-year-old kids on the active duty side. They were coming through and they didn't know anything and I had to rely on my reservists that were part of my associated unit as my experience base because they're the ones....All of them are sevens, every one of them, which is the highest level. *FG6 WP RC 02*

One of the things we definitely bring to the table, and that was very obvious to me, is the experience and maturity. I don't know how else to put it, but I know personally a lot of

17. "DO" stands for "division officer."

times when I was sitting there, especially looking like at one of my units in security forces, I thought, “Oh, if I was just looking at some of those tech sergeants, master sergeants, that I know have some experience opposed to some of these kids who are doing silly, dumb things.” **FG22 WP RC 03**

Communication is important in acknowledging different structures and practices, including translating those differences into terms that are meaningful to other components:

I think it comes down to communication too....In the Reserves, we have something that we call Groundhog Day, 'cause every 2 years we end up having to re-educate our active duty counterparts on how our business runs. And you tell the folks how our lives in active duty might get 2 days off the weekend, a couple days off. Then a technician comes in and works as a civilian for 5 days, ends up working [as a reservist] the weekend, comes in again for 5 more days, and then might work another weekend. So we have something we call the ART¹⁸ hostage crisis.

When we sit down and talk to them and tell them how our lives are and we compare—maybe not the daily clock, but the monthly clock—we're all spending about the same amount of hours out there. **FG26 CH RC 03**

In general, focus group members called for more education about the differences between Service components, and many pointed out how this education can happen naturally over time, as groups become more familiar with one another:

I just came back from SOS¹⁹ in residence and we had 450 students. The 12 of us were reservists and even less were AGRs.²⁰ I was the only reservist in my flight of 12 and then the day we left, I was patted on the back: "Hey, thanks for bringing the reserve perspective too. We had no idea what you guys..." And these are captains that have been in there for 5 or 6 years. They had no idea what the reservists do, what it means to sit in a reservist's shoes. **FG10 LA RC 01**

18. “ART” refers to “Air Reserve Technician.”

19. “SOS” is short for “Squadron Officer School.”

20. “AGR” abbreviates “Active Guard and Reserve.”

At our level, of course we're not higher up, but at our level we do joke around in the break room sometimes when we're on the flight line. But we do get out there and work hand in hand together. You know, there's some occasions where you have an expediter or a master sergeant that will look at us differently but that's...they're active duty. They've been down that road for so long, it's hard for them to look at a reservist as more than just a weekend warrior. Here in Charleston, it's more than just that because we get so many activated reservists. *FG36 CH RC E1*

Work arrangements, including career and tenure

Fundamental structural differences between AC and RC produce different work arrangements that can complicate integration. The following quotation gives some insight into how contrasts in career and base tenure can pinch in day-to-day work arrangements:

Because there's so much rotation, people being moved every three years, that they lose....When you get a new set of people in, they don't know what your area of expertise is. And I particularly had that problem in my last attachment, where they didn't....They were giving me all these civil law things to do, which I'm certainly capable of doing, but my background is in military justice. And I can answer most military justice questions off the top of my head, whereas civil law stuff....But it was like they never bothered to read my performance reports and to see what my background really was. *FG11 LA RC O2*

The primary challenge for successful AC/RC integration seems to reside in the intermittent nature of the reserve presence, which produces both substantive and perceptual problems. On one hand, reservists struggle with the conflict between their reserve service and their civilian careers, especially when they have demanding civilian jobs, such as the criminal prosecutor quoted below. On the other hand, active duty personnel can have difficulties meshing available work with reservist availability and may find (or assume) that availability constraints make reservists less skilled. In either case, the prevailing culture tends to support negative social categorization.

All the following reservist comments were associated with the mediator, "reduces engagement and morale," and suggest reductions in efficiency and performance:

I've seen that resentment that you're talking about, in terms of jokes, "Ah, you reservists," and all that kind of stuff. I've always been tempted to push back on the people that do that and say, OK, to have a good reserve year you have to get 22 days out of your work schedule. Especially if you're an _, which I think we probably all are. We're actually attached to an active duty unit, so we work during the week. So you think this is a joke and we don't participate? Sit down with me, now let's swap roles. You're a reservist and you're going to come work with me in my job. Now I need you for 22 days a year, and I need you to tell me now what days you're going to come and give me those 22 days over the course of the next year.... [He describes being a civilian prosecutor in a capital murder case, and the lack of understanding when he rejected a request from the USAF.] They can't predict when things are going to happen. But then to turn around and say, "You're not supporting us, you're not giving us what we need." Both of us need to be flexible, and sometimes it seems like the flexibility is more on my end. **FG11 LA RC 02**

I was activated for 2 years—only 2 years—and I was overseas three times. And I'm a civilian, a reservist. That took away from my career for 2 years. And it really hurt my career. I actually resigned from my [civilian] position because I could see activation coming forward. **FG11 LA RC 02**

I don't know if there's really a straightforward answer to how it will ever be put out to where everybody understands it. But the fact that people look at reservists as 2 days a month. I mean, that alone is the first thing they need to get rid of because I know the last time I was reading something I think it was saying that the average reservist does 6 to 8 days a month on top of doing a full time job. So, I mean it's basically another part-time job. **FG14 LA RC E2**

The reservists do realize they are on performance standby, and if we need to call them in they will come in. The active duty side of the house seems to have a little difficulty understanding that, you know, he's not at your total beck and call. If you're short a flight chief tonight, or short a worker tonight, contact one of us and we'll contact him. We don't need you causing lots of pressure because that means he's going to be going to school at night after he's worked a full day. That's why he got out of the Service. He joined the Reserves so he can pursue his education. **FG15 LA RC 03**

Nevertheless, real differences in knowledge and experience may underlie the lack of confidence in team members from other Service components:

When you're active duty and the Reserves come in, you're like...Reserves are just kind of like lower end because they don't do the job all the time. They do it maybe once a month, maybe 2 weeks out of the summer. So they truly don't know what the active duty person who has to do it maybe 5 to 7 days a week, 30 days a month, 365 days a year. And so active duty kind of looks down on Reserves. And I remember when I was active duty, I could not stand to have the reservists in my area because they didn't have the access or the knowledge that I had day in and day out. *FG21 WP RC E2*

Arranging work to complement reservist scheduling can be challenging for active duty:

I supervised reservists while I was on active duty, so I saw that standpoint too. And a lot of times it's frustrating because you don't get projects that are nice bite-sized chunks that you can give to reservists. Sometimes in the legal field, you have a court martial he's willing to get their help on, but sometimes the court martial takes longer than the amount of time that they're going to be able to give you. In the legal career field, part of the problem is that there are so many timing rules that have to be complied with, they really don't have, on their end, they don't have flexibility to say, "OK, we can wait a week to do that," and you need to understand that....

For me, it depends on if I come when they want me to come or come when I have [time] to go from my schedule. Because if I go when they want me to come, they have a specific thing they want me to do and they appreciate me doing that. But if I come, and they don't necessarily have anything for me to do, then I run around trying to find something to occupy my time....

We have a guy that's been on orders for 2 years, so he does everything, whereas I've been going the last 6 months to get my feet wet to try and do anything, and I just get pushed in the corner: "Well you're a reservist. You won't be here long enough." That's what it is. You're not going to be here long

enough. You almost can't fault them because it's true, a lot of times we're not. **FG11 LA RC O2**

Failure to leverage the subordinate component is obviously an inefficient use of resources: it can also reduce engagement/morale and negatively affect retention, as in the case of this discouraged young reservist:

Whenever we do go TDY,²¹ whenever we go on our 2-week tours and stuff like that, once we get to that active duty base and the active duty people meet us and give us all their briefings for that base, they're like, "OK, go sit over there and don't touch anything."

[T]hat's the reaction we get from the active duty people. But then they'll say jokingly, "We love you guys. You're the guys that give us relief in the desert." Well how? We don't know what we're doing....I know probably less now than I did getting out of tech school, 'cause when you get out of tech school, you know, it's all fresh in your head. Now after a year I feel I know less than I did. **FG20 WP RC E1**

Finally, effective leveraging of RC can vary by commander/leader, based on personality or past experience:

MEGAN: It's very contingent on the active duty people you work with. Because like, when I first transitioned to the Reserve program, the person I worked for wasn't really...you know, I just came in and did my mandatory and that was it. You get people that work with a lot of reservists and are used to it, and they know what your expertise is and that helps the situation.

MALE RESPONDENT: I don't know about ya'll's career field, but you'll hear in our career field...some [leaders] have a reputation for liking the Reserves and others not caring for them at all. And just to know that, that speaks volumes as to how do you feel in your work. That changes every time a leadership changes, to a certain extent. I suppose you'll never be able to get a hundred percent in any career field that think Reserves are a wonderful thing. And you'll never have a hundred percent that think they're a waste of time.

21. "Temporary duty" is abbreviated "TDY."

MEGAN: It's not just whether they like you or dislike you. It's whether you are in a position to contribute what you can, and if they're in a position to elicit that.

MALE RESPONDENT: There are positions where people don't care for the Reserves. I'm sure the position is based somewhat on their history and experience that they had with reservists. I mean there are reservists that I've seen, they come in and they read the paper for 2 days. There are not many of those people left, but there are reservists that come in and they don't do anything. They'll give them something to do, they'll spend 2 days on it and they hand it back. And they might have done something but it was done incorrectly or they didn't do anything. So it's hard to fault people who don't care for the reservists because they're intelligent people; it's based on something, it's not just a prejudice they have. *FG11 LA RC 02*

Military/civilian integration

Civilians are not an explicit component of total force integration, according to most printed sources.²² Nevertheless, they are a substantial part of work groups at bases around the country, so it makes sense to include them in research about the impact of structural diversity.

Component-based hierarchy

When it violates the component hierarchy, TFI can conflict with the self-categorization of particular components. For instance, military personnel can be uncomfortable when civilian employees are dominant, and the following quotation suggests a potential negative impact on retention in particular:

I had experienced that working over at the hospital with Airmen there. I used to always tell them, "Don't let Wright-Pat influence your decision on the next base because every base you go to is different. What you see here is not what you're going to see at your next base." I might be your first-line supervisor; next one might be a civilian. That does not mean that it's going to operate the same way. I might have to go to a civilian and ask them, "Can I go do this?" And that's what they see. So it was different for them, so I said,

22. For example, see [26].

“Don't let it influence your decision; don't base your decision on Air Force on what you see at Wright-Pat. It's totally different.” It was a culture shock for me. **FG17 WP AC E3**

Some of the military don't particularly care for having civilian supervisors. Because like in my organization, the chief might be working for a 15—that's a civilian—who has never been in the military and knows very little about the ins and outs of being in the military. And that kind of rubs some people the wrong way also. **FG32 WP AC E1**

The following comments by a higher ranking active enlisted group at the same base expand on this perspective. The suggestion here, and in the broader discussion, is that the civilians being "in charge" has negative effects on readiness and morale, due to both cultural and structural differences, as well as to a general sense that it violates the appropriate component hierarchy:

And also I think with the way the base is set up and the way things are going, a lot of the other Airmen that came in when I did, they got out because of the structure of the base. They didn't like it, just how things are run here with all the civilians in charge. A lot of people got out. At least they said that's what their reasoning was, the way their particular organization was set up....

What's frustrating for them is they work here in the relaxed environment, civilian environment pretty much, and then they have to go down range and deploy, and then they have to turn that switch back on. You may as well keep them in that mind-set—combat alert; ready to go, I understand—than try to switch them. They do 3 years, then they go to another base, and they'll go to ACC²³ or another base and it's all military. **FG33 WP AC E2**

Successful leveraging of experience and expertise is based on understanding rather than inaccurately stereotyping the other component:

There are contractors in our office, so we've worked at understanding each other's roles because we all have a role. We all bring something to the table but helping to know what your role is or her role is or what the other person's

23. “ACC” is the “Air Combat Command.”

role is. We spend a lot of time with that because it can cause friction within an organization if you really don't know. For example, in the military they're on duty 24/7. Civilians go home, sometimes we go home and then the contractors.... Even just things like days off, there's differences there and they have just no avenue for them, so you have to be respectful of that. *FG35 CH Civ2*

Identity differences are at the heart of diversity conflicts, and the empirical literature finds that replacing these differences with a shared mission is a successful way to manage diversity, even for civilians:

So we know that no matter what, our mission is to fly airplanes. So just because a new commander comes in and changes everything, that doesn't change that we have to fly the airplanes. It's the best possible end result no matter who's in charge of us. So we kind of like press on. *FG31 WP Civ1*

Many focus group members referred to the role of USAF core values, particularly the value of excellence with its focus on the common mission, in leveraging expertise by fostering cross-component teamwork:

I don't think you can overemphasize the need for teamwork and the need for everybody's understanding of their role on that team. I see it every day: the civilians of the old hands and the old experience and they know where everything is because they're constantly training these new, young military people so they can do their job when they're deployed. And they've been through tech schools and everything, but they have very little practical experience. So, they work shoulder to shoulder. It's almost like the journeyman-apprentice type relationship in a trade union. You know, a flight line, or working on a building, or what have you. And I think that's why it's a lot of times successful. The civilians bring that experience and that knowledge and that data there and, ya, they are civilians but they're a resource to the younger military types with the muscle and the force. "Got to get the job done." *FG35 CH Civ2*

Work arrangements, including career and tenure

Profound structural differences make it difficult to integrate military and civilians in a way that leverages civilian expertise and experience.

Differences in location and job tenure, accountability, and reward systems can affect work-group performance and efficiency negatively. Different work arrangements, in particular, create an *expectations gap*, which all components perceive as detrimental to morale and teamwork in military/civilian work groups.

I found out that most of the people that work for me make more money than I do but I'm the boss. They're a super group and I can't complain about them and they all work very very hard but, I have seen [the] situation where you have folks who, boy they show up on the dot at 7:30, they take their smoke break, their lunch break, their smoke break, and they're out the door at 4:30. And if you've got a mixed military and civilian staff, the military does resent that because sometimes I can't let them go to lunch, sometimes I can't let them go home on the dot at 4:30. You know we try and do it, but sometimes that's not possible, and then on the other hand sometimes the civilians are like, "Well I'm sorry my duty hours end at 4:30 and I can't stay" even though I've got something hot going on. So having to manage that, I've learned to do it but it's an uncomfortable situation. I wish there was a middle ground somewhere where we could accommodate both a little better. **FG8 WP AC 03**

As the above quotation shows, military and civilian expectations about the contours of the workweek are very different. The military workweek is 24/7, whereas civilians and contractors have the perspective (if not the reality) of a distinct workday with a work-free weekend. Indeed, many civilian employees left the military to improve the tradeoff between career rewards and a work/family balance. All Service components expressed some disdain for other components based on differences in arrangements regarding time at or away from work. These views are commonly expressed in a context of decreased teamwork:

The GIs have a lot of what we call "I got to's." I got to go do this; I got to go do that, do this. Well, in a civilian world an "I got to" means you have to take leave if you have an "I got to." If I have to go put new tires on my vehicle, I can't leave like a GI does. I have to take leave for that. GI says "I got to" and they go. If they got a dentist appointment or they have to take their child to do this, they're gone. So with them they

can take lots of "I got to's." Our "I got to's" have to be done a little bit differently. Ours take, they charge leave and that sort of thing. **FG16 CH Civ1**

In the two organizations that I've worked in we've had civilians there and because civilians don't have to abide by all the same rules that the military does, as far as leave, and taking time off, and they can't make it, a lot of the work does fall on the military. Which, it does affect my job. The civilian that I work with now, when he's not there customers are not serviced as fast. Sometimes they may not get who they want, or it takes longer than it usually does. That's the problem that I see as far as, in my personal opinion, working with civilians. Some of them are about the mission and that's what they focus on, others do slack off and they don't feel like getting to work, and it does fall on the military workers. **FG33 WP AC E2**

Active duty personnel express the same lack of understanding of different policies and practices related to civilian work schedules:

We have civilians that bitch and complain basically because we have to leave and go to training, you know, for our jobs. And I'm like, you're in a freaking military installation, what do you...? You know, you're not in some corporation where you're...you know what I'm saying? If that's what you want to do and, you know, don't get upset at the military members that have a job to do 24/7. We don't punch in at 8:00 and leave at 5:00, or 4:30 or whatever, you know. **FG18 WP AC O1**

The following discussion does not represent inefficiency (the icons mentioned are not functionally important) so much as a failure to communicate realistic expectations about a component partner:

There are screens with icons. They're normally green, they turn red, that's bad and you call somebody to fix it. And everyone you're calling is a contractor. Usually you can't get a hold of them....The job has been contracted out for a couple years at least; military members are only in there for accountability....I've had them tell me they're not coming in because it's their weekend or it's not in their contract or whatever else, and it's just annoying....Nothing you can do, really, just make note of it. Pass it on. **FG32 WP AC E1**

In contrast, task type is the element of the workaday environment that is associated with successful military/civilian integration. Perhaps this is because many important USAF functions are largely staffed by civilians. Indeed, it is common for active duty personnel in these fields to shift to the RC or civilian life, and stay in the same location, even the same job. In this case, the structural differences are well known, and perhaps even an advantage to the USAF.

For Air Reserve Technicians (ARTs) in the maintenance field, having a dual identity (civilian and reserve), along with a well-defined mission, can blur in-group/out-group identities:²⁴

No, because we're all ARTs, so we're all both sides. So there's no real dominant civilian/military struggle where I work at. Because on the weekends, we're the military. *FG31 WP E1*

In aircraft maintenance, the institutional knowledge, particularly on an airplane that's been around for a while, is seen as residing in ARTs. This is widely recognized as beneficial to efficiency and performance:

Our active duty master sergeants have a question, they ask an ART...before they look in the book because the ART normally knows exactly where to find it, you know, without having to look through computer books, or he just knows the answer. *FG 36 CH RC E1*

In addition, safety considerations are so important for aircraft maintainers that they can override separate group identities and engender creative and efficient teamwork:

Well, the way the C17 worked is that we followed certain procedures so everyone's always open for opportunity 'cause stuff always changes. There's always a new addition to that TO, which is a Technical Order, or there's always QA popping up, which is Quality Assurance. They want to make sure you're doing everything by the book. So, everyone always looks out for each other. "Hey, do you got this out there. Did you put up a warning tape? Did you fill that up correctly?"

24. ARTs carry dual status, working as full-time civil service employees for the USAF and as military members in the same RC units where they work as civilians and perform the same job.

Always backing each other up, making sure everything is fine. Civilian or military, there's no big difference. When you're on that line, it's all about the safety. **FG36 CH RC E1**

All the comments regarding task type and military/civilian integration were positive. The following comment addresses the general role of a common task in integrating civilians, who are hired along different lines and have different expectations for their work life. It shows that military personnel can expect civilians to want to do a good job, and to participate in activities that will advance that task:

As far as my particular unit, I guess when it comes to job training it's not an option because everyone has to do the same thing. So they, all civilians and military, get together for training and for commander's calls and everything like that. Our civilians do participate in that in my particular unit. I don't see civilians saying, "I'm not going because I don't have to go." They do go because they do want to get the knowledge and need to know what's going on to be in the loop. **FG33 WP AC E2**

Both civilian and reserve focus groups talked a great deal about the problems that occur in structurally diverse work groups because the active duty members have relatively short job tenure. This is especially grating when the shorter-stay person is the supervisor. In that sense, the active duty rotation policy can produce the anomalous situation of a supervisor who possesses less embodied job knowledge than the supervisee.

It seems like in years past they had more civilian superintendents who stayed in the role, and who learned the job, and who knew what was going on, and weren't asking you over and over and over again the same questions. Because they learned what was going on. It seems like now, as the civilians retire, they replace them with military...And you have the military, then you have the rotation of people staying in for 4 years, and then the next year you have another rotation—the other people—and it's always a revolution, and nobody stays the same. **FG29 LA Civ1**

Policies

Developing or modifying policies to effectively integrate different Service components into a total force is a work in progress; indeed, the common metaphor of "building a plane while flying it" may be particularly apt. In some instances, a lag in modifying old policies magnifies structural diversity and negatively affects engagement and morale, especially for the newly included groups. In other instances, unskillful development of new policies produces new inefficiencies. In either case, the lessons learned can be incorporated into future policy development if the learning process is managed.

Other policy differences are not as tractable because they spring from fundamental differences in the nature of each Service component. The USAF has good reasons for having reserve and civilian components in addition to active duty forces, and these reasons mold important policy differences. So diversity management is more challenging when it comes to policies regarding, say, job tenure or accountability, that are inherent in different Service components.

The diversity literature tells us that the initial stage in integrating diverse groups into the workplace tends to involve managing to avoid rejection or exclusion that can result from simple ignorance of the "other." The following illustration occurred at a highly stressful and mistrustful moment, but it shows how policies that exclude minority components of the integrated force on the basis of their different identity can affect their engagement and morale:

Coming in the gate from 9/11, I showed my civilian ID card. I was refused entry until I showed my driver's license. I did not hassle anyone. This is a very true story. It's too bad that's on but OK. I just automatically did it and I happened to be a military dependent, so I said, "What would happen if I showed this?" and I pulled out my military ID card, dependent ID card. They said we would let you right in. I immediately went to my office and lodged a complaint. I said, "Now this is an official complaint. If we are team Langley, then we as civilians need to be the valuable members who are coming to team Langley. We should be accepted and valued as employees coming to work to court Langley and support Langley's mission." I don't know why I as a wife would be

more welcome on Langley than I as a civilian employee. **FG4**
LA Civ2

In addition, policies that treat different components of the integrated force as if they did not have a different identity can also have a negative impact on engagement and morale. A common first response to diversity is for the original majority group to simply include the new, different components in activities designed by and for the dominant component without addressing the differences.

It's just that it's very difficult for us, for me, to go to commander's call and stand up and things like that, when it's all military, military, military. And they don't try to insert something civilian. And it's hard as the leader of my group to tell them you got to go, you got to go, you got to go, when they say, "Oh it's so boring, it's all military military military." **FG 4**
LA Civ2

A similar comment regarding the impact on cohesion came from a reserve officer who manages a work unit that includes both active duty and civilians. Several military supervisors in the focus groups found the policy issues that ensue from civilian unionization particularly challenging:

My interaction with civilians has been kind of different because nine times out of ten I'm dealing with union employees and that's become kind of an issue at times....In an integrated effort where you have civilians that are working with military and even with ARTs, and all three together with those components, it becomes difficult when the union guy pulls out the union card and you know, "Time for my break, time to go home, time to do this." And my active duty guy is standing there scratching [his] head going, "We have two more hours of work to do, what's up?" You know, but, and again it becomes...how do you get the civilians to feel a part of the team and how do you also get the military to embrace them and not create a rift between those civil service folks that are different. It was a challenge, honestly. **FG6**
WP RC O2

Perhaps the biggest challenge to melding diverse structural components into a total force has to do with policies relating to accountability. In some cases, it's simply a matter of understanding and managing different policies. More vexing cases involve policy differences that

hinder supervisors in using their accustomed tools for managing people from another component, whether using a carrot or a stick. Component-specific policies make a difference in the ability to use a stick (e.g., to command obedience to an order). And policies regarding reward structures make a difference in the ability to use a carrot.

A potentially disturbing example of both kinds of policy differences—accountability and command—comes from the following comment, which suggests that, if components do not abide by the same safety policies, circumstances might tempt exploitation of policy differences:

You only have so many maintenance personnel working there, so in this intermixed with active duty, reserve, and civilian. The active duty and reserve, they go by the book all the time. If they find something you call it out. But at the same time you see, OK, a civilian isn't held as accountable, I guess you would say, as an active duty person and so they would turn it off if the active duty person and ask the civilian to go ahead and perform the job. **FG39 CH AC E2**

Similar comments from civilians regarding the military suggest that substantive differences in policy may not be the issue, but a failure to manage integration in a key function adequately. Such reinforcement of social categorization does not help integration and raises questions about whether it exacerbates preexisting problems rather than leveraging diversity to solve them.

AC/RC integration

Active duty can see dealing with different regulations for the Reserves as a barrier to surmount, rather than one to work with:

I think probably that the toughest category is probably the Reserves just because their system is so different from ours. The regulations for them can be very different from our own regulations and that's like learning a whole other military system. So I don't know if there is a course you could take on that other than just experience. **FG19 CH AC 01**

Yet the focus group conversations suggested that considerable progress could be (and is being) made in integrating policies and thus reducing social categorization of the Reserves.

Command and control

Structural diversity that is not integrated with management policies and practices, particularly in terms of the chain of command, can have negative implications for performance. The following conversation is particularly nuanced because the focus group is made up of activated reserve officers who were formerly active duty, so they possess a broad understanding of structural diversity and how administrative versus operational differences in command and control can hamper performance and efficiency:

The agreement that's assigned at the highest levels, for our unit, that shouldn't be a gray area because it very clearly says that we, the 307, have administrative control over all of our people assigned—promotions, demotions if need be. The active duty, who owns all the airplanes and stuff, has operational control over our people. They say, "We need you to work on this aircraft at this time as our pilot. Here's your flying schedule." I know those lines get crossed every now and then, and probably in the operational world they need to be. But to me, when I read that I was like "Oh, pretty clear stuff." But I don't know out there on the line if it's working that way or not....

It works in a way that they see as their...they don't have full control over a person. They do, but they think that because they don't like that person's performance report, that they don't have any input on how he's going to be worked and how things are really going....

Or they try to reward or punish when it's not their place to do it. They need to be contacting this chain of command because it's now an administrative issue, not an operational one. I think it kind of swings both ways. *FG15 LA RC 03*

The same group went on to say that working effectively and efficiently across Service components requires communication of different policies:

Because they can't find the information, it's frustrating for them. And they don't want to ask the questions. They perceive it as negative because they can't find it written anywhere. You know, how we're supposed to control this person, how we can use him, how we can't use him. **FG15 LA RC 03**

A fundamental policy difference relates to the duration of time spent in a particular location or at the job. Indeed, many of the participants in the focus groups had left the open-ended temporal and locational commitment of active duty because they wanted to stay in one place and/or have more work/family balance in their lives. The following comment is representative of the active force's perspective:

We had a team in California of security forces that came over that were active duty Guard or Reserve, or I forget which, but after their 90 days they left. And we're like "Whoa, how come you don't have to?" "Well they basically have to ask us if we're willing to do longer than that," and this and that. And at one point we asked them if they could do two weeks longer, and they were like, "No, we have plans with our families." And at the end of that 3 months they were gone and we were there for 6. **FG9 LA AC E2**

Other policy differences

Changing policies that unnecessarily exclude other components reduces social categorization and can improve engagement and morale for members of those supposedly integrated components. Sometimes it can be simply acknowledging the force of symbolism, whether positive or negative:

The message is finally starting to get out from the ID. Look at my ID; it doesn't say reservist anymore, it just says United States Air Force. And I think that was a step in the right direction. And I think you are starting to see people understand that we are now part of the whole process. That it is not something that, you know a reservist is just a spare part. A reservist is now a vital cog of that machine. **FG6 WP RC 02**

More frequently, policy-related integration issues have to do with harmonizing medical and other administrative support to make integration function in day-to-day activities:

Typically, since we do deal with agencies on the base here, as soon as they hear the word *Reserves* they shut down. Their reaction is usually, "Oh, we don't deal with Reserves."

So it's new to them, and our program in particular is set up as a program where our folks are directly integrated in with the active duty. And one of the specific areas he was talking about that I've had to deal with is the medical group here on base. We tell them that our guys need physicals, check-ups, everything, every year just like the active duty do. And they're like, "Well, we need to contact whoever because we don't support it." And it was an ongoing battle. We've been fighting with them for about the last year and a half, and we finally got things set up between the med group commanders on down through the reserve chain of command. We had a couple of large meetings over the different medical areas. We pretty much have everything in place now, but it did take quite a time to get it set up.

Even though we've now got a system set in place, if you go over to the med group they've got all the active duty folks on this base, all the records are in one area. In order for them to know now that, yes, we've got reservists, they've got big large labels, they label them as reservists and put them in separate sections. They don't track them in the same computer system. If it's going to be something, you know, it's an initiative right now, but if they're going to press forward to the future of the Air Force for total integration where they've got the Guard, the Reserves, and the active duty all working together, then they need all the systems to be able to accompany everyone no matter what part of the military they're working in. ***FG15 LA RC 03***

Overall, reserve focus groups described lags in communicating policy change to all active duty service levels, and the resultant impact on cohesion:

It seems like the active duty leaders do buy into this. They embrace it. And my personal experience is that nobody's telling Airman Jones and Staff Sergeant Smith that you support these guys: "You treat them [the] same way. They're your customer base." And that's not an indictment of them; they're not being told, they're not being trained.

Right, it's not getting down to the people doing the day-to-day jobs. The supervisors all know about it at the top

leadership and they signed off on it on our support group and said, "Ya, we'll do this for them." But it gets down in there, "Reserves? What are you doing?" *FG15 LA RC 03*

Military/civilian integration

Command and control

Different operational and administrative chains of command are a source of frustration between military and civilian components, as well as between the AC and RC.

I think there's also a disconnect between the civilian rank structure compared to the military rank structure as far as the interaction between the two. I had a situation last week, where a GS3—which I guess is the equivalent to a major—tried to....She was going out and giving us orders out of the chain of command, not going through my supervisor, trying to get us military members to do a bunch of minute tasks, such as taking out the trash and proprietary information to dumpsters, you know, shredders. I think there was a disconnect between the...there needs to be a more defined chain of command, relationship, interaction between the two. Because there's not really a defined policy or way to interact I guess. *FG18 WP AC 01*

Officers see benefits in TFI, but their command, reward, and incentive policies are designed to improve performance for the military, not for civilians, whether employees or contractors:

Blue suit changes quickly considering the total force. We're with an order: "I need you to do this now. I don't care what you were doing yesterday, do this now." And with civilians, yes, they provide great continuity, contractors provide great technical expertise, but when you get them, how do you change, be it good or bad? You can't just give them money, you can't give them time off, you can't promote them, you know? Civilians are kind of the same way. It's got to be at that annual appraisal time I can reward them then. But unfortunately what happens is they do five good things, and then they mess up come February and appraisals are due in April. Sorry, and it's unfortunate, I'm not going to reward them. I'm not going to give them a monetary award; I'm not going to give them time off. Now, foul on us for doing that, but a lot of that's education as well. How many classes have you

been through dealing with civilian contractors where they taught us as officers? I know I have never been to one. **FG28 LA AC 01**

Building an integrated reward system requires learning how to manage the policies that govern each component:

PAT: But you can't give them a day off, like you can a military. They'll say, "Great job! You can have this day off." [together with Jo] But not the civilians!

BOB: Yeah, they can get monetary awards, we can't. So, yeah, there are differences but you have to use their systems. **FG19 CH AC 01**

All in all, we work pretty well. I think the only problem we have really in the squadron is if anybody does anything wrong. Like military people, they don't hesitate to tell us if we do something wrong, but for civilians it's like we have to get our paperwork legal because of the union and what not. It's not like if you have a problem with somebody, you can go talk to a supervisor. They can always go talk to a civilian but nothing will happen to them. Versus if you complain about a military per within LOC, LOR,²⁵ whatever, and they're not afraid to get them. So, like I said, it takes a really long time to deal with civilians. **FG27 LA AC E1**

Your civilian employees are working under OPM²⁶ rules and guidelines and there's very specific language stating that you must compensate them if they work. And they cannot work for free because then they are unprotected. The military owns their assets 24/7, they schedule them as necessary to accomplish the mission, and we have to mix them together. There's really no difference. We were talking earlier, in taking a junior officer that's active duty and supervising someone who's got 15 more years' experience in the same career field. It's something we have to learn to work around, the military force has downsized, the civilian sector is growing by leaps and bounds, and we just live by a new set of rules. I think some of the disgruntled voices that you hear

25. Letters of Counseling (LOCs) and Letters of Reprimand (LORs) are disciplinary actions.

26. "OPM" stands for "Office of Personnel Management."

are shortsighted. We have someone who gets upset because so-and-so gets to go home at 4:00 every day as a civilian employee because his 8 hours are up and I have to stay 2 more hours because this jet's got to fly tomorrow. But they don't realize that Christmas week, the active duty employee is told he can stay home all week because they're down scheduling all the missions, but the civil service employee must take his own vacation time or report to work. So there's more equity I think in the long-term view. **FG26 CH RC 03**

Focusing on common ingredients of social identity, such as wanting to do a good job, and rewarding personnel in an integrated fashion can reduce social categorization and improve unit cohesion, as seen in this discussion:

We're trying to implement the same thing, having a civilian award. Actually not a civilian award but we're trying to incorporate the civilians and military together. So instead of singling out, "OK, the civilian's done this good job and the military's done this good job," what we're doing here is we set up a voting box, or a recognition box, so if somebody does something good for that quarter or whatever, you put it in the box. And in a quarter, we take a look at it and say, OK, this person has been recognized for this, so we'll be able to say he's recognized that person as doing an outstanding job. We can't do, as far as time off with the civilians, because of their separation of, but we can recognize them as far as different things. **FG33 WP AC E2**

The following communications change had a positive impact on engagement and morale. Note, however, that the impact is reported by the group that is patting itself on the back for including the out-group in the activity that it plans; it would be more instructive to hear from the newly included group:

The number one thing was communicating. Good communication. We included our civilians in our roll call. We used to have them as separate when we did our daily roll calls. Every shift it was just the active duty guys and we let the civilians do their thing because it wasn't in their job description. They didn't have to be there. We said, "You don't have to, but we pass out a lot of valuable information at this roll call, feel free to attend it if you want." We started it that way and it got to the point where they did attend and it became more of a group thing and so, when we were doing our

recognition of the guys that had done a great job yesterday of getting the mission off, we included the civilians as part of it because they were there. They were at that same meeting, so we threw their names in a hat so we actually had a better kind of working relationship, but the number one thing was communication. **FG6 WP RC O2**

Perceived differences in pay, recognition, and so on, that seem to reflect hierarchies among component services can degrade unit morale and inhibit cross-component cohesion. Although the following comments come from civilians, focus groups from other components expressed similar sentiments:

I've been here since 1973 and management over the years have used civilians to their benefit. They come in and whenever they need something then they heavily rely on civilians, their expertise and their knowledge in the job. But as soon as the he-soldier's in, they just tell us to go back to work. Work's very slow to come for us. Our management, our immediate management, uses us for stepping-stones. And it's been like that. You lose respect in people when you see management doing that to you. All we're here for now is to do our job and to make people look good. As long as they look good, they're happy. **FG16 CH Civ1**

But then when we're out working day and night, hustling, doing whatever it takes to get this done, and they come by and snap a shot of the military person...and it gets frustrating because we're in the background doing everything and then, all of a sudden, they want to come by and shoot the military. **FG29 LA Civ1**

The empirical diversity literature finds that teamwork plays an important role in making structural diversity into an asset. The following example shows how the contrast in accountability policies can hinder the development of teamwork in between military and civilian groups:

I think in terms of making it work, you have military folks that come here, such as myself, doing career broadening. And, as an example, I was put in charge of an IPT,²⁷ and I

27. An "IPT" is an "Integrated Process Team."

had a lead engineer. That first day I met him, I said, "Who are we in charge of, in terms of who's our team?" And he stopped me and said, "We're not in charge of anybody. We don't do that here." I said, "OK, so who takes the blame if something goes wrong within IPT?" "You do." And I said, "OK, let me ask you again. Who are we in charge of?"

Or suspenses. Suspenses are something that at least in my office are real obscure, and vague. So it's just my experience, having things done when they're supposed to be done. By me coming in and holding people accountable for suspenses, you almost seem like a Nazi with certain civilians. And it's like, "Whoa, we don't do that. Hold me accountable, for things that need to be done at a certain time, that's just not what I'm used to." So, it was just a culture shock when I first got here. ***FG18 WP AC 01***

Disdain for civilians based on different policies relating to accountability is widespread among the military, and is associated with decreased teamwork and morale as well as performance and efficiency:

You've got military and GS²⁸ employees, and then your support contractors, and those are two different kinds of civilians....I think there's a lot of difference in terms of productivity. For one, your support contractors have a fire under their butt. Their contract gets reconfigured every year. They're prior military. And then your GS employees, it takes an act of Congress to fire them, so they know that, and they'll ride it for what it's worth. What I've seen, though, is if a GS employee gets in trouble—and I've seen it in my office and I've seen them fall asleep in bathrooms, I see them check e-mail all day long—and instead of firing them, they send them to a different program. So, once again, holding people accountable is something you just don't see much of, especially when it comes to GS employees. ***FG18 WP AC 01***

Civilians are also aware of different policies relating to accountability—in the following instance, relating to contractors. This quotation shows how policy differences can be used to categorize the other component negatively: the speaker doesn't acknowledge such tradeoffs as

28. "GS" stands for "General Schedule."

higher pay versus having to provide tools but magnifies his grievances about downsizing policies to include accountability differences:

They got rid of a 60-man civilian shop, reduced it to probably 12, and that's the shop I'm in now....All those guys were making \$20 an hour, but the guys they replaced them with are making \$37 an hour. And the heck with it, they don't have to follow the same rules we do. They don't have to use job guides anymore. They got their own toolboxes and it's a totally different world. They're not held accountable for being responsible like we are. If I leave a tool on an engine, I can be fired tomorrow for it. These guys are delivering engines to me and they've still got tools on it. **FG16 CH Civ1**

Other policy differences

The up-or-out promotion policy for officers focuses them on ways to make their mark. This interacts with the rotation policy and the drive for process change to make military/civilian integration difficult. In one sense, this is so long-standing that it is a part of the culture, but, in another sense, it is official policy because it was legislated by Congress and thus is not subject to change, but only to management.

Civilians resent it when integration means that policies developed by and for other components affect them, especially when they perceive that their expertise and experience are being disregarded:

And we're in the background. Like we've been running this spray mission for, what, 20-something years? But now all of a sudden it's about reporting. It's not about coordinating the program to get the job done, and it takes a lot of coordination to get it done. And all they're worried about are the things that don't even really matter at the time. You know, but they're just, again, so worried about who's going to get the first word to the commander. **FG29 LA Civ1**

It may well be that the military processes are effective, but that hasn't been communicated to the civilians. The following part of this discussion amplifies this perspective on the failure to use civilian expertise:

KEN: It seems like, in years past, they had more civilian superintendents...and who stayed in the role, and who learned the job, and who knew what was going on, and weren't asking you over and over and over again the same

questions. Because they learned what was going on. It seems like now, as the civilians retire, they replace them with military that, you know, that are nice guys, but you know pest control was under.... We're with water waste, we're with liquid fuels, and they'll pull a guy out of maybe water waste to run that whole section. Well, he may know water, but he doesn't know pest control. He doesn't know liquid fuels. Whereas in years past when a civilian guy was there, maybe he had worked all those issues and knew what was going on, so there wasn't as much running around behind you to see what you're doing because you don't know what's, you don't have a clue what you're doing anyway, you know?... And they're so intent on everything going chain [of] command. So if you've got a problem on our level, then you go to the military supervisor that doesn't have a clue what you're talking about, who's got to push it up to the next level, and by the time he gets it to the next level, what you told him may change because the way he perceives it is going to be different than what you told him. And by the time it gets up to where you need to get something done, it may be a whole different story.

LIA: And then, right there where he is, where he's saying it's so busy sending up the chain, when you have a person that's been for 27, almost 30, years in that same position and you're totally overlooking them. But just right on doing, you're ignoring the expert that's sitting there. That means nothing anymore. *FG29 LA Civ1*

Operating environment

Most of the focus group discussions regarding the operating environment as a moderator of structural diversity come, perhaps naturally, from reservists and civilians, the two Service branches that are most affected by the shift toward a total force. Although they tended to focus on budget-cutting and endstrength reductions, which the model and the literature expect to moderate diversity negatively, the impacts they describe are not necessarily negative, at least for the Reserves.

AC/RC integration

Deployment and op tempo

The focus groups reported that deployment is an important facilitator of teamwork and cohesion in integrating active and reserve forces. This TFI success derives no doubt from the empirical literature findings about the role of a shared mission in overcoming negative aspects of diversity. As [2] demonstrated, deployment tends to substitute the common mission experience for identity differences:

I think you have a lot of the distracters taken away from you when you're deployed. You don't have civilian issues. You don't have your neighbors. You don't have peer pressure. You don't have...television, movies, and all those other things that are distracters. When you're in that deployed environment, you are focused on the mission, it doesn't matter what color uniform you wear. *FG28 LA AC 01*

We hit the ground running in a bare base situation.... Doesn't matter...what your career field is, everybody's pulling together and at the same time getting the opportunity to see what I do versus what he does. We're all basically doing everything, so it allows everybody the opportunity to see what people in other career fields are going through. It definitely plays a big role. *FG24 CH AC E3*

Put another way, a significant operating environment such as deployment can override the distancing impact of different policies, and so on, for different groups:

I was deployed—you were deployed too—I was the mission support group commander. The commander was active duty, 80 percent of the people were active duty, and there was no difference. We were not treated differently. The only thing that was different was on one occasion they had a Reserves liaison come over and talk to us. That was the only time we were singled out and told, "Oh, you guys need to go to this briefing." And that was because we have pay issues that are different and those kinds of things. It was an hour briefing...but other than that it was really quite similar. And I think, from my perspective, and I know some of the active duty people there, they may be the ones that had never worked with Reserves before, I thought they were quite impressed. *FG22 WP RC 03*

Thus, deployment mediates structural diversity positively because it brings two successful diversity management tools into play naturally. One is familiarity: as people from different identity groups work closely together, they substitute real knowledge of capabilities and attributes for stereotypical ones. The other is focus on a common mission that supersedes organization-specific goals. Both situations promote teamwork, performance, and readiness, as the following comments suggest:

When we first deployed prior to the war, we were in Saudi Arabia and we were at Prince Sultan Air Base. We were the only Reserve component there of any type, doing aeromedical evacuations or anything. We were ignored as soon as we mentioned we were reservists. A lieutenant I was conversing with one time, as soon as I told her I was a reservist, the conversation stopped and she turned around and walked away, literally, to the point where I was like, "OK." But in the last 2 years I've had the opportunity to, you know, been out the door, worked with a lot of different people, and I do think the attitude has changed. *FG6 WP RC O2*

In the past, the active duty people would say, "Well, I'm active duty, I'm in charge." They don't care if you're Guard or Reserve. I think I've seen that change a lot recently. Especially nowadays, because you could be in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and the person next to you could be a Reserve, a National Guard, an active duty, and nobody knows. And so you have to really look at it and base it on, "Well, how is the person performing?" As opposed to, are they active duty or whatever. *FG14 LA RC E2*

Budget and endstrength cuts

The empirical literature finds that diversity can be a disadvantage when organizations are downsizing. In part, this reflects the fact that people are competing for a declining number of jobs; in part, it reflects the need for effective implementation of changing organizational strategies, including ones that long-time workers may perceive negatively. These negative influences evolve in a broad context of fewer resources, often with greater work demands. Thus, we paid particular attention to discussions about budget and endstrength cuts in relation to integration because they can harden differences, especially if having fewer people makes working with others less frequent:

Something has happened here in our military that we are, we've gotten leaner, less money, less time, less ability to just make that force go. So the folks that are overworked and overtasked continue to be overtasked, and I do think that becomes part of the problem with—whether it be civilians, officers enlisted, whatever—it's forced us back into our little areas, because you don't have enough time to go out there and get to everybody. And so you're expecting your civilians to do their thing, your enlisted to do their thing, the officers to do their thing, and hope we're all going in the same direction. **FG38 WP AC O2**

Across all components, budget and endstrength cuts are seen as barriers to integration, with one exception. The Reserves find that these cuts increase active duty's perception of their value:

I know in my headquarters we have a whole division that we might have one or two active duty blue suiters, 10 or 11 contractors, and one or two civilians maybe. But that's a problem because the contractors can't go to a lot of the meetings and stuff because the contractors aren't suited. That legal thing or whatever, you know?...So that the blue suiters are getting quickly overwhelmed with needing them, and that's why the reservists are very welcomed, because they can help with that. **FG11 LA RC O2**

Before 9/11 really is kind of the dividing line....The Guard and the Reserves, they are in many cases staying longer than the active duty people. I know people from the Army that are in the Guard and they were going to places like Afghanistan for 14 months. And the active duty people would be there for 10 months to a year. So you can definitely see the change. It looks like it's being for the good. **FG14 LA RC E2**

Military/civilian integration

Budget and endstrength cuts

Changes in the operating environment also affect military/civilian integration. Downsizing and doing more with less can reinforce component and functional stovepipes at the expense of integration. And budget and endstrength cuts can make the civilian workplace more structurally diverse by militarizing or contracting out civilian positions. The empirical literature cautions that downsizing can magnify

rather than leverage diversity, and the focus groups offered many instances of this finding.

Downsizing has a specific negative impact on teamwork and communication, as civilians try to protect their employment opportunities by holding tightly to their knowledge:

The civilians here, it's like a rat race because there's so many layoffs. We have people outside the gate picking teams. So now the civilians are like, "OK, I'm going to hold this information aside, I'm going to make myself employable, make myself needed." Because if they're not needed...I don't know how civilians tend to work, but I do know they get bumped, they get ripped, they get moved around, they get a pay cut. So they're trying to get all this training, and they're saying screw us—the military guys—because once again we're coming and we're going. **FG33 WP AC E2**

We have certain people in my office that don't feel that other people should be included on things and that they should do it, and [in] my opinion it's for job protection. They're afraid if other people know how to do the job, then they won't have a job anymore. **FG39 CH AC E2**

This situation can be detrimental to work-group creativity and innovation as well as to efficiency:

That's another thing, because they're only going one deep and they do cut back and whatever. You've got people now that cover up and say, "This is my work, and you don't need to know what's going on in here because once you do then they can get rid of me because someone else knows it now." Where they used to, where you had two or three people in there that did the same thing, that had the same knowledge, and worked together. **FG31 WP Civ1**

The use of contractors as well as military also diminishes civilian unit morale. In part, this reflects a perception that their promotion ladder has been lopped off; in part, it is resentment of people they perceive as earning more than they do but doing less. Either way, this relationship has a negative impact on morale and individual engagement:

But it seems like with all the contracting that they're doing, that the civilians are really just kind of losing all of their

footing. And it's like they're pushing the military into more positions and they're contracting out more of the civilian jobs. And like he said, there's no way to improve, there's no way to....And when you come to a job every day, and you're treated like a child and there's no way to improve, no way to better yourself—even if you go get a degree—where are you going to go? It makes it really hard to motivate yourself sometimes. **FG29 LA Civ1**

Civilians also associate the replacement of civilians by military employees with reduced engagement and morale because they feel the military do not respect civilian contributions or expertise:

A lot of the civilian slots, supervisor slots are gone. So now they're made up now with military guys....All those home-grown are now retired or gone and we're getting people from other bases saying, "Well, this is the way we did it at the other base." And I don't have a problem with that except they just give us no respect at all. We're treated like we were a tool-strapper. **FG16 CH Civ1**

The following comment regarding civilians not being told about a strategy to move higher-level jobs out of the civilian component suggests that communication could mitigate some of the negative effects:

No one's ever come out and said this....That would even make us feel better if they would come down to tell us that. And they have not done that. Well it wouldn't make me feel better, but we'd know that we might as well stop. **FG16 CH Civ1**

Still, it would not be wise to underestimate the impact of the common mission in furthering civilian integration, especially in a deployment environment:

I think because when we're gone, they have to fill those spots. So from my aspect and who I work with now...I see they're all about the mission, taking care of the people. There's a couple, well one civilian in particular I know, she stays late....She doesn't complain about what she has to do 'cause she knew when she signed up to work for the Air Force, the mission came first. **FG33 WP AC E2**

Drive for process change

The drive for process change is part of both the operating environment and a desired outcome. In terms of the operating environment, process change heightens the impact of the structural contrast between military rotation and civilian stability on military/civilian integration, which has a particularly negative effect on creativity and innovation.

Military members tend to perceive civilians with long job tenures as unduly resistant to the changes they try to implement:

I know I've had civilians express that they get annoyed with the change in the military—"Eh, now I have to get this person all trained up again"—because they're here forever. Or they have to change their way again because so and so came in and they didn't like it that way. *FG19 CH AC 01*

I've noticed something too, in our office, heaven forbid there's a change that comes down. You know, you've got civilians that have been there for 20 or 30 years in the same building, and it's just like, well, we've been doing this for 20 years. And it's just like they are not adaptable. And we're constantly changing. We have to adapt to changes all the time, and it's not an option. But it's like, for them, you're butting heads. *FG18 WP AC 01*

Civilians in the focus groups acknowledged being resistant to change, but attributed their resistance to long experience seeing supervisors and commanders come and go, each one changing the processes established by his predecessor:

Because they're looking for a name and they're looking for their grade, and moving on to their career or whatever. They're only there for a year or two at a time, and the civilians have to deal with that on a constant basis for their career. They're stationary there for 30 years, 40 years, so they have to be very diverse in putting up with these changes all the time, and all the new structures and things. And then turn around and come back, and you want the same one that would happen 20 years ago or 10 years ago. You're right back to the same circle again. *FG31 WP Civ1*

Civilians say that the constant changes are not only tiresome but frequently unproductive because new commanders have not taken the time to understand the processes they've been assigned to manage:

JEFF: And each chain of command, when they have a new officer coming in, they have their agenda, they have their own ideas. Instead of coming in and trying to fit in and find out what's going on and learn what the basics are, he wants to come in and he wants to have a chain. Or, "I don't like the way you set the chairs up in here in the breaking room. I want to turn them around." It's uncalled for.

LIA: And it totally clashes with the mission to change the set like that....I mean we just totally changed everything. And it started this thing about this, you know, in order to do your job you need to call 50 million people before you can get the job done. The job should have been done an hour ago, you're still trying to get the chain right before you can go facilitate whatever that needs to get the work done. And doing all that, now that person's gone, and what have they done? Messed up the function of something that was already working. *FG29 LA Civ 1*

Another civilian was more critical, indicating that the promotion process, combined with short tenure, creates incentives for officers to make changes without keeping in mind the long-run good of the organization:

DANIEL: I get a sense sometimes that they could really care less about the organization itself because it's really a stepping-stone for them.

APRIEL: You mean the local organization?

DANIEL: Correct...because you get some colonels that come here and they say, "I care about this project, but I care about it as long as I'm going to be here. Because once I leave it's no longer my headache; it's no longer my concern because my career is far greater to me than the project." And to me that goes against the Air Force integrity, service before self. And I've seen it in my reserve unit quite a bit. *FG31 WP Civ 1*

Finally, although civilians expressed frustration with the changes that come with military rotation, they also indicated that they are willing

to adopt change if their leaders can show them that the change is for the good and if they are included in the decision-making process:

Right. Let the people that have done the job for years and whatever, let them give that expertise to that commander up there when he brings up this idea. Because everybody is kind of resentful to change to a certain extent, you know? They're set in their ways, they've been there, they've been doing it this same way their whole lives, and it's always been that sort of thing. You bring a change in, you throw a monkey wrench into the thing, whatever, you know, I got to do something different. It's strange to me. I've never seen a computer before, and I don't want to have to do this, that, whatever. But that still has to be brought about. But I think when you do these changes, these commanders do these changes, supervisors do these changes, they really need to reinforce what good it's done for us. And if it doesn't show that it's doing any good, then you are holding back on the job, the progress, the work, and you're bringing up more problems than you wanted to do away with in the first place. Then let's stop the program. Don't because you said, "Well, we're going to do it this way," do or die type thing, doesn't mean that it's the right way. If it's not working, it's not working. Be willing to change it, even though you initiated it and your career, you're trying to go up the road here. But if it doesn't work, then say it doesn't work. *FG31 WP Civ1*

Summary

In general, the focus groups validated findings from the corporate literature. The outcomes they described are largely negative and fit the research results regarding the diversity impact of cost-cutting and downsizing. However, these outcomes are largely subject to management (and the increased work-group familiarity that time will bring). More specifically, these largely negative perceptions differed according to Service component. That is, those being integrated are concerned and critical regarding specific policies and structures, while those they are being integrated with (mostly active duty) present attitudinal concerns that focus on ways that the other components aren't like them, such as perceptions that they are less committed to service. The positive outcomes expressed are usually by people who have

been through the crucible of deployment and have served in other components and/or by senior people who have a broad perspective.

It is not surprising that the most important mediator relating to the research question about TFI is teamwork—positive and negative—followed by engagement and morale, mostly in relation to negative impacts. When engagement and morale are described positively, it tends to be when the organization has learned to cross the Service boundaries. That is, the negative impact, which tends to occur when the diversity aspect of integration has not been managed, has been removed or eased. It may be that force integration calls the teamwork question immediately, and the skillfulness of the work group in learning to answer this question can move the group forward when the group has the ability within itself to learn and act. When it is up to the organization to act (say, by revising policy), Servicemembers have to wait for others to manage their discomfort—hence, the largely negative impact on engagement and morale.

Most of the discussion regarding structural diversity and TFI came, perhaps naturally, from reservists and civilians, the two Service branches that are most affected by the shift toward a total force. TFI is challenging the expectations of both components.

On balance, reservists find themselves being treated as integral members of the total force, but perhaps without adequate preparation and communication either for themselves or for the active duty forces with whom they come into contact. More is being asked of them, and their concerns focus on how well their new roles are supported.²⁹

In contrast, civilian employees find themselves at the interface of contracting out as well as integration of the Reserves. Many not only see their career expectations vanishing but also experience uncomfortable changes in management.

In short, USAF culture and structure, policy, and operating environment moderate teamwork both positively and negatively where different components are integrated, depending on how skillful the team

29. Recall that no ANG members were included in the focus groups.

is in handling the social categorization issues that accompany structural diversity. They also moderate engagement and morale negatively, but in different ways, for the reservists and civilians who are affected by TFI. Some of the negative impacts will work themselves out over time, while others can be managed, particularly through attentive policy change.

Implications

This research suggests two broad implications for the success of TFI. First, other things equal, time will resolve the negative impact of diversity on teamwork that is based on social categorization. As people from different components work together, their joint experience substitutes real knowledge of the “other” for stereotypes. However, if the USAF wishes to hasten this adaptation, it could use deployment as a learning experience and apply the lessons learned to stateside teams.

Second, although one can assume that time will soften the rough edges of policy differences according to component, such changes may be insufficient and/or inefficient, as good reasons underlie many of these differences. Such reconsiderations are undoubtedly under way; this research adds a new dimension for this process. In particular, it suggests two approaches:

- Since teamwork is the primary mediator for TFI, policy change could focus specifically on issues that occur in cross-component teams.
- Since TFI is having a negative effect on morale and engagement in the Reserves that is different from the effect on civilians, these effects must be considered within a broad strategic approach.

Finally, the negative impacts of cost-cutting and downsizing on each component are real and need to be acknowledged. Good communication and planning can go a long way toward improving TFI outcomes, given the dedication to mission that the focus groups expressed. In particular, the active duty leadership needs to take the responsibility to communicate accurately and fairly across component boundaries.

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Managing structural diversity

Analysis question: Do USAF personnel describe their leaders as having and using the leadership competencies that are associated with good diversity management? Specifically, does it appear that USAF leaders have the skills to ensure that the Service fully benefits from the range of experience and expertise that a structurally diverse force embodies?

This question is motivated by results from the empirical literature indicating that structural diversity in an organization's workforce can be both a blessing and a curse: Unmanaged diversity can create costs in terms of conflict-driven process loss due to social categorization, while well-managed diversity can yield benefits in terms of creativity and innovation by expanding the array of approaches available for complex problem solving. The analysis is particularly timely given the current strategic focus on process change and the need to generate asymmetric advantage on nontraditional battlefields. It is particularly important given results from the previous section, which indicated that component-based hierarchy combined with different work arrangements for the different components creates pronounced social categorization that affects morale and openness to change.

Diversity, innovation, and diversity management

In terms of the Diversity Model and the coding, Leadership and Management moderate the relationship between workforce diversity and mission capability in the following ways:

- Structural (and other) diversity increases the range of problem-solving perspectives and abilities within the workforce.
- Application of these perspectives to actual problems is mediated by communication, teamwork, engagement, and morale.

- Leadership and management moderate the quality of communication and teamwork, and the levels of engagement and morale.
- The impact on mission capability is mainly in terms of creativity and innovation.

Empirical research in corporate and USAF settings (see [1] and [2]) indicates that team building around a common mission, facilitation of communication and constructive conflict, and openness to others as well as the promotion of learning from others are all key diversity management competencies. These competencies, among others, are also identified in USAF leadership guidance articulated in [21]. Therefore, we approach this research question by examining how the Leadership and Management moderators affect key mediators and, eventually, outcomes. The primary outcome of interest is creativity and innovation.

How leadership and management matter in the USAF

Regardless of component, respondents speaking as subordinates indicated that the level and quality of participation in the work group depends on the leadership or management style of the person in charge:

Any group is a reflection of the leader, whether the leader's listening, [the] leader's got a dynamic, and the squadron will have that as well. If the leader's a pessimist, a jerk, then the squadron is going to have all kinds of rotten things going on. Any organization is the same. ***FG2 CH RC 02***

And again your ideas are based on the leader's listening ability. The leader—it's true, it's true—[if] the leader won't let them, and doesn't want to hear, only wants to hear himself or herself talk, then nothing is going to happen. If the leader listens and shows an interest, people are much more willing to participate. ***FG4 LA Civ2***

Across the force, respondents have experienced both good leadership and bad:

MALE 1: I see 20 percent of the manpower we have in our shop will probably speak up and voice opinions because decisions that are made affects everyone in the shop....And once the results are actually negative results, then they pretty much don't want to hear what you have to say, even though you told them so.

MODERATOR: But do you think that's because of particular individuals who are decision makers where you are? Or do you think it's just about the structure?

MALE 1: I believe just the individuals, because it wasn't like that previously. **FG12 LA AC E3**

ZACK: I've been in two offices. Both GS15s I've worked for.... One you could walk in his office anytime with a question. You say, "Hey, how're you doing?" Very friendly guy. The other guy, you have to make an appointment....Not very warm, friendly. It's a personality thing, I think, more than anything.

MARTIN: But once you encounter this situation of, "You can't go there, you have to make an appointment," the effect of that is to discourage any other....You're not going to do that again. You aren't going to go up there. **FG23 WP Civ2**

I've had supervisors in the past that have been horrible. I just go to work and just do my work and leave and go home. I don't stay overtime like I do now. I don't tell them new ideas, try to make things better. I just went to work and left when I was supposed to. But now with the office I'm in now...[m]y supervisor, she'll get me out on the weekends, "Come on, we're going to the movies," or something like that....So, that makes you feel better. That makes you want to come to work, makes you want to do different things 'cause your work reflects them also. **FG37 CH AC E1**

These respondents all describe varying levels of motivation and engagement that directly affect work-group behavior, in general, and the desire to offer ideas for process improvements, in particular. In the next subsections, we consider more specific examples of different leadership and management approaches and how they play out in different contexts.

Getting structurally diverse teams “right”

The value of structural diversity lies in the diversity of perspectives that accompanies different component and functional backgrounds. The focus groups indicate that the keys to realizing organizational benefits from this diversity are having an appropriate blend of perspectives during decision-making and managing group decision-making processes well.

Component-based work-group diversity

One of the basic lessons from the diversity literature is that the “learning” organization profits rather than suffers from diversity. The learning described below is that an essential ingredient in successful TFI is integrating the decision makers by component:

We've kind of worked out quirks with the current issues we have there now. We just kind of know that when we're trying to accomplish something, we have the right players at the table, regardless of whether they're active duty, reservists, contractors. We have just learned from trial and error, that it's important to bring the right people to the table. Even in other things—if there are awards, celebrating certain things—we always include our civilian personnel. We've just learned from experience. *FG24 CH AC E3*

If the different components are not at the table when policy is being developed, inattention to component differences can have unintended consequences. The following examples demonstrate how the component hierarchy can exclude reservists or civilians from deliberations that will affect their efficiency:

You've got an active duty force that's trying to dictate the rules of engagement for an entire profession or job AFSC....Active duty wants to control the world in our situation, and they lack the understanding of how we work....The rules that we work under, the fact that we do have a civilian job...and the fact of their own inadequacies of their own system. Because they're active duty, they don't get the same opportunities that we do in our clinical experience. So because of that, they have to increase their amount of training, and we're getting pulled into that. Well, we might not necessarily need that amount of training, but they're doing

[it] across the board because they're coming up with issues out of the system. **FG5 WP RC 01**

We had a lean team group. I'm sure you guys know what that is. It's just an organized, effective way of thinking—organized common sense. Well, we had a chief in our flight that would ask how things were going (much like you guys are doing), how can we improve. And I mentioned something about, "How many civilians do you guys have on that lean team? You guys got this thing made up of staffs and techs and senior Airmen, and they're going to make decisions on our work area." And in 2 years they're going to be gone, and I'm going to have to live with their decision. Whether or not we can leave the toolbox out on the floor or whether we keep it 500 yards over there in the tool room and have to walk 500 yards every time to get a wrench. Simple things that make life a whole lot easier. And they put me on this lean team, which has now been disbanded—ya, they broke it up, ya they did. They don't consider that at all times. When they think about changing things on the base, when they put a group together to try a base improvement or anything, they don't include civilians on that because we're...I think we're likened to stepchildren: we're here when they need us, but they don't care what we think. **FG16 CH Civ1**

Function-based work-group diversity

The following discussion, which occurred in a cross-base focus group composed of respondents from multiple functional areas (i.e., acquisition, aviation, and medical), shows that having the right people at the table also matters for decision making that involves functional diversity:

RESPONDENT 1: We do a lot of process improvement type of activity within the acquisition community. Strategic planning might be another example....My philosophy would be, when you're doing strategic planning, you might not want to have all senior people versus all younger people. You want to have the experience of different backgrounds and a number of years within a certain area so you certainly want a depth and breadth type of deal....We basically take a variety of experience levels, different backgrounds, whether it be different disciplines within financial...and we've got budget people, we have accounting/finance people. So from an experience background and from an expertise

background, we try and pull different people together to give us different perspectives.

RESPONDENT 2: Often times in the airplane world we have to come up with a quick fix or fix the problem. And when you put together a team that is made up of all engineers, you're gonna find a very elaborate answer but it may not be grounded in the reality of the cost. Often times, especially when I first got here, was that a lot of answers made a lot of sense when you were sitting at your desk, but if you've been flying for 12 or 15 hours on a B2 mission...what seemed like a really simple activity of putting in five or six keystrokes on a keyboard became an awful lot of errors because of the fatigue factor of the individual who was flying it. So by bringing together teams that had the different disciplines and teams that were willing to ask different questions even outside of the disciplines you had, you normally got an answer that was far more satisfactory to the end mission requirement, and that was achievable, than if you allowed a team mix of folks who wanted to work together.

RESPONDENT 3: In the medical profession, what we do is we have an executive oversight body and it can't just be the medical profession. It can't be just all doctors because clearly there are two aspects of medical care; there is the health care piece and then there is the cost piece. If I continue to just provide everything to everyone without any concern for cost, then I will be bankrupt and we will have no service to provide anyone. So your team has to consist of diverse backgrounds; some people who have strength in management and some people who have strength in the clinical realm. **FG8 WP AC 03**

In all cases, a key issue is managing the work-group process, especially communication. By establishing "a free flow of information and communication up, down, across, and within" [21] the unit, the active duty leader quoted next is able to surface and leverage his structurally diverse work group's accumulated and cross-disciplinary knowledge:

And then as we come to the table with these problems or challenges, whatever you want to call them, that pop up, we are able to, "Hey, I used to deal with something that was similar to this and this is what we did then...."

But through that interaction, “Hey, I got this going on, this going on,” and “Hey, I’ve done this, I’ve seen this,” there’s a lot of that free-flowing cross-talk, there’s structured cross-talk at the staff meetings, and then there is just me being stupid asking lots of questions....

I’ll have a problem that has to do with a computer. And within my shop I’ll have a cop who used to be a com guy and so he would know the route to solve that problem. Or I’ll have a manpower, which is a big issue for what we’re trying to do right now, in terms of getting the right people for the right jobs with the right backgrounds and right clearances and things on those lines—and I happen to have a chief who works in my shop who is a former manpower specialist. So he knows how to work that side of the house....

On Friday we’re going to sit down—we being the shop, the entire shop—and we’re going to try and figure out how we’re going to solve this problem. **FG30 LA AC 02**

More junior respondents, however, described situations in which the exchange of ideas was less productive. First, a junior officer recognizes the value of diverse ideas and perspectives, but doesn’t see that people have the skills to bring them together to generate innovative solutions to problems:

Team building. Brainstorming....But what I’ve seen in a lot of things is none of us really had any training....You put everybody in a room, everybody’s got great ideas, we can talk all day long, and everybody agrees to disagree. But we never bring all that stuff together because that whole scientific part of teaming and facilitating commitment [is missing].
FG28 LA AC 01

Similarly, a junior enlisted member says that he and his peers argue about process change but typically don’t implement it:

BILL: Nobody hesitates to shoot out bad ideas where I work. Not everybody thinks an idea is good, and we argue about it.

APRIEL: Then what happens?

BILL: I don’t know. We usually stick to the process. Not much has changed since I’ve been here. **FG27 LA AC E1**

It is possible that the difference between the first set of responses and the second set can be attributed to differences in the respondents' experience levels and ranks. More senior officers who are tasked with strategic planning are more likely to have the experience and the authority to both create well functioning (and structurally diverse) working groups and initiate change.

Leveraging experience and expertise within the total force

Successful leveraging of experience and expertise is based in part on effective two-way communication. Respondents from across the total force described unambiguously open environments in which neither component-based nor rank-based hierarchies impede the free flow of ideas:

In the time that I've been in the Air Force, I've seen leadership styles change. When I started out, O6s were somebody to be feared for the most part. Now O6s seem to be much more willing to walk around to units and shake hands saying, "You guys are the experts here, what do you need? My job is to give you what you need to do the job because you're the people right where the rubber meets the road." And I think as soon as the youngest Airmen hear that, the communication process instantly improves because they realize that, "OK, this guy recognizes that I know how to do my job because he's actually asking my opinion on how do we do this better." I think the Air Force has evolved in a very good way in that respect. **FG26 CH RC 03**

One of the things that we try to stress on all of our shop members is everybody has a say. Just because I'm a 20-year master sergeant doesn't mean I have all the answers. If you see me doing something you don't agree, ask a question. If you don't feel like it's right, make a comment. And people kind of use that in a sense as checks and balances. If everybody's looking out for the whole process by bringing to my attention or to whoever is in the process, that's one thing we do. Communications is a critical thing, it's got to be understood that regardless of whether you're an Airman basic or a G6 or G8, you have to say so. It's not necessarily going to change but you've got to say if you think it's a bad process or something is wrong with the way that it's being done. **FG24 CH AC E3**

PAUL: We talk every day. We meet every day, at least the leadership. And then the leadership, they meet with their folks on the down line. So, there's always discussion going on. If there's a change to be made, even though we're a military organization, it's not necessarily done with directives....It can be done but we get by it. We ask the people at the lowest level because they're the experts anyway, you know, "How do we do this better?" or "Here's what's on the table, make it better." And if there's some direction that we have to go, we at least let them decide how we would implement it. So, it's done like that on a daily basis.

JOE: I wanted to go back to your question about do people feel like they can speak up. And I was an Airman at one time, believe it or not. I've never been in a situation in the Air Force where I didn't feel like I could speak up or where the atmosphere was so bad that people couldn't speak up. I think we have always encouraged that—from Airmen, to civilians, officers, or whatever—in meetings, through IDEA³⁰ Programs, through complex processes. If anyone feels constrained to speak up in this environment, then I would be really surprised. *FG35 CH Civ2*

The focus groups also, however, yielded many examples of situations in which structural hierarchies are perceived to block effective two-way communication and, thus, limit the USAF'S ability to successfully leverage the experience and expertise of all its members. These counter-examples to the general sense of open communication channels were primarily raised by (a) civilians who indicate that their military managers neither tap their expertise nor provide explanations for changes that are made and (b) military members who feel constrained by the rank structure. In both cases, the preponderance of comments were associated with unresolved negative outcomes. A few respondents, however, provided descriptions of leaders who were able to resolve structural tensions with communication and/or purposeful management.

30. This acronym stands for "Innovative Development through Employee Awareness." The IDEA Program will be discussed in a later section.

Leveraging across components

As earlier quotations show, a fundamental difference between active duty and civilian components is the versatility of the former versus the more narrow experience and expertise of the latter.³¹ As a result, training is often an implicit goal in structurally diverse units, especially when officers command civilians whose products and processes they may not fully understand. Civilians who see their job as tasks to accomplish tended to talk about the negative impact of this rotation-induced “training” on efficiency and unit morale:

You were asking about having enough room to do our jobs. Well, we're at a unique situation. We're not only governed by our supervisor and our bosses, we're governed by the EPA³² and dealing with that society. We're not covered by the EPA, there's a lot of different laws that we have to keep up with. So when we do our job, we have to do it a certain way. If not, we can go to jail. And if we do it wrong because someone told us to and we break a law, the guy that told us to is not going to go to jail, I'm going to go to jail....[So] you're in that training process all the time: "We can't do this because...." And then the next week, "We can't do this because...." You know? And they never seem to learn. And then by the time they get trained, they move on to the next base, and a new one comes in. *FG29 LA CIV1*

The following contrasting perspective from an active duty officer suggests a need for clarity regarding whether and when such training is a primary role, with appropriate time allotted and acknowledgment in performance appraisals:

I don't think civilians are being held accountable for a lot of things. They're kind of left at their own conveniences to go off and do their job the way they see fit. But they're not responsible for training us when we show up. It's like pulling teeth to get them to show us what the job entails, and what

31. In the previous section, see discussions of military/civilian integration as it relates to two of the moderators: Policies (“Other policy differences”) and Operating environment (“The drive for process change”).

32. “EPA” abbreviates the “Environmental Protection Agency.”

our responsibilities are. So I think that's paramount, to hold them responsible for things like training us. **FG18 WP AC 01**

In addition to making civilians' role as trainers more explicit, two-way communication is an important way to manage the contrast between the expertise of the civilians and the broad but more shallow knowledge of AC leaders. The following comment suggests that, if such communication were to occur, civilians would be more willing to participate in implementing changes initiated by active duty managers:

You've always got to look at new ways. That's what's happening in the world, that's what's going on....I think the biggest problem they have is, they need to understand the process when they come in, and they need to get the information, the input from the people to find out what that process is. And then if they've been somewhere else, diversity somewhere else, and they've seen something that worked well there, bring it in and let it work well here, too. That's fine. But let the people you're managing know what you want to do, where you're going with this, and get the input from what's been going on in the first place. Just don't jump in and say, "Hey, this is how we're going to change things: I want these letters now every day, and I want this every day, and I want you to do it this way every day, and this and that." That's not going to work, and it takes time. And like you said, 2 years later and they're gone and the next one comes in and says, "Well, why are we doing it this way?" **FG31 WP Civ1**

More generally, active duty officers who manage with one-way communication (i.e., by giving orders) fail to leverage the experience and expertise of structurally diverse groups. The first of the following examples shows an officer who chose not to "manage" civilians he couldn't command; the second example shows an officer who chose the other extreme of micromanaging instead of managing (i.e., understanding the process, rules, etc., in all their complexity and interconnections):

There are technical experts that are usually civilians. Technically they know what to do, but they don't have the thrust. So when you get there, yes, I have someone who knows what they're doing, but I can't get them to do it because they have a different set of rules, a different set of everything. We don't speak the same language hardly. Whereas I can get that

young troop, who has all the thrust in the world, but has no vector. Easy, I could easily do that; it takes very little effort to vector someone. **FG28 LA AC 01**

I'll give you a prime example of that. We had a civilian who is now retired. He was—back when we had the C-5³³—he was doing a long alignment that took more than 24 hours and had to be turned over and turned over. So he was back there through his lunchtime, working through his lunchtime, had his brown bag lunch. The commander came through and said, "We cannot have that. He cannot eat his lunch at the test station." So supervisor told me that next day he says, "Mr. Macintyre, you cannot eat your lunch there." Macintyre said, "OK." That station had to be monitored. He reaches over and cuts it down. He went and ate his lunch and comes back, starts it up again. They said, "How's that thing going?" He says, "Well, at the rate we're going now, it ain't never going to get finished because tomorrow we'll take lunch again." And they changed that real fast. But you got people trying to micromanage that don't know what in the world they're doing. **FG16 CH Civ1**

Despite these structural tensions, individual leaders are finding ways to foster a healthy climate in structurally diverse units. For instance, the following reserve officer was the “good” example in an earlier civilian focus group discussion of leadership. They felt that his explicit listening activity made a big difference to morale and teamwork in a structurally diverse unit:

Now what I've done the last two groups I've commanded, with the civilian side, I brought them—every ART—in my office. I have 162, so I didn't do it in a week; I took it out over 2 months. But I brought everybody from my new training WG10s³⁴ all the way through my Chiefs, and I said, "This is your time to talk. What's on your mind?" **FG26 CH RC 03**

Some leaders are also figuring out ways to manage across the policy differences (and negative incentives, such as contracting costs) that can make structural diversity a problem:

33. The C-5 Galaxy is a larger passenger and cargo airlift aircraft.

34. “WG10” indicates “wage grade 10” (a civilian rank).

There's an assumption that the military will take the night shift and the weekends. And that's the one thing I really finally did get tough on is that those duties would be spread equally among the military and the civilians. And if we had to pay the extra costs, we would go ahead and do that. There was just this assumption that the civilians would only work the day shifts during the week, and we have actually gotten past that, and I'm really happy with the way people have accepted that. And now we don't have those discussions any more, but in the beginning it was an issue....

I was able to do that I think because, one, it was within my authority, I guess. But the other thing was just the personalities of the folks involved. They are responsible people and they finally understood that this was the right thing to do. I don't think you can always count on that though. I would like to see, particularly in the DOD, that civilians and military understand that working for the DOD is not working for IBM...we ask things of you that we wouldn't normally ask, you know, if you were Corporate America. **FG8 WP AC 03**

This whole discussion on civilian/uniformed conflict was focused on the mismatch between rewards and responsibilities. The senior officers in this focus group felt that empowered leadership can overcome diversity-based conflicts, but they also wanted better tools for incentivizing civilians.

Leveraging up and down the rank structure

Achieving two-way communication up and down the USAF rank structure may be even more difficult than achieving two-way communication across components. Indeed, many focus groups addressed the negative impact of rank-based hierarchy on the free flow of ideas. Some statements related to the generally dampening effect of the rank-based management system on people's willingness to be frank with their superiors:

We're a very rank-conscious structure. We all go up and look to the dude sitting at the head of the table and those are the good ideas....If the commander says it, if the NCOIC³⁵ says it, that's the good idea kind of thing. It doesn't matter if I

35. "NCOIC" is short for "noncommissioned officer in charge."

have something floating around in my head...I won't communicate that, even at my rank....And that starts from the time we're in Basics often times. You defer to who has the most stripes, and that can sometimes impede innovation. And I'm not saying throw out rank, because we need it to function here. But how do you balance that against getting input and getting honest input in, because it's easy if you're ranked in amongst your peers to say "that's a bunch of BS."

FG9 LA AC E2

And the military, the reason I say we're behind [the civilian sector] is, we still form groups in the military, we still have a rank structure. We have fear of retribution as a colonel, as a general, as a...because we'll get fired if we say really what we think. We always want to think, "Well, the general wants us to be honest." No, he wants us to follow his lead. ***FG22 WP RC 03***

This reserve officer continues by pointing out that, within the rank structure, dissenting opinions are likely to be offered only in private, limiting the scope of and potential benefit from creative discussion:

When you're at that table with your peers, you don't want to be embarrassed. But if you disagree, you'd better, you say "General, I want to talk to you" or "Colonel, I want to talk to you" behind closed doors, and that's where the real discussion takes place. And what happens at the group level, nobody gets a benefit of that discussion. And it happens so much. ***FG22 WP RC 03***

Comments from civilians indicated that, as part of the total force, they are affected by the rank system as well. Specifically, the rank system is the dominant culture of the DOD and it sets the tone in terms of focus on mission and the valuing of diverse ideas:

I'd like to get back to the definition of diversity. I think that what Myra touched on, that deals with the idea of diversity of ideas. When I look at our workforce, I—just from being observant—I see a relatively diverse, in the traditional sense, workforce....It appears to me that there really isn't a diversity when it comes to ideas though. I think there is a focus on kind of getting on board. Almost to a fault. Now obviously you don't want to create a situation where there's dissension, you have people who are not really focused on accomplishing the mission, but I think far too often we look at the

different administrative obstacles or personality issues or whatever that would prevent us from being able to achieve a whole lot more based on some of the ideas that we could try to implement. And I just don't know if we really do truly foster a difference of opinion. And that could come from our rank, the fact that we kind of have a military system: You do what I tell you to do because I have higher rank. And that might not foster that kind of pre-sharing of ideas that would result in really something different occurring, you know? So I think the diversity of ideas really seems to be where we lack, where we fall short. **FG23 WP Civ2**

Rank structure has a particularly heavy impact on the lower levels of the hierarchy. The following exchange illustrates how accepting junior Servicemembers are of the reality of the rank structure:

APRIEL: OK, so, what would happen, then, if you had a great insight into how to do something differently? Would you keep it to yourself?

CHAVEZ: Yes.

APRIEL: OK, even if you thought of something revolutionary you'd keep it to yourself. So at what point in your career do you think you'll have the opportunity to contribute something?

CHAVEZ: When I make Staff. **FG27 LA AC E1**

A more senior enlisted member also acknowledges that, even when junior members do speak out, their ideas aren't always considered:

Just coming from past experiences, sometimes you do see somebody that has an idea but, because of their rank, you see them getting blown off. They preach it, we all hear it, but sometimes we don't follow through with it. **FG12 LA AC E3**

Perceived generational differences complicate the issues of rank-based hierarchy and vertical communication. There seemed to be general agreement among respondents that the current generation of junior Servicemembers is more likely to question established processes and procedures. Respondents had different opinions, however, about whether this willingness to question is good or bad for the USAF.

The following exchange shows that some respondents see the new generation as intelligent, highly motivated people who respectfully question authority in order to achieve individual and organizational success:

CURTIS: When I came into the Air Force 24 years ago, most of the people, most of my peers, saw the Air Force as a place where you come in and you follow the rules and there was a way to succeed, and you don't question authority, you try to give your superiors what they want. Now, when we see younger people come into the Air Force, they are very willing to question everything. They don't always respond to authority the way that we would expect them to, you know, there's not, I won't say fear, but that very healthy respect that we had, say, 24 years ago. I don't see that nearly as much. I see a willingness to question all authority, question every order you know, "Does this make sense? Is that really what I should do?" There's still the professional respect and courtesies, but they're much more open-minded.

APRIEL: It sounds like what you're describing could be both a good thing and a bad thing.

CURTIS: I think it's a very good thing. I think it's extremely good when younger people are constantly challenging you, wanting to know "Why is this the best idea?" If you're in battle and bullets are flying at you, that's not the time to question. But when you have the luxury of time to discuss things, it's a very good thing because it makes you examine your own leadership style and your own decisions and determine if our duties make sense.

CORIE: I'm seeing them come in much more intelligent, capable, motivated. You don't see people that are just coming out here to draw a paycheck. These guys are out here to serve their country, especially the base environment. They're here for a reason, they have initiative, they want to go places, and so they do challenge things that stand in their way sometimes....We're seeing very, very intelligent people like young Airmen coming up. We can channel them, but we're gonna have an awesome force. ***FG26 CH RC 03***

In contrast, some respondents perceive today's young recruits as disrespectful, immature, and more likely to complain than to offer constructive solutions. Based on this perception, rather than impeding a

creative flow of good ideas, the rank structure acts as a brake on bad ideas:

The young troops we're getting out of tech school, we're getting reports on them saying they require close supervision, they cannot be trusted without continuous monitoring. And I think it's a real reflection of what we're seeing in society. You mentioned particularly the younger troops. Somebody that has been here 6 months says, "I've got this great idea on how to change the Air Force Reserve," they're going to be listened to with a real guarded ear. And I'm seeing an increased amount of discipline issues, brand new coming in, the maturity level seems to not be as good. And they just don't seem to be, for the most part, as focused as they need to be for this. And that's why I responded to your comment about listening to younger people. Sometimes—no, a lot of times—what I hear are complaints and whining and discontent. But I don't hear a desire to improve the system. Let me tell you what's wrong with the system. It's a different focus. So, ya, maybe they're not being listened to as closely as they would like, but I don't think it's because we're not listening to good ideas. **FG2 RC CB O2**

Along these lines, some respondents see the rank hierarchy as appropriately restrictive, serving to provide the parameters within which change should be allowed to occur. These respondents cited the importance of chain of command, indicating that they had the freedom to be innovative provided they respected the chain of command and worked within existing guidelines and processes:

If the lowest person has something they want to bring up, or change, or an idea or something, it's always encouraged to use the chain of command to channel it up to the managers or whatever. So, ya, everyone can do that, and if something's brought forward, whether it be from the highest person or lowest person, if it's viable, as long as it falls within the normal instructions that we have. **FG12 LA AC E3**

Q: Yes, at a local level we do have opportunities to change policies, and to affect change in our own offices. However, there are more times than not where those local policies [are] dictated by a higher headquarters. There's nothing we can do about how many aircraft or how many air crews in my current job have to task to each squadron. Because that is dictated to me by higher levels in the Air Force. Now I can

say, "Hey, I would like to organize my office, X, Y, Z...." It's great, we get everyone's common thought process on it, and that's fantastic. Only to a certain extent, and that's going to happen in any large corporation.

APRIEL: So does that structure then make you more or less likely to try and think of different ways to be organized, or do you just accept that as background reality?

Q: I think partly you have to accept....I mean, it's the military, we're given orders. But, when we're given leeway to go do this job and it is not dictated on how you do that job, how you get it done, you can affect your own by organizing things in a manner that that organization needs. **FG3 CHAC 02**

Micromanagement

Several focus groups raised the issue of micromanagement, indicating that it not only decreases efficiency but also stifles creativity and innovation at both the individual and work-group levels. Although micromanagement is akin to managing via one-way communication, it has other elements, such as ownership and empowerment, and therefore merits being addressed separately. In addition, micromanagement occurs up and down the rank structure as well as across component structures. Indeed, many of the civilians who gripe about the military supervisors are really expressing frustration at not being allowed to do their jobs according to their own established standards.

Several respondents indicated that the best way to stimulate creativity is to give subordinates control over their work, even though it may entail risk:

Sometimes you can get positive input by pushing it down to lower levels....To empower lower levels to obtain information and bring it forward, both positive and negative. And allow them the ability to gather it, to work with it, and then bring it to the higher organizational levels, whether it's civilian or military. That's the only success I've had with that. Pushing things down lower and empowering them to make decisions and do things. And sometimes by doing that they make decisions you don't like, and you just have to take it. It's not done to your standards, the way you want it, you have to live with it and support it. Because if you don't, you're

going to turn that off. And so far that's the only positive success I've had of trying to get positive information and positive ideas. **FG22 WP RC 03**

A second officer, code-named Troll, confirms that empowerment stimulates creativity and further indicates that micromanagement can inhibit it:

Well, it's giving your people ownership. If the people don't have the freedom to do their job the way they want to do it....Was it Patten that says, "Never tell people how to do things; tell them what to do and they'll amaze you with their ingenuity"? If people don't have a sense of ownership you're not going to get much out of them. At that point, they're going to become punch-card operators and just checking boxes and just doing what they need to do. But [if] they have ownership over something, they can do amazing things. And they'll think outside of the box, and they'll come in with innovative ways to do things. And then you can share that with everybody else and it becomes the norm. And then everyone else has ownership with their little, how they execute this little program, and then they'll come up with a new idea. And it's just constant improvement as long as you give people the freedom to do it. If you have a micromanager over a program that has been established for a long time, it's going to go stale. It will go stale....I think the micromanager, it's the worst thing for any unit. I don't care if it's a 3-people shop or a squadron, or a wing, or a group. It crushes ingenuity, it crushes free thinking, and it crushes will because I think people lose ownership. **FG30 LA AC 02**

Two additional officers indicate that most people in leadership positions understand the limiting effects of micromanagement:

KIP: I think the majority of officers learn very quickly that they can be micro-managers if they want, but they don't necessarily get the best product if they don't allow people to be flexible and to be diverse in their thought process. You can accomplish different things a whole manner of different ways, and sometimes somebody does have a better thought process than you. Now, there are specific items where they say, "I want it done exactly this way," and we do that. But I think for the large majority of our mission requirements, we're given a lot of flexibility in how we accomplish. Now in the flying game, they tell us to fly an airplane from point A

to point B, we do that. But as far as other type tasks, where you're given a project to run, you're given a lot of flexibility. Do you guys agree with that?

FEVER: I agree with that. *FG3 CH AC 02*

Troll, on the other hand, is less sure that micromanagement isn't a problem in the force:

MARTY: Is there a consciousness in the Air Force amongst people who are in a management situation? Is there consciousness of what micromanagement is, and it's not a good thing? Or is it something you have to see for yourself?

TROLL: I don't know if there is a consciousness. Because... when you get up into the higher level, what is a group commander to look at? He's going to look at what the squadrons are producing. Now the squadron commander, you know, he has his flight. Maybe one of those flight commanders is a complete micromanager....He manages everything, does everything himself, and doesn't allow any free thought within his [flight]. But the J-O-B, at least in the short term, is getting done. So he reports up to his DO and squadron commander, and they go, "Well, the J-O-B is getting done. You're doing a pretty good job, results are coming out." Nothing new is coming out, but they're not going to see that. They're not going to see innovation. And as it goes up the chain, all they're seeing is the job is getting done. I think that the only way that you'll see micromanagement up the chain is to have kind of a feedback loop in the Air Force climate survey....'Cause I'm not going to go up to my vice wing commander and go, "Hey, sir, you're micromanaging me." I'm not going to do that. And I don't think anyone will. *FG30 LA AC 02*

Others agree that micromanagement produces suboptimal results and, like Troll, see that it occurs:

A lot of the upper echelon doesn't leave the immediate supervisor to do their job. Or they send down this one-way communication process that this is the way THEY want it. [Laughter all around here] Well, I look at it in a sense that, "This is my crew, this is my responsibility, so let me run this my way. Where me and you need to consort is the end product. If you don't like the end product, let me know; I'll change that. You can lay down the law and say this is what

you want it to look like when you're done. And you need to leave me alone and let me do this. If it doesn't look like what you want then we'll go back and change it." But a lot of times it doesn't go like that. You have to supervise in accordance with your supervisor....It doesn't really give you the chance to do what you want to do or have been selected or earned.

FG1 WP RC E3

Quality control was a big issue here for years. And they had it going on where they had this self-reliance on your own quality, you knew what to do and you could tell the supervisors how to do things, you could talk to them about whatever. It wasn't a dictatorship: this is the way it's done. You had a lot of input from your employees, and they could do a lot of their own stuff, they didn't have to always go through the steps and processes. Well that's been all thrown out the window. Because you get a commander now that says, "Hey, I want to have the control. We're going to do this micromanagement thing again." So they have kind of gone back into that phase again with the micromanagement. You have to be told to do what you've got to do, you can't just do it on your own. You've got to have the OK now. Where you used to be able to—hey, if I needed to do this, I just went ahead and did it. And things, I think, went a lot smoother. ***FG31 WP Civ1***

Formal programs to encourage process change

The empirical research reviewed in [1] indicates that, when informal communication does not occur naturally within diverse work groups, formal processes can be used to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas. The focus group discussions revealed two formal programs designed to elicit input from all members of the total force. The first of these vehicles is the Innovative Development through Employee Awareness (IDEA) Program. As described in [27], the IDEA Program "encourages creative thinking and makes innovative ideas (especially those fostering continuous process improvement, economies, and productivity) available to benefit the USAF." The Directive also stipulates that all military and civilian USAF personnel, including members of the Reserve and National Guard, are eligible to participate.

Some focus group respondents were aware of the program and felt encouraged to use it:

I know with the IDEA Program, if somebody submits an idea, it's a \$10,000 award. We all come together as a group and go over it, the paperwork and everything, make sure these are valid numbers and everything is what it's supposed to be. Anything like that we just come together as a group. Hash it out and talk about it. **FG24 CH AC E3**

Other respondents were aware of the program but weren't confident that such awareness existed consistently throughout the total force, and indicated that the IDEA Program could be better advertised.

Some discussions also indicated that, although the program is technically available to all military and civilian personnel, it may not be effectively available to all because the nature of some work doesn't lend itself to changes that have an impact that can be easily quantified in terms of time or cost savings.

MOM: But you have the IDEA Program, which we don't see a lot of. I know they just recognized somebody, and I believe it was in maintenance....I would think we'd see a lot of that....We've got such a talented group of folks that can build a mini-C17 out of a John Deere tractor. So, I do think it's out there, but I think we don't see it so much at the wing level.

JOHN: Big-picture items. Big things that you can stick it out there and say, "This is my idea, this is an innovative idea." I think those are received well. Those are the things that go up to the wing commander. I think day-to-day working—squadron workers, supervisors, commanders—I think those are hard to change. **FG25 CH RC 01**

The second formal vehicle for change that surfaced in the focus group discussions was Air Force Technical Order Form 22 (AFTO22). Two junior enlisted members described how they were encouraged to use the AFTO22 to initiate process improvements:

APRIEL: ...But what if someone figured out that there was a better way of doing something? What is the process?

GILLIGAN & COL. MUSTARD: 22....

GILLIGAN: It's an AFTO Form 22. I just filled out four of them.

COL. MUSTARD: ARTs do a lot of them, too.

GILLIGAN: And they get compensated for them.

CHERYL: Is that an IDEA form or is that different?

COL. MUSTARD: It's a change form, a TO change form.

GILLIGAN: If we see a, there's supposed to be tech data for every single thing that we do on a job. Occasionally, somebody will come across something that no tech data was written, like changing a step. There's no tech data for it. We can come up with the idea, write down everything, step by step that needs to be done, fill out that Form 22, shoot it into QA. QA sends it on up the network, it's all the way up to the top. It gets approved and we end up getting compensated for it—active duty, and Reserves or civilians. So, if we come up with something that saves Air Force money, time, and possible exposure to damage to the aircraft or loss of life, we get compensated.

CHERYL: So, I guess it's safe to say you feel encouraged to submit those ideas?

GILLIGAN: Yeah, sure do.

COL. MUSTARD: Well, that's a stupid step. We'll fill out a 22 then. ***FG36 CH RC E1***

Like the IDEA Program, however, use of the AFTO22 isn't consistent across all work functions. A third member of the same junior enlisted focus group talked about the process used in his shop:

CHERYL (ADDRESSING MIKE): You've got a slightly different function, organization from what I'm understanding. OK, have you seen the same kind of process? Whether you've done in the past? Have you seen the same kind of process working for people?

MIKE: We do do it, we don't probably do nearly as many just 'cause we don't see the stuff they do. We have a couple of TOs and that's them. I'm sure they have way more than us. Yeah, we have like, five.

CHERYL: But you feel, if you saw something, is there a process that you can get it to them?

MIKE: We do. We have continuity binders and stuff like that. They step us through everything. We get the same e-mails back, from Phoenix Star,³⁶ and we go through the IDEA Program and get our supervisors to submit it. **FG36 CH RC E1**

It is interesting that, although these junior members in the maintenance career field appear to feel encouraged to generate new ideas by the possibility of being compensated for them, a more senior member explicitly indicates that, in maintenance, they do not want to foster a creative environment:

We're compliance driven, aircraft maintenance....If you've got an idea to technically improve something, it's submitted for approval or disapproval. I mean, we don't do anything because it seems like it would be a good idea. That's just, with aircraft maintenance you have too much at risk, too many safety procedures in place. So, I would say our culture is not one to, "Oh, gee, that's a good idea—I think I'll go out and try that on an airplane." It just, you know, you do it the way the book says it's done and if you don't, somebody's going to slam you. You're going to do it exactly the way the technical order is written. We do not foster an environment for creativity. There's no room for it in maintenance. **FG2 CH RC O2**

These two perspectives reiterate the earlier point that creativity is allowed and encouraged, but only within certain parameters.

Summary

The results from the focus groups largely confirm the Diversity Model's hypotheses regarding the relationships between diversity, leadership and management, and mission capability. The following paragraphs elaborate.

First, focus group participants acknowledged that the multiple perspectives offered by members with different component and different functional identities have the potential to add value in terms of

36. Phoenix Star is a quality management program for the C-17 Globemaster aircraft.

increased creativity and innovation. In some cases, this acknowledgment comes from positive experiences in which teams that were diverse according to component or function generated better, more creative solutions to problems. In other cases, this acknowledgment comes from negative experiences in which homogeneous teams generated inappropriate or inefficient solutions to problems.

Second, focus group participants indicated that leadership and management moderate structural diversity in some of the ways implied by the model. Specifically, managers must ensure that an appropriate range of perspectives is represented in decision-making processes. In this context, an “appropriate” range of perspectives is defined by the task. In general, decision-making teams should include representatives from all groups that are affected by the decision, as well as those who have expertise to offer. This point was particularly salient in relation to component-based diversity because civilians tend to feel that active duty leaders do not take advantage of their technical expertise when making decisions about process change.

It is not enough, however, to construct structurally diverse teams. Managers must also know how to elicit the full range of ideas from team members and be able to facilitate consideration of the different ideas that may be offered in a way that culminates in the appropriate decision being made. Some respondents talked about this in terms of being able to manage “brainstorming” sessions. The extent to which USAF leaders have these skills seems to vary with experience and management level.

More generally, there was broad agreement among participants that people’s engagement and morale vary according to the management styles and practices of their supervisors and managers. A specific aspect of engagement addressed by several participants was their own and others’ willingness to offer ideas for process and organizational improvements: low levels of engagement were associated with unwillingness to make suggestions.

The focus groups identified key management practices that are directly related to increasing engagement. These were creating open two-way communication channels and empowering employees with creative ownership over the tasks they were assigned. This type of

empowerment was directly contrasted with what respondents called “micromanagement.” Although they differed in their opinions about the extent to which it occurs in the USAF, respondents uniformly described micromanagement as having a negative effect on engagement and creativity.

These discussions about management brought to the surface another relevant dimension of structural diversity in the USAF, and that is rank. In a rank-based hierarchy, social identity can be defined by rank, and the attached meanings can relate to the value placed on the ideas presented by a team member of a specific rank. Participants indicated that some managers effectively solicit input from all their subordinates, regardless of rank. However, the stronger statement was that the rank-based culture limits contributions from low-ranking members. In some cases, this has an additional negative impact on morale; in most cases, it means that team members and the USAF lose out on potential learning from open discussion.

The focus groups also indicated that rank diversity is especially important because it interacts with other kinds of diversity. In terms of TFI, rank diversity tends to exacerbate social categorization by component because active duty members are frequently in positions of command over civilians. Rank also interacts with age diversity, sometimes impeding intergenerational communication.

Finally, as suggested by the diversity literature, the focus groups identified formal solicitations of input as a potentially effective substitute for more organic processes. For example, the IDEA Program and AFTO22 create structured processes for idea submission that can get around such structural barriers as rank and component. The only shortcoming of these programs appears to be that they don’t apply equally across all functions in the USAF.

Implications

The focus group results indicate that the analysis question posed at the beginning of the section can be answered with both yes and no. Specifically, respondents described an environment in which some leaders have and use the leadership competencies that are associated

with good diversity management, while others do not. Given that respondents consistently indicated that such management competencies matter, this means that the USAF is not positioned as well as it could be to benefit from the range of experience and expertise embodied in the total force.

To increase its capability to leverage the contributions of all members, the USAF could more specifically target diversity management competencies in leadership and management training. Since many of these competencies are already included in USAF leadership guidance [21], new training could be structured to call out these competencies more specifically and to highlight the contexts and ways in which they can most productively be applied. In addition, consistent with results from [2], the focus group results call for training curriculum that focuses on group process management.

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Mentoring

Analysis question: Do USAF personnel describe mentoring practices that contribute to retaining and developing the right people for the new leaner force? The Air Force has a specific interest in mentoring as a tool for managing structural diversity within the current context of downsizing and transformation. Individual Servicemembers reap benefits from mentoring and being mentored, but we focus here on benefits that can accrue at the organization level. The literature suggests that these benefits include increased commitment and satisfaction, reduced turnover, and more efficient identification and promotion of talent.

Mentoring as a diversity management tool

Mentoring is a management activity and, as such, could have been addressed in the section on leadership and management. Instead, we address mentoring in a separate section to acknowledge the USAF's emphasis on mentoring as a diversity management tool and because of the volume of material to be covered.

The Diversity Model is a model of the impact of diversity on work-group processes. The mentoring functions identified in the literature are aimed at the relationship between the employee and the broader organization and, thus, effectively supersede work-group structures. As a result, the model can be applied only in very general terms:

- Diversity is connected to social identity.
- Mentor/protégé pairings are affected by social categorization.
- Mentoring moderates social categorization as well as individual engagement and morale.
- Individual engagement and morale, in turn, affect retention, unit morale, and teamwork.

The key connection between diversity and mentoring is captured in the second bullet on the formation of mentor/protégé pairings. More specifically, the application of formal mentoring programs to workforce diversity management is usually based on the assumption that self-categorization processes will make people who are different from leaders and managers less likely to receive informal mentoring. Thus, in this analysis, we looked for the role of social identification in the success or failure of mentoring.

Beyond these general statements, the Diversity Model is not particularly useful for addressing mentoring as a means to identify, develop, and retain talent in the downsizing context. Therefore, we departed somewhat from using the model as a guide and queried the data for two additional research questions:

1. Is mentoring identifying and supporting talent so that the right people are retained and assignments are made efficiently?
2. Do potential mentors have the time and the tools to do more than the minimum required of them?

Finally, the extensive discussions of mentoring in many of the focus groups found that it mostly occurs, or fails to occur, within components. This is not surprising given the primary role that supervisors play in Air Force mentoring. Therefore, we only briefly identify and analyze instances of cross-component mentoring before turning to the more pertinent issues.

Cross-component mentoring

Discussions of cross-component mentoring addressed both formal supervisory mentoring and informal mentoring based on other work relationships. Regarding supervisory mentoring, respondents point to the difficulty of getting appropriate mentoring when they are supervised by leaders from components other than their own. A senior NCO articulates it this way:

The Air Force has layers right there saying official mentors are their first line supervisors. But the ACC is different with civilians, and that's what makes it tough, what she's saying here because your next boss could be a civilian, could be a

GS7, GS6. So civilians, what the Air Force don't do well, they don't know how to train civilians. To the point of, they train military well, but they don't have nothing formal to train civilians. They just give civilians jobs and say, "Go for it."

FG17 WP AC E3

It is noteworthy that she expresses this concern, even though it doesn't affect her directly. A first-term officer, who has experienced civilian supervision, describes the issue more specifically:

Sometimes my supervisor will try to...like when he sat down with me and walked me through, like, "I think you should do this in your career, and this or that." And not to be conceited or anything like that, but I honestly think....He's a civilian, and I don't think....The things he suggests, I don't agree with. I've had other mentoring from higher levels that were just the complete opposite. And he's an [former] Army guy, so that's where these problems come in. In career-field level and acquisitions, there's a huge disconnection in the mentoring cycle because some of these people, they seem like they try to make it up, to the point where, "Ya, I'll give you mentoring advice," but it's not necessarily all good advice in my case. ***FG18 WP AC O1***

Both of these responses suggest a need for more cross-component education and understanding when supervisors from one component are required to mentor subordinates from another component.

In contrast to cross-component supervisory mentoring, informal cross-component mentoring appears to occur more easily and to be a long-standing practice:

Well, in all my years in the military, mentoring has always been a big part of management. They disseminated that down to us: Mentor, mentor; help bring someone up, show someone the ropes. It hasn't really changed that much here. People are always available. The young Airmen reach out to older NCOs or civilians, and most of the civilians I know would have some prior military background. ***FG33 WP AC E2***

Next, another mid-career NCO from the same focus group believes that you need to reach out to everyone in your workspace, whether

you supervise them or not, because often their work (or lack of work) affects the group's performance:

Like the one person I worked with, he was just so nasty to me and it was because of personal issues, and I went to him and said, "I need to know what's going on with you. Tell me what's the problem. Prior to you and me working here, you and I never had a problem." "Well, you do this that way and you just." I said, "OK," it calmed his tone of voice, and he talked to me the right way....Although I wasn't the civilian's direct supervisor, I still had to go to him and find out what was going on because him slacking off is causing my military to get attitude, and then we get bad customer comment cards because my military has attitude. And it just goes round and round. **FG33 WP AC E2**

For a group of early-career enlisted reservists, ARTs mentor them regardless of formal chains of command and across component barriers. (Recall that ARTs are civilians during the workweek but reservists on the weekend.)

I know my trainer, one of my trainers, I have two: I have an ART and a reservist who's activated. And since I've been activated in April, I've probably spent the majority of my time with my civilian ART trainer. I've learned a lot from him. He's worked C17 [for] years since they got here in Charleston and he knows every frame backward, forward, inside and out. I've learned a lot from him. **FG36 CH RC E1**

As noted earlier, the ARTs' dual status and key function probably explain why they recur throughout these discussions at the nexus of successful cross-component integration.

Some respondents identified barriers to even informal mentoring across components. According to one civilian, the varied tenure of other components suggests that if he has to make a choice of mentoring, he will choose the civilian:

CHERYL: You're saying that today if you brought on Mr. Smith from outside, you feel like in 5 years, you would have him better mentored, better trained, possibly than the GI you got mentored for 2 years?

ERIC: Absolutely. If I get two new people, one civilian and one GI, the GI knows he's going to be gone in a year and a half or 2 years on a different weapons system totally. So why should he bother retaining all this knowledge? Well, the civilian, "I'm planning on being here for 20 years, I'd better learn what I can and know as much as I can." *FG16 CH Civ1*

Finally, mentoring is experienced as being so important that Service-members keep valued mentors even when they change component membership. In the excerpt that follows, a mid-career reserve NCO describes how continued communication with a previous supervisor has benefited her, despite geographical distance and her move from active duty to the Reserves.

Then after I separated from active duty I found my own slot, but that's because I learned from my mentor when I was deployed. And I still go to that person, even though he's at Davis Montana. *FG34 CH RC E2*

Does mentoring help achieve right people, right place, right time?

Initial assignment and first-term reenlistment

As the USAF downsizes, it is important to retain useful personnel, especially in key functions. Effective mentoring is one way to manage this. The following two excerpts show how mentoring can address the most common reason enlisted focus group members gave for wanting to leave the USAF—feeling “stuck” in an AFSC they did not want but had accepted because their recruiter told them they would be able to make a change after entry. The first excerpt lays out the problem; then an NCO describes how mentoring can help.

FEMALE: Denied.

MALE: Denied. It's like, “Wait a minute, I'm getting out. I can't take this.”

FEMALE: See, they fool us. They tell us newcomers, “Ya, go ahead, you can cross-train, blah blah blah” It comes back, “No, we're short manned, you have to stay.” You're trying to push your life in a whole different direction and all of a sudden, it's like, bam! Oh, so you're going to treat me like that? Well, I'm getting out. Sorry, got to go.

MALE: It used to be guaranteed for first term.

MALE: I actually have my package in right now, and they told me that it's up in the wind.

MALE: Ya, well, you are dead.

MALE: Exactly. Talk about people from the list, we're saying, you know, we need 50, 60 people in this career field, so I'm not counting on it.

MALE: Oh, ya, it used to be automatic. When you were a first-term Airman and you put in for cross training, "We need you all."

MALE: Ya, 'cause you got a window, and once you get to CJR,³⁷ you got like that 8-month window where you can apply for cross-training.

FEMALE: But it just confuses you because it's all about, they're trying to keep people out. In the meantime, you can't cross-train because they're short manned.

MALE: Go Guard. I guess I don't understand the "more with less" when the workload has not decreased. ***FG13 LA RC E1***

This discussion highlights a disconnect between the old recruiting culture and the new downsizing context. When the focus was on simple recruitment and retention, the promise of cross-training was real. Now both the operating tempo and downsizing prevent the promise from being kept. This changed situation introduces two kinds of inefficiencies: some recruits are misassigned, and the "right" people may not reenlist because they can't cross-train.

Here, a senior NCO describes how he works to remedy the ineffective tactic of reminding such troops of their contractual obligation. He explicitly tries to engender more productive relationships between supervisors and subordinates:

I go to an extraordinary amount of effort to patch up the relationships that are typically built upon, "You signed, this is what you get. You should have thought more about it."

37. "CJR" stands for "career job rotation."

That's a quick, ignoramus management tool that you can't call a tool. *FG1 WP RC E3*

Mentors have an important role in helping their protégés deal with downsizing. In the following exchange, mid-career enlisted reservists discuss how changes in reenlistment policy ended their active-duty careers, largely because their supervisors were uninformed of the changes, or of their status, and failed to guide them appropriately. Because they still wanted to serve, they joined the Reserves.

RESPONDENT 1: I came from a time, while I was active duty, before you had to have career job rotation. And so I—it was easy—I'd walk in, "Oh, ya, I want to reenlist." Reenlist. It's changed. For a lot of people, and especially for young airmen nowadays, they may be thinking about reenlisting or not, but active duty side not all the supervisors are aware that this is something that has to be projected out. You have to say, "Yes, I'm thinking about doing this," and get that thing set up ahead of time, and they're not being told.

RESPONDENT 2: Well, the CJR, like you're saying, you're supposed to sign a piece of paperwork between 13 and 5 months before you actually reenlist. You don't have to reenlist if you sign it, but you have to sign it to reenlist.

RESPONDENT 3: It was only based for first-term Airmen. I was a first-term Airman as a staff sergeant, so my chain of command did not know I was a first-term Airman. They thought I was in my second term going on my third term. So they had no idea. They never gave me any information about it....So I based my decision on that getting out. I was like, I don't want to fight this, because if I fight it and lose....Basically I was scared of getting kicked out of the Air Force technically. Because, I wouldn't have really been kicked out, but basically I would have been kicked out, because I didn't have the option of staying in. So I identified it and I just got out. And now I'm in the Reserves.

RESPONDENT 1: So the biggest thing that I can see with the tension is to educate everybody. Not just supervisors, not just the Airmen, but educate everybody on, one, what they need to do if they're a first-term Airman; what not only they need to do to stay, but their supervisor needs to do. Because the supervisor doesn't know what his Airmen need to stay. How are we going to get them to stay? *FG14 LA RC E2*

Clearly, it is not in the interest of the Air Force to have Servicemembers separate because of misinformation or poor communication between supervisors and subordinates. Career counselors can help to bridge this gap but, as the following respondent states, they can't do it alone:

But it takes more than me. I'm like him—I'm the career advisor in my unit. But anyway, besides all that, when I talk to them I want them to know that there is another avenue before you decide to not show up for the UTA³⁸ and get kicked out. Let's see what we can do to help you. That's coming from me. But it needs to be reinforced. Not only from me as the career advisor or as the superintendent. But from all the other superintendents, from all the other chiefs and senior master sergeants. There's no reinforcements of anything. *FG1 WP RC E3*

Mentoring strategies

An early career officer describes a way to tie high-quality mentoring to the evaluation process and incentivize supervisors to identify and keep the right people:

I think what works well in our work area, our commander has made it a policy that no one will receive a “5” on their EPR³⁹ unless they've gone up for at least one award. You don't have to win, but you have to be nominated. Because if this person is worthy of the “5,” then they have to prove that through an award package, which means they have to be doing things like community service, they have to have leadership opportunities. So that's put on that supervisor and that member to make sure that they're doing those things....Each section there's a task that comes down and we'll sit [at] our planning committee, our executive committee, and they'll say, "I want two names from each section, whether they're available or not, I need you to give me two names to get in the habit of nominating your people for things." *FG19 CH AC O1*

38. “UTA” abbreviates “Unit Training Assembly”—the reservists’ monthly drill weekend.

39. “EPR” stands for “Enlisted Performance Review.”

In the following discussion, senior NCOs talk about their mentoring strategies, including how they take risks to develop their subordinates and assure the Air Force of a continued supply of talent:

APRIEL: Do you feel in your current position that it is either part of your job or that it is either encouraged or discouraged for you to help develop those people who report to you?

PATRICK: To me, in my experience, it's the Air Force. You're always bringing up your replacement and so that's mentoring. Leaving a job and not having trained or mentored someone to replace you....I mean, it's what you're supposed to do; that way everything keeps, the mission keeps rolling.

APRIEL: In choosing that replacement to mentor, do you choose a person who has been firewalled off for their career? Do you choose a person that you think has some potential? Is there some combination of those kinds of choices that you make as to who you invest that time and that effort in?

PATRICK: To me, to show it, or asking for it, or showing the greatest potential, whether or not they had firewalls. But someone that's willing to learn and wanting to learn. They would be coming up or showing you that they want to advance. I mean if you just had like three people and hadn't talked to them and you were just looking at records, you would probably pick the person with the firewall because you would think they had the greatest potential just because of how someone rated them. Whether that rating is true or not, you wouldn't know until you started working with them.

LYNN: I've been in two organizations, a leader's organization and the organization I'm in now....He mentioned about fear. Then if I had programs that I know are very dear to that person, I wouldn't take risks and give it to a guy that I know personally has troubles. But I got an organization now where a person, he invites us to take risks, to grow up the next person, no matter who. To give them the opportunity to make it. So what I tend to do now, I tend to put the programs out there and say, "Here, here, here," and then you just tend to look at, OK, who wants some? All programs on the table and then find that person that does their program well and they'll come up to you and say, "Chief, what else do you got for me? What can I do?" Then you start to say, "OK."

And this one over here, I need to continue feeding him and keeping him motivated. This requires maintenance on him now, to get him up to par and to that level. I need to bring him into feedback and say, "This is where you are. This is your standard, but these are my standards. The goal is to get you to my standards." And do that. **FG17 WP AC E3**

This discussion highlights some problematic aspects of mentoring as seen from the mentor perspective. First, many supervisors indicated that they tended to let people identify themselves as worthy of mentoring—that is, they tacitly observe the principle of self-selection. (We describe this process from the protégé perspective later in this section.) Others rely on previous identification of promising personnel (i.e., the “firewall” concept). This concept may fail, if only because the self-categorization process may favor “firewalling” protégés who fit the profile of the dominant group.

In contrast to those quoted above, some supervisors believe that it is worth making the investment in reaching out to all personnel, not just those who step forward:

I try to take that person who is sitting back and is not being mentored because for whatever reason that person doesn't want to go out there and grab that person. I find myself going out and asking that person, “Is there anything that I can do or we can do to help you?” Just because somebody is not actively or....Sometimes it just takes someone to help that person and you can pull something out of him. They just may need that attention. Just because they're not seeking it doesn't mean that they don't need it or want it....Sometimes you have to make time because time is made for you. I mean I think time has been made for me in the past, so I just try and go that extra mile and make time for them cause that can make a difference. **FG34 CH RC E2**

As this mid-level reserve NCO put it, all NCOs should feel responsible to mentor all Airmen with whom they interact:

You don't even have to be a supervisor to be a mentor for someone. We're NCOs, we should be mentoring to, you know, Airmen. Airmen, we should be helping them when they come in, “Hey if you're serious about what you wanna do, where you want to go with your career...” We should take them under our wing, help them get where they can be.

And then when they get there or whatever, then they mentor someone. **FG21 WP RC E2**

Here, a mid-career reserve NCO explains why applying Air Force core values is important, rather than expressing frustration at being "stuck" with a subordinate with an unpleasant personality:

I mean, it's up to that supervisor to have integrity: Integrity first. Service before self. Excellence in all we do. So it's up to that supervisor to have enough integrity to say, you know, "I care about you, I care about your well-being." You know, they work so closely together, there are things that happen that you really don't like about each other and things you really like about each other. But not everybody's mature enough to say, "Hey look, this is what I don't mind, this is how we can fix it, please let me know how I can help you."
FG14 LA RC E2

And a senior participant describes how supervisors' having taken a chance on him not only encouraged him personally but also encouraged him to think about mentoring in turn, especially in terms of targeting likely personnel:

I think the opportunities have been made available to me....Some chances have been taken....People have believed in my capabilities....Hopefully, they feel they haven't been let down. But no doubt we always have those heart-to-heart conversations with those above you and they decide if you are ready to take the next step. And sometimes they express they're 80-percent sure but not 100-percent sure, but they're willing to take a walk with you. And I think that we try to do the same thing for those that work for us.
FG26 CH RC O3

A strong theme among these respondents who seek to mentor across the board is the notion that the mentoring is handed down from each generation to the next. Each Servicemember who receives mentoring from a more senior member is obligated to return the favor by mentoring the next person in line.

Finally, the following two selections illustrate how supervisors are internalizing the impact of downsizing and high operations tempo on potential mentoring relationships; they suggest that leaders may need guidance in doing this effectively to meet USAF goals.

It's going to come down to leadership and managing your people. Knowing their strengths and weaknesses....The 90/10 rule: 10 percent of the people cause 90 percent of the problems. It's knowing that—look, I'm not going to waste my time on these people because I don't have the time for it. And that's the way the Air Force has gone, with our manning, the way we're cutting back. It truly is saying, “Hey, look, this is what I've got to work with.” It's a leadership decision. That leader has to make a tough decision of—look, these 5 people out of the 10 are going to be my powerhouse. These 5 people I'm going to rely on to get the job done. And that goes across Guard, reserve. When you bring people in, it's very easy to find out who's got the thrust. **FG28 LA AC 01**

The following quotation features the same reasoning, but communication is direct rather than tacit and, thus, a positive version of negative mentoring.

When people cross into our squadron, I make a point at telling them that, "If you're here for the benefits that your recruiter told you that about, and no one told you about what it will take to earn those benefits, then you need to pay very close attention because you will work very hard for those benefits. And if that has been left out of your information, you need to know that. If you find you cannot and will not do it, we're a voluntary force, then you need to come directly to me or first sergeant and get out before it's an involuntary discharge." And we will assist them in getting back to civilian life if they do not want to work really hard for those benefits. Because there is an adjustment, there is a price they have to pay. And they are told that the first day they're in the squadron. That, “Here's what it's going to take. If you don't want to do that, the Air Force has already invested a certain amount in you, we're not going to invest any more.” **FG2 RC 02**

Is there time for more than the minimum during downsizing?

The direct effects of downsizing on mentoring

Passages coded as having negative outcomes tended to reflect perceptions that supervisors are “checking the box” rather than effecting mentoring in a substantial way. Many respondents who had negative mentoring experiences cite the limitations of overworked supervisors

who could barely meet the USAF guidelines for supervisory mentoring. Recall the reservists whose supervisors failed to guide them appropriately regarding reenlisting in the active corps.⁴⁰ While it could be argued that the supervisors were at fault, the operating environment can make it difficult for them depending on their workload and the number of subordinates they have.

A mid-career officer holds that time pressures on young officers set them up to be poor mentors, thus hindering making the most of human resources:

Nowadays, we're expecting that lieutenant, when he walks in the door, you'd better be ready, here's your job, here's 25 people you're supervising. We don't have time to necessarily help you. We have a mentorship program again because they said we have to have one, but the whole thing is we're running so much faster with so fewer people that we're losing folks in the gap and we're....I don't think that we're expecting too much from people, but we're not giving enough time to help develop them. *FG38 WP AC O2*

And a mid-career NCO brings this point home by describing the many demands on his time:

So if they're spending time managing these databases, and making sure I don't get fired because Joe didn't pay his credit card on time, do I have time to talk to Joe about his career? There is just less time. And there is a whole lot less of us in the Air Force. *FG9 LA AC E2*

In the following discussion, an officer talks about how, in an environment where there is not enough time for mentoring, he needs to manage around people who have not adapted naturally:

Today, with downsizing...I think it's a failure on leadership parts sometimes. But a leader will go out and exploit those pockets of competence. Get the job with those few MacGyver people and let the follower type sit on the sideline and they don't grow. And it's not fair for them, but you know, when we have to get a mission done, we've got to get

40. We lack the information to assess whether this omission was deliberate, in the interests of downsizing, or inadvertent.

it done so we're going to go count on and exploit those people with the competence in every unit.

MODERATOR: OK, so do you think those people arrive naturally?

MALE: Absolutely, they arrive naturally. **FG28 LA AC 01**

This group went on to discuss the goal of identifying the right people versus the impact of downsizing on the ability to mentor:

MALE: You have to have the time to develop people. Cause I mean, you asked the question already, leadership building. So, I have Airmen A, B, and C. And maybe they're mediocre right now, but maybe it's just because we haven't given them a chance. Maybe they really are mediocre. But absolutely, me and the white guy come in and say, "OK, for this process, you own it. Go make it happen." Now they might succeed, greatly, and I'm going to give them the help that they need. I'm going to try to coach them. I'm not going to try and baby-sit them, but you have to take those kinds of risks. And how do you do that in an Air Force unit that is always up-tempo? It's always so high, so you don't have a lot of time to take those great risks you need to grow the large number of people. I might be able to say, "OK, out of A, B, and C, I know A has got great potential, so I'm going to trust him." But B? Maybe if I get asked to work a really low-grade project. Or C? No I really can't do much, he's gonna paint the wall or something. And it's really not fair, but that's just kind of the constraint that we have—with the budget, time, and resources. **FG28 LA AC 01**

In this context, mid-career active duty personnel, enlisted as well as officers, are concerned about how downsizing has transformed the mentoring function:

You had, I think in some sense, a better mentor program because you had so many people, and people did take care of you. I never had to figure out my job. Someone came and said, "Fill out this form. You're going to AFIT [Air Force Institute of Technology]. Here, fill this out." So as a young lieutenant, I just had enough people around you that you were insulated. You could do your job, and off you went to the next stage that somebody else picked out for you. **FG38 WP AC 02**

The following participant gives a civilian perspective on how downsizing hampers ongoing training, which then affects readiness. In terms of diversity, the key issue is whether such downsizing focuses scarce attention on the right people from the organization's perspective or whether the "clique" the speaker refers to is based on favoritism or other unproductive aspects of the social categorization process:

You can't get the training when you want the training because you've got a job. You're one deep, you can't be going away for 3 days or 1 week to do training or get caught up with things or whatever because you are only one deep in that job. So that eliminates....The training and education went out the window when they went one deep with people. It's only people that they know that they're trying to move a person up or whatever, they're trying to make sure they have this stuff. As far as the rest of it goes, if you're not in that clique or whatever, trying to move you up somewhere, you're not going anywhere. Even though it's mandatory training, I'd say nine out of ten times you're still not going to get to go. Or you won't go because you've got so much work going on that you can't go. *FG31 WP Civ1*

Proactive behavior

Potential protégés are aware that time pressures can constrain senior personnel's mentoring capabilities, and many are figuring out that one way to deal with the new environment is to take responsibility for seeking out mentoring, whether among supervisors, nonsupervisors, or peers. Note, however, that relying on proactive mentor-seeking, rather than proactive protégé-seeking, risks substituting protégé self-selection for mentor identification of talent. Perhaps the USAF has decided that forcing self-selection is a useful filter for retention because proactive people are the kind of people it wants. However, if other useful characteristics are found among recruits who fail to be effectively proactive, the USAF may be missing out on talent that it could develop in some other way.

As this group of first-term reserve Airmen describes, supervisors can go out of their way to help proactive subordinates acquire new skills and thus increase their readiness. Supervisors' willingness and ability to offer help does, however, depend on current work demands:

GILLIGAN: And most of the time they're pretty lenient, you know. If there's nothing major going on, then you can just go up and say, "Hey, you know, I know you're getting ready to go work something on an engine. I'd like to learn that system, can I come out and watch, hand you a tool or, you know, get in there and get dirty with you?" And most chances, unless it's something critical that has to be done right then, we're going out there with them.

COL. MUSTARD: In fact, I made it, I've had situations where I wanted to do something, you know, learn something else. He needed a tire changed, but tire change could wait. We'll send him out here. We'll get you in a little while. So, still they'll even put things on hold for training because they know that a tire change isn't immediate, it's not going out tomorrow. We can wait a couple of hours and you know, get the training. **FG36 CH RC E1**

In the following, a first-term enlisted reservist describes a mix of receiving and seeking (by doing extra work) mentoring:

I had good managers and they showed me how to fight to get to where I wanted to be, So for me it's been good. I've been able to progress, but that's only because....It's tough, you have to work—become like a mandate hog—and do others' jobs. **FG20 WP RC E1**

The following mid-career Airman sees both mentors and protégés taking the initiative to build mentoring relationships. His strategy is to reach outside his unit to find diverse perspectives:

In my case, I reach out to other people, out of the unit, because I can get a different look at maybe how I can make myself better. **FG33 AC E2**

A senior NCO validates the proactive tactic, saying that protégés need to seek out senior NCOs rather than waiting for NCOs to come to them:

And that's what we have to change, our mind-set: You need to go and get it. They're all out there. They see chiefs, they see NCOs, they go to the dining facilities, etc., and you see them everywhere. And there's nothing wrong with anybody, any chief or anybody would love for somebody to walk up to them and say, "Just mentor me." Because that's what

mentors do. They don't really go out and reach for people, they wait for people that are sincere to come to them. **FG17 WP AC E3**

A common mentoring tool, whether offered or sought, is a "road map" for career development. This mid-level reserve NCO went to the top to get one:

I had set some goals that I wanted to achieve in my career, and I wasn't exactly sure how to go about achieving them 'cause I'd never been exposed to the Air Force. So the first place I went to was our command chief. And over the course of probably 2 months, he sat down and gave me a list of things I needed to do, such as PME,⁴¹ some education I need to look at, and he made out a little map. And every time I achieved an objective, we would mark that off. So the command chief was a good place to start. He gave me a lot of clues about my career. **FG34 CH RC E2**

Not all respondents were so clear about how mentoring could help them. In a group of first-term enlisted reservists, we saw Bob begin to realize how he could increase his opportunities by seeking out mentoring after hearing another group member talk about his success in using mentors to progress:

BOB: Ya, I'm probably not asking the right questions whenever I go, like, looking for something to do. When I say, like, "Hey, I want to go do something," I probably should be saying, "I want to look for opportunities to be put on orders for this." You know, I probably....I want to do something.

MODERATOR: Do you have someone you can ask what the right kind of language is to make that kind of request?

BOB: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I would think yes.

MODERATOR: OK, who would that person be?

BOB: Probably my NCOIC, so, I could probably talk to him about what I need to do. He's pretty busy so, you know, if I want to talk to him, I would probably have to ask him, "Hey, do you think you have time in the next 4 years to sit down

41. "PME" refers to "Professional Military Education."

and talk about this? I don't know where to look for the extra activity and stuff like that." I was asking him [another focus group member] before we actually started, and he said he's been on orders for a couple months now and I was like, "How do you do that?" You know? **FG20 WP RC E1**

Beyond mentoring from higher to lower, up or down, peer mentoring is another option, as a first-term officer describes:

Becoming a player within [the Air Force] is very difficult sometimes; people get lost within it. Especially, I think, a lot of the junior officers. So I've seen a lot of peers, and almost grabbed them by the arm and helped lead them down the path and show them how to become a player within the game and show the routes. Because some people catch on right away and some people just take more and more time. **FG19 CH AC O1**

A mid-career NCO underscores the importance of peer mentoring by giving a specific example of how he and an opposite-sex peer use it to negotiate potential pitfalls of gender:

I have one more comment on mentoring. One of our big parts are peers where we go to bounce ideas. Say, let's be honest, a guy having a female troop, some of the questions she's going to come up with sends me running to one of my friends who is female. "Hey, what do I do here?" And she turns around and I get phone calls because we've been stationed together and now we're at a different base and we bounce questions off through the internet....Like, she got a guy troop and a guy is going to pull stuff on her. Like, "OK, this is what you do, and you have to stand your grounds." **FG33 WP AC E2**

Focus group participants were of two minds about the extent to which information postings, physically or on the internet, are an appropriate substitute for one-on-one mentoring. The first-term reserve officers quoted below believe that, since information about becoming commissioned is readily available, everyone who wants to get commissioned can apply for it. They do, however, believe that personnel need to be proactive to make it happen.

JOHN: If you don't take advantage of those opportunities, it's nobody's fault but your own. There are so many opportuni-

ties out there that I guess could help you check those boxes, and, more than that, it can help you give you the skills and those opportunities.

MODERATOR: Would time pressures be related for somebody not checking those boxes, let's say because some of that is extra then? I'm thinking if you have somebody who's in a heavy family time.

MOM: But that's always an issue. And even for maintenance, there's probably a lot of the maintenance members that it's difficult to try and go to school and do their schoolwork because they work a lot of shifts. But, for everyone that says they can't because of that, there are probably a handful that are. They are still managing because a lot of the—especially the colleges on base and stuff, they know that—so they cater to that. They offer online stuff and they offer different courses on weekends and they're willing working around deployment schedules.

JAMES: I did the same thing that John did. I came up through the ranks as well and I wouldn't be where I was at.... I mean the opportunities are there.

MOM: And, for some people, it's a little bit harder than others, when there's a traditional 9-to-5 job.

JAMES: Right, it just takes a little bit of effort.

APRIEL: That comment, for everyone who says they can't, someone else can. Are those two people in comparable situations?

JOHN: Yes, absolutely. I hear people, "Oh, I just don't have time. I have this, this, and this." So did I.

JAMES: Ya, I came out of maintenance, so....

JOHN: I went to school full time, I worked a full-time job, and I got a Bachelor's degree in a little over 3 years. And I tried to have a social life and I tried to spend time with my family as well.

MOM: I've talked to people who work shift work, I talk to people who are frequently deployed, and they're still doing it. So just because someone else says, "I can't because it's too hard," well I'm not saying it's not harder for you as a shift

worker than it might be for someone on 9-to-5 schedule, but it's not impossible. Because there are a lot of other people doing it if you want it badly enough. And I think the opportunities are there.

COCO: I was just going to say, my situation, I was a single mom, I was going to school full-time and working part-time. And I was able to do it. I consider my situation pretty unique. Well not unique, I'm sure there are others in similar situations. But if I could do it, anybody could. And I also wanted to add commissioning opportunities for enlisted folks come every 4 months or so to everybody through e-mail.

JOHN: It's advertised base-wide. If you don't know about the programs that are out there it's because you're not looking.

FG25 CH RC 01

The element of luck and fit in finding a mentor

Many focus group participants indicated that their ability to find a mentor (or not) was based on luck or random assignment to a supervisor who was a "good fit." While many of these respondents indicated that they benefited from having a mentor, the fact that they believe getting a good one depends on luck is a weakness given the general message that mentoring is important for career management and career development.

A senior reserve officer believes that getting lucky and finding a champion (usually by networking) help you get promoted:

CORIE: From my perspective, if you don't have somebody in your corner, you're gonna be left out.

MODERATOR: And how do you get those people in your corner?

CORIE: Good question.

MODERATOR: Are you lucky or in the right room or the right place?

CORIE: Being in the right place at the right time and knowing the right people. Networking is a lot of it.

PAUL: I think that's a lot, though, why we see people get off active duty and join the Guard or Reserve because they reach that point in their life, as the young officer who was talking a while ago, if you don't have a champion to progress your career, you find that it doesn't move at a pace that's necessary to make flag officer. **FG26 CH RC 03**

Similarly, the mid-career reserve NCO quoted below believes that it depends on luck whether the mentor you get is effective:

RESPONDENT: It's been the right person at the right time that help me know what I wanna do and where I wanna be, and to help me do the things I need to do to get there. I think it's....If you don't know, if you're young and you just came in and you don't know. A lot of people, "I don't know if I'm going to stay in," or "I'm only joining to get school money." And then 10 years later, you decided to stay in. But you have no idea where you're going to go if you don't have the right people helping you, mentoring you.

MODERATOR: And how do you get access to the right people?

RESPONDENT: First, it's just luck. **FG21 WP RC E2**

As discussed in the literature review, similarity of any type promotes comfort between mentor and protégé, which increases the likelihood that the mentor will engage in the kinds of additional developmental functions (both career and psychosocial) that lead to long-term success. Consistent with results from the literature, across the board, focus group members were skeptical that assigning mentors, rather than informally connecting with them, could be effective. The following active-duty recruit feels lucky that he got a supervisor he can relate to easily:

I find that my supervisor, he's an excellent supervisor. I mean, he's around my age, he's the same similarities, he's outgoing.... **FG37 CH AC E1**

More generally, a mid-career officer explicitly suggests that such effective mentoring may come from like finding like, rather than from a formal policy or program:

No, there's always mentoring protégés that will go around, and nothing's formal about it, but it's usually because guys have some form of connection. It might be...for example, I consider my mentor a major general who's retired....He was a young lieutenant colonel when I was second lieutenant colonel and for some reason or another he says, "Troll, I like you. You seem like a good kid...let me show you a couple of things." Well, the guy retired a two star. **FG30 LA AC O2**

Finally, in addition to citing the importance of luck and fit, respondents also indicated that finding the right mentor can take time. One mid-career reserve NCO found locating an initial mentor particularly difficult:

I figured out a lot of things I never knew, how the Air Force worked. So it took a long time for me to get a good mentor....I still go to that person anytime I need anything, or need help with it because he has been the one that has helped me all through everything I've done, and it took 4 years to find that person. **FG34 CH RC E2**

Similarly, a mid-management-level civilian says that she largely guided her own career until she was lucky enough to get a civilian leader who made opportunities available for her. When this happens, it can make a real positive difference:

Self-motivation and going after what I wanted to do and what I didn't want to do. And then when I got into this field, there were classes available for me to take. Sometimes, I took them, sometimes I didn't. And then luckily along came this wonderful civilian leader who said, "We need to provide training to our employees." Ta-da. And when my employees in one particular field, there is training available and they all get that training. **FG 4 LA Civ2**

This conversation also suggested that civilian careers do not always have a clear path of progression, but depend both on the leader, military or civilian, and the proactive stance of the civilians themselves. This may make effective mentoring particularly important for civilian personnel.

Summary

Downsizing and transformation are enhancing the role of mentoring as a tool for targeting and retaining the right people, and having them in the right place. It is a business truism that keeping the customers you have is far more cost-effective than recruiting new customers. Given the costs of recruiting and training Servicemembers, targeted retention at a time of downsizing is an obvious strategy.

By and large, the focus groups suggest that supervisors have internalized the Air Force's mentoring goals and their responsibility for them. Many of them referred not only to Air Force goals, but also to their personal history of being mentored. (It is, of course, possible that those who were not successfully mentored were not represented in the focus groups because they had left the Air Force.) However, some cited aspects of the rank hierarchy that made them question taking the risk of helping those who hadn't already been targeted ("firewalled"), especially in activities that were important to their own supervisors.

Meanwhile, the same context that enhances the value of mentoring is making it harder to do. The terms "do less with more" and "one deep" recurred throughout the focus group discussions about mentoring, and many saw the official process as receiving lip service; "checking the boxes" was heard frequently. Although many mid-career Servicemembers reached out to young Airmen who seemed to be hanging back, others waited to give special attention to those who volunteered or otherwise expressed interest. In this context, many long-career personnel lamented the fading of the one-on-one mentoring attention that they had received.

However, many of the newer Servicemembers have internalized the new situation and are modeling a range of proactive behavior. Note that the focus groups of new entrants displayed a wide range of ability to make this kind of adaptation. Young people who were technologically and socially adept were very comfortable seeking out ways to make things work for them, as were young people who came from military families. (The intersection of technical literacy and military background yielded several entry-level focus group members, both

officer and enlisted, who receive much of their mentoring remotely, from home.) Other young people were less equipped to be enterprising and, absent specific instruction or a lucky encounter, will likely fall by the wayside.

The focus groups also suggest that self-categorization is indeed important in successful mentor/protégé relationships. However, participants uniformly held that identification is not founded on demographic similarities but rather on personality, work style, and the nature of achievement. A common response to the question, “What would you tell a young ‘you’ entering the Air Force today?” was to identify someone whose success they wanted to emulate, build a relationship with that person if possible, but if not, still use them as a career model. In terms of their own mentoring history, participants tended to use the word “random” in finding the mentor who made everything “click” for them. It was not that their supervisors didn’t try or do a good job; they simply weren’t the “right” person.

Mid-career and senior Servicemembers who said that mentoring had been crucial to their careers tended to incorporate the term “road map” in their comments. The picture they painted was one in which a person who shared personality traits, work styles, and values with them drew them a personalized road map, not a generic one. Thus, the issue seems to be how to make the personal connection that will yield an individually tailored road map in a changing environment.

Implications

The focus group results indicate that mentoring works well when a connection is made, but that the context for making that connection has changed. Given the important role of self-identification in successful mentoring, it is unlikely that supervisors will successfully mentor more than the few with whom they “click,” even if they have all the time in the world. Thus it might be useful to separate mentoring per se from the supervisory responsibility to see that mentoring happens.

The corollary to this strategy would be to acknowledge that not only the mentoring context has changed but also the characteristics of

young entrants, many of whom insist on being proactive in managing their careers. This would imply a two-pronged strategy. First, acknowledge the diversity of entrepreneurial ability within new cohorts by making explicit the value of finding a mentor or at least a model who can tailor a personal road map, and train/model the less enterprising on how to seek them. Second, exploit the information channels (e.g., web postings) that younger people use to get them the information they need, thus leaving supervisors to support the information flow, rather than the other way around.

Although older Servicemembers are nostalgic for the way mentoring worked for them, the changed context suggests that it would be both useful and wise to make this shift from top-down to bottom-up mentoring. Certainly the focus groups suggest that this is already happening.

Finally, as we stated at the beginning of this section, the diversity model is generally applicable to the important mentoring role of identifying people to promote and keep. In its entirety, the model implies that such identification should be based on true understandings and assessments of individuals' capabilities and how they match the USAF's needs. It also suggests that, absent specific management, such identification could be based on social categorization, either personal or organizational (i.e., fit a stereotypical USAF image of success), or self-selection bias (e.g., limited to proactive go-getters). This is not related to structural diversity per se other than that people from different components may have a hard time recognizing talent in members of other components through the haze of component-based bias as well as the social categorization described in the earlier section on TFI.

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Conclusion

TFI increases workforce diversity along structural and organizational lines. At the same time, budget and endstrength cuts and the consequent drive toward efficiency-improving process change create an operating environment that makes this diversity potentially more difficult to manage. To gain insight about USAF's diversity climate, we conducted focus groups with personnel from across the total force. Transcripts from the focus groups were then analyzed using a coding scheme motivated by the empirical literature on diversity management and USAF guidance on leadership competencies and core values. This process permitted the development of general statements about the USAF diversity climate and the likelihood of benefiting and losing from the increased focus on cross-component integration. More specifically, it allowed us to identify organizational structures, policies, and management practices, including mentoring, that are likely to impose potentially unintended costs and/or yield benefits.

Summaries

The climate for TFI

The USAF's strategy of becoming more effective by integrating its components into a total force increases structural diversity and the concomitant need to manage it. Using the Diversity Model, we find that the conditions that spur TFI can exacerbate social categorization and make TFI *less* effective. Efficiency strategies tend to incorporate elements of cost cutting and downsizing, which tend to have negative impacts on work groups—both homogeneous and diverse. Also, structural diversity requires newly integrated work groups to overcome basic issues of social identity, in much the same way as groups newly integrated in terms of race/ethnicity and gender have had to do. The empirical literature suggests that the impact on work groups tends to be largely negative, absent effective diversity management.

In general, the focus groups confirmed the findings from the corporate literature. The outcomes they described are more negative than positive in terms of teamwork, and engagement and morale; however, these outcomes are largely subject to management and the increased work-group familiarity that time will bring. That is, shared experiences replace stereotypes as people from different components work together. Waiting for that phenomenon to occur, however, may take more time than the Air Force has. Thus, it may wish to adapt lessons learned in regard to demographic diversity to managing structural diversity.

The focus groups reinforced the value of a common mission (such as deployment, safety, joint AFSC) in supplanting work-irrelevant categorizations. In addition, participants expressed a desire for more education/knowledge about the "other" to replace stereotypes with understanding. Notably, resentment over component differences in the shape of the workweek, pay/benefits/rewards, and real or perceived accountability is common; mutual understanding is not. These dissatisfactions are reinforced when policy integration lags force integration, as in the case of separate medical record-keeping and other support practices.

TFI also creates an interesting blend of demographic and structural diversity in that component hierarchy conflicts with tenure (both age and location) and expertise. This conflict is exacerbated by perhaps perverse incentives for active duty officers to make their mark in what, to other components, is a short-term assignment. As the regularity of rotation replaces supervisors and commanders, this repeating conflict creates resistance to change among members of the other components. Many participants from the "lesser" components described situations that were the direct opposite of what the management literature calls a "learning" organization (i.e., what sounded like deliberate, albeit unconscious, "nonlearning").

Managing structural diversity

The focus groups reflected respect for the value of leadership and the sense that the USAF knows what leadership qualities are, has communicated them well, and trained personnel accordingly. However, they

indicate that managing a structurally diverse force is something new for USAF leaders, and civilians in particular have issues with active duty leadership.

For instance, an essential ingredient in successful TFI is integrating the decision-makers by component, rather than simply integrating the components that decisions will affect. Focus group participants gave many examples of how the component hierarchy can introduce needless inefficiencies by excluding reservists or civilians from deliberations that apply to their work. Others gave examples of the effectiveness of including multiple perspectives, including instances of developing better, more innovative solutions to problems.

Beyond component hierarchy, the rank system is the dominant culture of the Defense Department and sets the tone in terms of valuing diverse ideas. Some groups addressed the negative impact of rank-based hierarchy on the free flow of ideas, including, for example, the generally dampening effect on people's willingness to be frank with their superiors absent a well-managed process of two-way communication. When this occurs, engagement and morale diminish.

Rank is also associated with command and control, and this presents a challenge in a structurally diverse context. Uniformed personnel who are accustomed to managing by giving orders find that they need a range of carrot/stick tools to manage across components. In particular, the need to enlist cooperation, rather than order it, means that active duty leaders need to take the responsibility for communicating accurately and fairly across component boundaries.

In general, active duty officers who lead by giving orders instead of managing (i.e., understanding the process, rules, etc., in all their complexity and interconnections) fail to leverage the experience and expertise of structurally diverse groups. A main theme is that micro-management crushes both efficiency and creativity and innovation. Officers talk about this explicitly, but many of the civilians who gripe about their military supervisors are really talking about micro-management and not being allowed to do their jobs.

Mentoring

As the USAF downsizes, it is important to retain the most productive personnel, especially in key functions. Effective mentoring is one way to achieve this goal because it can both identify such people and give them the coaching they need to be successful. Mentoring in cross-component units can be problematic due to a lack of shared identities, experiences, and perspectives. Within components, the same context that enhances the value of mentoring is making it harder to do.

The terms "do more with less" and "one deep" recurred throughout the focus group discussions about mentoring. Potential protégés are aware that time pressures can constrain senior personnel's mentoring capabilities, and many are figuring out that one way to deal with the new environment is to be proactive in seeking out mentoring—among supervisors, nonsupervisors, or peers. In turn, many supervisors indicated that they tended to let people identify themselves as worthy of mentoring (i.e., they tacitly observe the principle of self-selection). Others rely on previous identification of promising people, known as the "firewall" concept.

It is helpful to consider the important role of self-categorization in the mentoring process. Similarity of any type promotes comfort between mentor and protégé, and participants uniformly held that such identification is not founded on demographic similarities but rather on personality, work style, and interests. A common response to the question, "What would you tell a young 'you' entering the Air Force today?" was to identify someone whose success the junior member wanted to emulate and build a relationship with that person if possible, but, if not, still use him or her as a career model. In terms of their own mentoring histories, participants tended to use the word "random" in finding the mentor who made everything "click" for them.

In consequence, focus group members were uniformly skeptical that assigning mentors, rather than informally connecting with them, could be effective. Note, however, that relying on proactive mentor-seeking by protégés, rather than proactive protégé-seeking by mentors, risks substituting protégé self-selection for mentor identification

of talent. Perhaps the USAF has decided that forcing self-selection is a useful filter for retention because proactive individuals are the kind of people it wants. However, if other useful characteristics are found among entering personnel who fail to be effectively proactive, the USAF may be missing out on talent that it could develop in some other way.

Recommendations

Organization level

Perhaps the most important organizational response to structural diversity is to acknowledge that social categorization works across Service components and to manage its effects. This means paying attention to symbols (such as ID cards) as well as to substance (administrative support) that matter across as well as within work groups. This also means finding ways to change long-standing attitudes that are harmful, such as disdain among active duty members for members of other components.

Recommendation 1

The USAF should undertake a focused effort to build positive common understandings of all Service components—both the rules that govern each of them and the unique contributions that each makes. Note that the many Servicemembers who have belonged to more than one component, or who have dual status, such as ARTs, may be a resource for such an activity.

Recommendation 2

The USAF should consider ways to manage workaday differences in incentives, pay, presence requirements, accountability, career horizons, and so on, across Service components. These differences matter within work groups, but work groups usually lack the ability to make local-level changes to organization-level policies. Differences that can't be changed need to be communicated. For example, when uniformed members keep working but civilians are allowed to go home, both groups need to know that uniformed members get to do

personal "got-to's" on the job, while civilians need to take leave, or that uniformed members get days off that civilians don't.

Recommendation 3

The USAF should reconsider the possibly perverse incentives to active duty leaders and managers to make fundamental changes on their tour, only to rotate out and presumably up. For example, incentives could focus on outcomes, as is customary in nonmilitary organizations. Such accountability could encourage supervisors and leaders of integrated components to consult those who are there when they arrive (and will be there when they leave), to keep what is good and make it better.

Recommendation 4

The USAF should observe diversity in decision-making and standard-setting for integrated forces. This is the key meaning of diversity—that diverse components are included in discussions and decisions that will affect their responsibilities. Such inclusiveness not only avoids needless errors but also distributes accountability for changes that are made.

Recommendation 5

These and the following recommendations require more communication—up, down, and sideways. Lack of communication has obvious costs, such as when there is confusion in the chain of command, but it also has insidious costs in engagement and morale even when the substance is minor.

Work-group level

The focus groups confirmed the lessons learned from the empirical corporate literature in terms of the value of a common goal in managing diversity, as well as how working together eventually overcomes initial perceptions of difference. Deployment was frequently cited as a good experience of structural diversity for precisely these reasons.

Recommendation 6

The USAF should study what can be learned from the deployment experience that can be translated to all work groups. Some focus groups suggested, for example, that the USAF find ways to enable Servicemembers to substitute a USAF identity for existing functional (e.g., pilot, personnel, maintainer) and component identities.

Recommendation 7

The USAF should be cognizant that longer time together is helpful for work groups and should consider policy change to make this happen. In addition to substituting real-life knowledge for stereotypes, managing group tenure is one way to make the integrated workforce a "learning" organization.

Recommendation 8

The USAF should think about how to manage the impact of specific forms of structurally induced diversity. Overall, force integration pits one kind of hierarchy (age and experience) against another (command and control), and this potentially productive conflict requires management if it is to deliver maximum benefits instead of negative costs. In addition, unmanaged downsizing can reinforce component stovepipes or guildlike job protection behavior, with harmful effects on work-group performance.

Recommendation 9

The USAF should understand that downsizing and other changes have transformed the mentoring situation from a mentor-driven to a protégé-driven process. This requires explicit training and direction for new recruits and employees in the value and techniques of seeking and utilizing mentors, as well as continued exploitation of new communication channels in accordance with the behavioral characteristics of new entrants.

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Appendix: Focus group protocols

Track A

Topic 1: Mentoring and career development

In this section, we will be discussing your experiences with mentoring. We want to know about both informal and formal mentoring experiences, including connections to people in and out of your chain of command, peers, friends, and friends of friends. Please ask any questions you have now. We'd like to make sure we all have the same idea about the kinds of relationships and activities we mean when we use the word *mentoring*.

1. What was the type and quality of mentoring you have received to prepare you for your current position?
2. How do your current mentoring relationships prepare you for future positions of leadership?
 - a. Are there developmental opportunities that you feel you need, but are not made available to you?
 - b. Is there anything you'd like to learn or do (related to your career) that you can't here?
3. How are key assignments and high-visibility projects assigned? In what ways are supervisors willing to take risks to develop those in their command?
 - a. In what ways are supervisors willing to take risks to stretch someone?
 - b. How is personal commitment/ownership/passion encouraged?
 - c. Do coworkers encourage each other or compete against each other? Can you give examples of what this looks like?

4. What advice would you give a peer or subordinate to help her/him have a more successful Air Force career?

Topic 2: Mediators and moderators

In this section, we will discuss things that researchers have found help organizations make the most of their employees' talents and skills. Some of the questions may seem strange or abstract, so we want you to feel free to interrupt and ask clarifying questions whenever you are unsure what we are asking. We are happy to give you examples of the kinds of things we are asking about, but we don't want you to feel limited by our examples. We are interested in learning about what you think helps Air Force personnel perform at their best. When we use such words as *goals*, *tasks*, *problems*, *functions*, and *assignments*, we are referring to those things that contribute to the core mission of the Air Force. Words such as *good* and *bad* refer to things that enhance or impair achieving the core mission.

1. Many organizations establish processes and procedures to manage conflict effectively. What processes and/or procedures manage functional conflicts in your organization?
 - a. What processes and/or procedures prevent bad ideas/activities from being implemented in your organization? What helps ensure that good things do happen?
 - b. Begin with general comments and reflections. What stands out for you or what first comes to mind?
 - c. Are there differences between in-groups/out-groups (as defined or mentioned by respondents)?
2. What processes/procedures promote common ground and increased familiarity between Airmen?
3. How are Airmen selected to participate in groups assigned to perform complex tasks or solve difficult problems?
4. What activities in your unit/on your base/UASF-wide promote a collective culture?
5. What input do you have as collective goals are established for your unit/on your base/UASF-wide?

6. In what ways are you encouraged to invent or apply new and/or innovative strategies for accomplishing goals?
7. How does the USAF grow the talent it needs to achieve its goals? What contributions have you made/can you make to grow/improve talent?

Topic 3: Cultural values and structure

In this section, we'll talk about cultural values and cultural structure in the Air Force. We really want to get a sense of what it feels like to work (and live) inside the culture of the USAF. How do things get done, and how are bad things either kept from happening or repaired? Words such as *good* and *bad* refer to things that enhance or impair achieving the core mission.

1. Where would a potentially great idea get lost, blocked or ignored in your organization?
 - a. How would this happen?
 - b. What would be required to change this?
2. Have you ever noticed that some people's comments and suggestions are not taken as seriously as those of others? For example, have you ever noticed a situation in which one person suggests something that is not taken up by the discussion until someone who is viewed as more capable makes a similar suggestion?
 - a. Can you tell me more about that situation?
 - b. Some have suggested that such things as who gets listened to in a meeting are really small issues, that they are molehills. Common sense says that everybody is ignored sometimes, and to call attention to these small things is to make a mountain out of a molehill. But some researchers say that with enough molehills, you make a mountain—a phenomenon sociologists call accumulated disadvantage. Can you see both sides of this argument? Do you see either or both of these things playing out where you work?

- c. Fairness requires appreciating the importance of each molehill of advantage and each valley of disadvantage, and then taking steps to ensure that molehills do not accrue to individuals on the basis of who they are. How is fairness ensured here? What would you suggest to prevent any Airman from experiencing accumulated disadvantage?
3. Often the exceptions obscure the rule. This means that one example of success can give people the impression that there are no obstacles to success; consequently, real opportunities for success look better than they actually are. At other times, seeing unexpected success can tell people that opportunities are real. Which is more likely to occur here?

Topic 4: Missing contributions and risk

Here we'd like to talk about whether there are contributions that USAF personnel could be making but aren't. Again, please interrupt to make sure our questions are clear.

1. How/when/in what context do you think other people might intentionally not make a suggestion or contribute an idea?
 - a. Why does this happen?
 - b. What would be required to change this?
 - c. Are there times when this is good?
2. Some people think that making unsolicited suggestions is a risky thing to do. What do you think?
3. In general, is risk-taking encouraged in the Air Force? How?
 - a. How are risks—and resultant failures—handled?
 - b. If failures are punished, how do such punishments affect tendencies toward inaction? In other words, is doing nothing better than trying something big and failing?

Track B

Topic 1: Vision penetration

In this section, we want to listen to your ideas about some USAF-wide goals. Some of the questions may seem strange or abstract, so we want you to feel free to interrupt and ask clarifying questions whenever you are unsure what we are asking. We are happy to give you examples of the kinds of things we are asking about, but we don't want you to feel limited by our examples.

1. What is “the main thing” USAF does? Your unit/your base?
2. Ask specifically about USAF's diversity vision and activities.
 - a. Have you seen the SECAF & CSAF video on USAF diversity vision?
 - b. Probe for connection between diversity efforts and force development activities.
3. Investigate Airmen's understanding of the difference between diversity and EEO activities.
 - a. Use Bean's air show example (“don't need more flying experience”)
 - b. Diversity focuses on maximizing/using each person's strengths rather than on handing out rewards in a zero-sum game.

Topic 2: Leadership perception

In this section, we will discuss your views of leadership. When we use such words as *priorities* and *accomplishments*, we are referring to those things that contribute to the core mission of the Air Force.

1. What are your leadership's priorities?
2. What happens when these priorities are not accomplished?
3. How do you know what is important to your boss in an everyday way?

4. How is success recognized and/or rewarded by your leadership?
5. Some people define leadership as having a genuine interest in serving the best interest of the people you are leading. How do your leaders serve you?
6. Some people say that leaders must be advocates for those they lead. In that role, they must comfort the afflicted, and sometimes an advocate must afflict the comfortable. In what ways do your leaders serve as advocates for you?
7. A well-known public speaker often says, "If you're leading, and nobody is following, you are not leading, you're just out taking a walk." In your organization, who's leading, and who is walking? (Here we are interested more in factors that you attribute to someone's position or function rather than issues of personality or style.) What is the best place from which to lead? What is the place where you'd be most likely (regardless of your own efforts) to be walking rather than leading?

Topic 3: Mediators and moderators

In this section, we will discuss things that researchers have found help organizations make the most of their employees' talents and skills. Some of the questions may seem strange or abstract, so we want you to feel free to interrupt and ask clarifying questions whenever you are unsure what we are asking. We are happy to give you examples of the kinds of things we are asking about, but we don't want you to feel limited by our examples. We are interested in learning about what you think helps Air Force personnel perform at their best. When we use words such as *goals*, *tasks*, *problems*, *functions*, and *assignments*, we are referring to those things that contribute to the core mission of the Air Force. Words such as *good* and *bad* refer to things that enhance or impair achieving the core mission.

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- a. What processes and/or procedures prevent bad ideas/activities from being implemented in your organization? What helps ensure that good things do happen?
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 5. What input do you have as collective goals are established for your unit/on your base/UASF-wide?
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 7. How does the UASF grow the talent it needs to achieve its goals? What contributions have you made/can you make to grow/improve talent?

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