



MLDC Research Areas

- Definition of Diversity
- Legal Implications
- Outreach & Recruiting
- Leadership & Training
- Branching & Assignments
- Promotion
- Retention
- Implementation & Accountability
- Metrics
- National Guard & Reserve

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

Military Leadership Diversity Commission
1851 South Bell Street
Arlington, Va. 22202
(703) 602-0818

<http://mldc.whs.mil/>

Examples of Diversity Definitions

Abstract

How the MLDC chooses to define diversity is fundamental to its work. First, it has to define diversity to address charter tasks and the overall commission charter. Second, it has to recommend a uniform definition for the Department of Defense (DoD) to use for all the armed forces. This issue paper discusses the DoD and Service definitions of diversity and those of selected private-sector corporations. In general, these definitions address a broader array of diversity attributes and goals than those implied by the MLDC charter.

How the MLDC chooses to define diversity is fundamental to its work. Currently, the Services have broad definitions of diversity that address multiple servicemember attributes and broad organizational outcomes. However, the MLDC was chartered with a narrower goal: to increase racial/ethnic and gender diversity in military leadership. With this goal in mind, the charter requires the MLDC to evaluate and assess “policies that provide opportunities for the promotion and advancement of minority members of the armed forces, including minority members who are senior officers.”

Thus, the MLDC will address the definition of diversity on two levels. First, it has to define diversity to address charter tasks and the overall Commission charter. Second, it has to recommend a uniform definition for the Department of Defense (DoD) to use for all the armed forces.

This issue paper summarizes the diversity definitions of the Services, presents examples of definitions from private-sector corporations, and outlines some issues for the commissioners to consider.

How the Military Services Define Diversity

Table 1 summarizes the definitions of diversity from DoD, each Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Note that all of these

definitions address a broad range of personal attributes, and all share some common themes:

- Diversity is recognizing, appreciating, respecting, and utilizing a variety of attributes, not just race and ethnicity.
- Diversity creates performance advantages through the synergy of diverse ideas and people.
- A diverse military appropriately reflects our nation.

Table 1. Diversity as Defined by DoD and the Services

Organization	Diversity Statement
DoD	The different characteristics and attributes of individuals.
U.S. Army	The different attributes, experiences, and backgrounds of our soldiers, civilians, and family members that further enhance our global capabilities and contribute to an adaptive, culturally astute Army.
U.S. Air Force	A composite of individual characteristics, experiences, and abilities consistent with the <i>Air Force Core Values</i> and the <i>Air Force Mission</i> .
U.S. Navy	All the different characteristics and attributes of individual sailors and civilians that enhance the mission readiness of the Navy.
U.S. Marine Corps	Currently, no definition per se. Marine Corps policy holds that diversity in the background and experience of those who join the Corps is not only a reflection of American society, it is also a key element to maintaining the strength and flexibility required to meet today’s national security challenges.
U.S. Coast Guard	All the characteristics, experiences, and differences of each individual.

SOURCES: DoD definition from U.S. Department of Defense, 2009; Service definitions presented to the MLDC at its first meeting in September 2009.

How Some Corporations Define Diversity

Table 2 provides definitions of diversity used by some well-known corporations. As with the definitions used by DoD and the Services, these definitions also address a broad range of personal attributes, not merely those that are subject to equal-employment opportunity (EEO) policies. Moreover, they address the business utility of diversity, generally in a very direct way.

Table 2. Selected Corporate Definitions of Diversity

Corporate Entity	Diversity Statement
Disney Interactive Media Group	“It is critical that as a global business, we have people from different backgrounds and experiences that truly understand the international markets and communities we operate in.”
Lockheed Martin	“The definition of [diversity] has become much broader than its traditional focus on creating a workforce that is diverse from the standpoint of race, ethnicity, gender and age. Diversity today also emphasizes inclusion. Inclusion means embracing employees with different working styles, capabilities, communication styles and life experiences, so that all individuals in the workforce are valued for what they bring to the enterprise and have the support they need to succeed.”
Walmart	“At Walmart, we believe that business wins when everyone matters, and that the true strength of diversity is unleashed when each associate is encouraged to reach their full potential. Diversity then becomes the foundation for an inclusive, sustainable business that embraces and respects differences, develops our associates, serves our customers, partners with our communities, and builds upon an inclusive supplier base.”
General Electric (GE)	“We are more than 300,000 people with jobs that range from biochemist to finance specialist to wind energy engineer. . . . We’re diverse, supporting out communities in more than 140 countries. We are GE.” ¹

SOURCES: Disney Interactive Media, n.d.; Lockheed Martin, 2009; Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., n.d.-a; General Electric Company, 2009.

These corporate diversity statements echo the same themes noted above for the armed forces, but they are situated within the context of their specific business needs and characteristics. For example, GE’s definition focuses on functional (occupational) diversity and community diversity within a global context. Other corporate definitions implicitly recognize that diversity among their customers calls for diversity among their employees; to a certain extent, the Army definition in Table 1 echoes this theme.

These themes suggest that organizations seeking to define diversity, whether military or civilian, have considered the following questions:

- Is “diversity” more than simple population representation?

- Why is “diversity” valuable to our organization?
- How is “diversity” valuable to our organization?

Meanwhile, some corporate definitions, such as those developed by Lockheed and Walmart, directly address the diversity climate they intend to maintain. “Inclusion/inclusiveness” is the key theme for these organizations, and it implies the approach they will take to managing diversity.

Common Approaches to Managing Diversity

When it comes to approaches to managing diversity, Service and corporate diversity definitions rarely, if ever, specify the EEO/affirmative action approach of mitigating past discrimination and ensuring equality of opportunity for protected minorities, even when this is the focus of the organization’s diversity activities. Instead, they generally approach the issue from one or both of the following perspectives:

- Perspective 1: People bring differences to work and we should respect them (as long as they are consistent with our values and purpose).
- Perspective 2: The differences that people bring to work can be useful to our organization.

Occasionally, organizations derive their definition of diversity from a third, more political perspective:

- Perspective 3: Diversity has political value as a “brand” (it reflects the people the organization represents or serves), as a part of public-relations efforts aimed at interest groups (see Disney’s position on diversity among its suppliers in the following section), or as a way to observe legislated goals (see Walmart’s position on diversity among its suppliers, also covered in the following section).

The Services’ definitions generally reflect perspective 1, although the Army makes explicit the military value of cultural “astuteness,” which is implicit in perspective 2. Corporate definitions are more likely to balance perspective 1 with perspective 2, explicitly stating their business case for diversity, as we discuss in more detail below.

In Table 3, we parse out the diversity statement of the Department of Homeland Security—the home of the Coast Guard—because it combines all three perspectives as it unfolds.

What Are Appropriate Diversity Attributes?

In developing definitions of diversity, the principal issue is which attributes to include. At one pole, narrowly constructed diversity definitions focus on groups that have suffered discrimination and are, thus, incompletely represented in an organization.² At the other pole, R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., founder and president of the American Institute for Managing Diversity, offers this broad definition: “Diversity refers to any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities.” Thomas usefully expands this statement by asserting,

Table 3. Approaches Reflected Within the Department of Homeland Security’s Diversity Statement

Selected Paragraphs from the DHS Diversity Statement	Related Perspective	Reflection of Perspective in Diversity Statement
“The Department promotes diversity as a matter of <i>inclusion, equity and fairness</i> and optimizes the talents, characteristics, origins and experiences of everyone working to carry out our mission.”	Perspective 1	This element of the diversity definition folds in the traditional fairness approach, which commits the DHS to a respect for differences.
“Improving diversity benefits the Department by <i>enhancing our capabilities</i> through increased points of view, creativity, and life experiences. We . . . seek applicants that provide the widest range of solutions, ideas, perspectives, skills, experiences and backgrounds to protect and secure America.”	Perspective 2	Diversity here is defined in a broad sense and not limited to demographic attributes; it suggests that diversity is necessary for increasing DHS capabilities.
““With a mission and occupations as unique as those in the Department of Homeland Security, we need a workforce that is equally diverse and <i>reflects the face of the nation</i> that it serves and protects.”	Perspective 3	This section indicates that demographic diversity is necessary to accomplish the DHS mission.

SOURCE: Department of Homeland Security, n.d.
NOTE: Emphasis added.

“Diversity refers to the differences, similarities, and related tensions that exist in any mixture” (Thomas, 2006).

Between these two poles, the choice of attributes generally reflects the goal(s) of the particular diversity initiative. When the goal is to rectify past discrimination and ensure equality of opportunity throughout the organization, the narrow, demographic range of attributes is generally used. However, when the goal is to improve organizational performance (essentially providing a business case for diversity), a broader range of attributes is generally used. For example, in its diversity definition, Boeing specifies the outcomes it is seeking rather than any diversity attributes per se:

Diversity and inclusion are part of Boeing’s values at the highest level. Having diverse employees, business partners and community relationships is vital to creating advanced aerospace products and services for our diverse customers around the world (Boeing Company, 2009).

However, other business case-driven diversity initiatives may find the narrow range of attributes appropriate. For instance, the Walt Disney Company is very clear that its supplier diversity process is aimed at the traditional, EEO attributes to meet the goal of supporting “the Walt Disney Company’s diversity strategy by developing and leading a world-class Supplier Diversity process that:

- Articulates the value of a robust Supplier Diversity process
- Enables diverse suppliers to compete for sourcing opportunities.
- Facilitates a healthy, fact-based dialogue between Disney and external interest groups (Walt Disney Company, n.d.).”

Apple and Walmart have similar, EEO-based specifications for their supplier diversity programs:

The businesses we categorize as diverse suppliers are Minority-Owned, Women-Owned, Veteran-Owned, and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses, as well as businesses located in Historically Underutilized Business regions (HUBZone) and Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDB) (Apple, Inc., 2009).

Our mission is to increase the amount of business we do with minority- and women-owned firms, using our scope, scale and leverage to create companies of significant size and stature (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., n.d.-b).

These examples reflect the tendency for some organizations to use the terms *diversity* and *equal opportunity (EO)* interchangeably; however, other organizations do not see the two terms synonymously. For example, for the U.S. Air Force, *diversity* is mission-oriented and leadership driven—the way individuals should embrace their differences and leverage them to better accomplish the mission. *EO* in the Air Force is compliance-oriented and legally driven—the standards by which individuals must treat others (e.g., prohibitions on discrimination and harassment):

Diversity is broadly defined as a composite of individual characteristics, experiences, and abilities consistent with the Air Force Core Values and the Air Force Mission. Air Force Diversity includes, but is not limited to, personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical/spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity and gender (U.S. Air Force, 2008).

Because of its broad definition, the Air Force has categorized diversity along four dimensions (derived below from U.S. Air Force, 2008) to facilitate understanding:

- *Demographic diversity* is associated with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) protected groups and demographic data that is routinely captured, such as age, race/ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, marital status, and national origin. Demographic trends show that diversity is increasing exponentially in American society; therefore, the Air Force feels it needs to ensure that it is attracting a diverse pool of candidates to benefit from their valuable contributions.
- *Behavioral/cognitive diversity* refers to differences in personality types and styles of work, thinking and learning. Diverse approaches to problem solving increase creativity and innovation.
- *Structural diversity* refers to organizational and institutional characteristics that affect interaction. Leveraging skills and experiences from other Services, components and occupations; e.g., differences in status (active, guard, or reserve, Air Force Specialty Code, rank, etc.) increase mission capability.
- *Global diversity* is knowledge of and experience with foreign languages and cultures of citizen and non-citizen Airmen, exchange officers, coalition partners, and foreign nationals with whom we interact as part of a globally engaged Air Force. Global diversity expands experiences and skills to draw on for problem solving and decision making.

Note that all these attributes have been selected for their relevance to meeting Air Force goals.

Conclusion

In a broad sense, there are two levels on which to examine the definition of diversity. At one level, *diversity* can refer to the differing characteristics of people in a group or organization or it can refer to the climate or culture of the organization (for example, recall that one of the slides that the Coast Guard presented at the September MLDC meeting indicated that diversity was a “state of being”). Meanwhile, there is a narrower discussion—in terms of both personal attributes and organizational goals—about the dimensions of diversity to include in any definition of the term.

Thus, issues for the MLDC to consider in developing a uniform definition for DoD include:

- Should the list of attributes defined as *diverse* be as broad as the Services currently define them or as narrow as the MLDC charter implies?
- How will this determination tie to the objectives of the Services’ diversity programs? Should the Office of the Secretary of Defense definition of *diversity* focus on climate or attributes, or both?

Notes

¹Nevertheless, on the same Web page, GE lists all the race/ethnic/gender employee networks it supports (General Electric Company, 2009). Such networks are a common EEO practice.

²When diversity is defined this way, it may be viewed by some as simply a repackaging of affirmative action in response to political pushback. This choice may be acceptable to those to whom affirmative action is important and who tend to view broader definitions as leaving unfinished business. And it may be unacceptable to those who feel that discrimination has been vanquished.

References

Apple, Inc. (2009). *Apple and procurement*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from <http://www.apple.com/procurement/>

Boeing Company. (2009). *Diversity*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from <http://www.boeing.com/aboutus/diversity/>

Disney Interactive Media. (n.d.). *About us: Commitment to diversity*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from <http://disney.go.com/disneycareers/dimg/diversity.html>

General Electric Company. (2009). *Our people*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from <http://www.ge.com/company/culture/people.html>

Lockheed Martin. (2009). *Diversity: Forming a new idea of diversity*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from <http://www.lockheedmartin.com/aboutus/culture/diversity.html>

Thomas, R. R. (2006). *Building on the promise of diversity*. New York: AMACOM.

U.S. Air Force. (2008, November 12–18). *Diversity. Airman’s Roll Call*.

U.S. Department of Defense. (2009, February 5). *Diversity management and equal opportunity (EO) in the Department of Defense* [DoD Directive 1020.02].

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (n.d.). *Commitment to a diverse workforce*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from www.dhs.gov/xabout/careers/content_multi_image_0015.shtm

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. (n.d.-a). *Diversity*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from <http://walmartstores.com/Diversity>

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. (n.d.-b). *Supplier diversity*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from <http://walmartstores.com/Diversity/247.aspx>

Walt Disney Company. (n.d.). *Supplier diversity and development: Our process*. Retrieved December 2, 2009, from http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/diversity/our_process.html