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Managing Diversity in Higher Education: USAFA Case

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Abstract

Today organizations are heavily affected by globalization and changes in the demographic structure of the society. Since the sex, race, and ethnic diversity of organizations are much broader than the past, nowadays the number of members in the same organization sharing different backgrounds and values has increased to a great extent. Moreover, the rapid development in technology not only entails more trained and skilled workforce but also necessitates sharpening intercultural collaboration skills in the organization. Organizations managing effectively a diverse workforce are capable of increasing organizational innovation and creativity, reaching more people and customers. Thus those organizations embracing diversity acquire competitive advantage and increase profitability. Educational institutions with a focus on diversity can graduate well trained employees capable of managing diversity and resolving diversity related workplace conflicts. Therefore as the organizations’ need increases in managing diversity, higher education institutions graduating labor force with intercultural communication skills and employees well aware of cultural diversity become more and more important in improving organizational effectiveness. United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), one of the world’s largest military academies, sets a model in managing diversity with its policies and practices related to coping with diversity effectively. USAFA curriculum is tailored in accordance with the great number of cadets -approximately 4000- varying in ability, interests, and character. With its prep school, USAFA supports cadet candidates from disadvantaged sections of society by providing them with a one-year program enhancing their readiness for USAFA and helping them to maximize their full potential. Furthermore USAFA helps all cadets participate in learning and teaching activities via various innovative techniques. The focal point of this study will be USAFA and the study will elaborate on innovative USAFA policies regarding the diversity management in a higher education institution.

Keywords: Diversity management, Higher Education, USAFA

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1. Introduction

Today diversity of organizations is much broader than the past; the number of members in the same organization sharing different backgrounds and values has increased to a great extent. Organizations embracing and managing effectively a diverse workforce are capable of increasing organizational innovation and creativity, reaching more people and customers. In this study, after a literature review on the management of differences, USAFA’s -one of the institutions that meet the USAF’s personnel needs- effective and innovative way of policies and practices related to the management of differences will be discussed.

2. Literature Review

Development of Diversity Management Approach

The demographic changes have diversified workforce in most of the developed countries like USA and EU countries. Labor force in United States, for instance, has changed dramatically in the last century. American females’ percentage earning a college degree has reached 60 and the number of women workers is increasing day by day. Furthermore, females’ proportion in managerial positions has reached more than 50%. Moreover, diversity in workforce is also increased by the expanding number of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians joining the labor force. (Schermerhorn, et al 2010:13-14). By the year 2050, people of color will constitute over 50 percent of the U.S. population; approximately 30 percent of the population will be Hispanic (Passel and Cohn, 2008:1). Another demographic change which is particularly affecting the developed countries is the increase in the average age of labor force depending on the community’s average age. According to Pew Research Center’s report about aging, middle-age population of the world will be increasing in the following years. Senior citizens’ population was 530.5 million in 2010 and by the year 2050 the number of seniors is expected to reach 1.5 billion i.e. one out six will be 65 and above (Kochhar et al., 2014: 9). Furthermore, median age is increasing due to improvements in life expectancy. For instance the median age was 24 in 1950 and it was 29 in 2010 and it is expected to rise to 36 in 2050. The median age for American citizens was actually 37 in 2010 and it is expected to be 41 in 1950 (Kochhar et al., 2014: 47). These results indicate that the labor force working in the organizations would be getting older in the following years.

Another difference which is frequently mentioned in the literature is the situation of being disabled. According to World Health Organization (WHO), the number of disabled people is estimated to be more than a billion and this is actually -based on 2010 global population estimates- approximately 15% of the world’s population. This ratio was 10% in 1970 and the number of disabled people is increasing (WHO, 2011:29).

Another reason for the increase of differences in the social and organizational environment is globalization and the development of technology. According to Macionis, globalization has brought about an increase in flow of goods, information, and people. Thus interaction among individuals, groups and societies has increased. “Global economy” increased the flow of goods and “Global communication” increased the information flow and “Global migration” increased the travel rates with the hope of better living conditions i.e. work, education and health care (Macionis, 2012:76).

Regarding globalization as a three face process, Thomas Friedman stated that at the first stage countries have globalized and at the second stage companies have globalized. At the third and the last stage, since 2000’s with the development of information and communication technologies, globalization was experienced in such a way that differences were more visible and came to the fore including everyone and the groups in the world. (Luthans, 2011: 31-32).

Compared to the past, today the description of differences is wider and more inclusive when we take all the differences into consideration. According to Daft, traditional approach to diversity takes the factors such as race, gender, age, and physical ability which are all determined by birth into consideration. On the other hand,
contemporary approach to diversity is much more inclusive and it counts all the factors that make an employee different and assumes those factors can be acquired or altered as the time passes (Daft, 2010: 347). The new approach to diversity regards the factors: work background, income, marital status, military experience, political beliefs, geographic location, and education as changeable (Luis et al., 2012: 129).

Some of the positive effects of employee diversity for an organization are as follows (Mullins, 2010: 154; Daft, 2012: 349):

- Promoting cost-effective employment relations by better use of employee talent,
- Enhancing customer relations,
- Enhancing creativity, flexibility and innovation,
- Promoting sustainable development and business advantage,
- Reduced costs associated with high turnover, absenteeism, and lawsuits.

By offering new benefits to an organization, employee diversity also sets new challenges for the managers. Some of these challenges are as follows (Luis et al, 2012: 134).

- Appropriately valuing employee diversity,
- Balancing individual needs with group fairness,
- Dealing with resistance to change,
- Ensuring group cohesiveness and open communication,
- Avoiding employee resentment and backlash,
- Retaining valued performers,
- Maximizing opportunity for all.

Even though the history of management of differences dates back to the Social Rights Movement emerged in the US in 1960’s (Bell, 2012: 65), it is stated that the first practices in this area were made by the order of the President Harry S. Truman’s presidential order that prohibited racism in the US Armed Forces. (Lim et al, 2008:1). Diversity as concept was basically referring to minorities and female workers in the 1970s, but it has been changed in the following decades to a great extent (Keil et al, 2007: 4). The concept of “Diversity Management” was first presented by R.Roosvelt Thomas, Jr. in 1990 (Sürgevil, 2010: 88). According to Thomas, management of differences concept is defined as “a comprehensive management process where an ideal environment is developed for all employees.”, and the differences include everyone beyond the race and gender (Thomas, 1991: 10). It is seen that an important part of the studies in management of differences are carried out in the USA. Therefore it can be concluded that the management of differences is a hot topic for the USA (Sürgevil, 2010: 87).

Researchers studying the management of diversities by business case approach conclude that effective management of the labor force diversity in an organization has positive effects on the organization’s success (Mullins, 2010: 153; Sayers, 2012: 15; Borrego and Johnson, 2012: 198; Hubbard, 2004: 88). On the other hand, some researchers studying in public administration cases criticize the business case approach to diversity management by arguing the fact that it has moral, social, and legal aspects (Groeneveld and Van de Walle, 2009:13; Thomas and Ely, 1996: 1). In this respect, Bell states that inequalities and poverty in society is often experienced by minority groups and women. She also claims that exclusion of minorities and women from the organizations leads to moral and social problems; moreover, reducing the discrimination, poverty, and inequalities will be beneficial not only to the organizations but also to the society (Bell, 2012: 21-22).

In the public administration, in the studies on the diversity management, effectiveness of public service and policies which are produced by the strategy of diversity management are examined, and the terms representative bureaucracy, inclusiveness, and diversity management are discussed in relation to each other (Groeneveld and Stijn, 2010:7). Representative bureaucracy simply recommends that; when we take the common values and beliefs of a black bureaucrat that he shares with black citizens into account, at the points of representation and producing appropriate policies in accordance with the preferences of black citizens, black bureaucrats will be more effective than white bureaucrats. Therefore, in a democracy, those people who are responsible for the delivery of public
services should look like the citizens they serve (Guy and Schumacher, 2009:2). Representative bureaucracy method is an active method. Going beyond passive or sociological representation, representative bureaucracy is to defend the interests of represented minority groups more actively (Groeneveld and Van de Walle, 2009; 13).

**Diversity Management in Higher Education**

Recently, the differences in education have been studied by many researchers. According to Wall, diversity in education is an intellectual work and it entails imaginative thought, critical analysis, and careful study. Diversity in education via changing the higher education institutions can change the society (Wall, 2009: XI). Brown-Glaude states that higher education institutions are not only expected to provide the students with knowledge but also they are supposed to make them productive workers. Since the globalization is a process shaped by rapid technological developments, the global workers are supposed to have sophisticated and adaptable technological skills as well as the ability to interact with a diverse citizenry, both locally and globally (Brown-Glaude, 2009: 6).

Although majority of the studies of US origin and pertaining to diversity in education focus on race and gender differences (Brown-Glaude, 2009: 3), diversity in education is a much more comprehensive subject affecting the approach to education. Nowadays diversity in education and teaching diversity are issues discussed with the following dimensions (http://ondiversity.com/our-focus/themes, Access Date: 16.01.2015):
- Dimensions of individual differences in learning
- Inclusive education
- Educational policies and practices related to diversity
- Curricular and instructional frameworks for addressing diversity
- Educating teachers, administrators, community members in diversity
- The role of ethics in education
- Language diversity and learning new languages
- Service or experiential learning and intercultural understanding
- Multicultural, cross-cultural, international and global education

The discussions on affirmative action and diversity in higher education have two facets one of which is the individual needs and qualifications and the other one is institutional needs and obligations. As this issue gets more and more complicated by globalization, opponents of affirmative action emphasize individual needs and qualifications by articulating arguments for merit (Brown-Glaude, 2009: 6).

Studies in diversity in education especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (the STEM disciplines) show that the distribution of students who earn doctoral and professional degrees, white women and people of color are poorly represented. But, in a study that Bradley et al. states that though quite a bunch of debates on diversity and equity are held in higher education, there is not much focus on the women’s problems of representation and even the four historically black colleges and universities in Georgia are no exception to this case (Bradley et al, 2009: 103).

3. **Methodology**

3.1. **Research Goal**

This study will investigate how the differences are managed in United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) which is a four year military higher education institution graduating officers for United States Air Force (USAF) via the content analysis method.
3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Content analysis was carried out for the “The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) Diversity and Inclusion Plan (USAFA, 2013a)” available at www.usafa.af.mil. This plan includes the practices in diversity management of differences and it consists of 71 pages excluding the cover page, contents, and introduction section. The analysis is carried out by means of a content analysis program accessed at the web page http://textalyser.net/. Plan text is copied on the internet environment and pasted on the “Enter your text to analyze here” section in the content analysis program. After clicking the “Analyze the text” button, the acquired analysis results are transferred to a newly created file in MS Word. After removing the repetitive and irrelevant phrases from the text, the most widely used words and phrases are studied in order to find out USAFA’s approach to the diversity management.

3.3. Analyses and Results

Diversity and Inclusion Plan has total word count; 12211, number of different words; 2648, readability (Gunning-Fog Index) (6-easy 20-hard); 11.6. Top words Frequency in Plan: USAFA (348-% 2.8), Diversity (277- % 2.3), Inclusion (93- % 0.8), Training (91-% 0.7), Programs (86-% 0.7), Staff (81- % 0.7), Diverse (81-% 0.7), Faculty (81-% 0.7), Force (80-% 0.7).

The plan defines the concept of diversity as follows (USAFA, 2013a: 75):

“A composite of individual characteristics that includes personal life experiences (including having overcome adversity by personal efforts), geographic background (e.g., region, rural, suburban, urban), socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background (including academic excellence, and whether an individual would be a first generation college student), work background (including prior enlisted service), language abilities (with particular emphasis on languages of strategic importance to the Air Force), physical abilities (including athletic prowess), philosophical/spiritual perspectives, age (cadet applicants must be within statutory parameters for academy attendance), race, ethnicity and gender.”

This definition is in line with USAF’s the definition of the diversity (AFPD 36-70, 2010: 2):

“In the Air Force, 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.”

As can be seen in the above definitions, USAF and USAFA approach the concept of diversity from a wider perspective by going beyond the classical differences such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender. Fostering a USAFA environment embracing the differences and demonstrating inclusiveness is one of the USAFA Strategic Goals. Furthermore, mutual respect in the organization and all diverse contributions aiding the accomplishment of USAFA’s mission of education, training and inspiring future officers of character (USAFA, 2013a: 7).

The following principles guide the USAFA action plan (USAFA, 2013a: 11):

- Accessions: Establish self-sustaining programs that identify, attract, and access diverse candidates
- Retention: Establish and strengthen programs focused on retaining a diverse Cadet Wing and faculty and staff
- Force Development:
  - Recruit diverse permanent party personnel (military and civilian);
  - Retain diverse permanent party personnel (military and civilian);
  - Develop diverse personnel through developmental plans that capitalize on equitable professional development (staff, faculty, and cadets);
  - Create a culture of inclusion that fully capitalizes on all USAFA members’ unique differences
- Accountability: Establish accountability for successful diversity efforts through the USAFA Institutional Effectiveness Program (IEP) and senior leader oversight to monitor/measure the effectiveness and resourcing of Diversity programs and initiatives
Sustainability: Develop structures and strategies to equip Team USAFA with the ability to manage diversity, be accountable, measure results, refine approaches on the basis of such data, and institutionalize an organizational culture of inclusion.

Considering the principles of Diversity and Inclusion Plan, it is obvious that USAFA has a manpower management system ensuring manpower representing all layers of society; talents of various origins should be recruited, employed, and trained. Since the issue of diversity management is quite a broad issue to be discussed in a single paper, the focal point of this study will be USAFA Preparatory School practices aiming at supporting the disadvantaged groups of the society and the USAFA Core Curriculum designed in accordance with the USAF’s mission needs and the students’ interests.

3.3.1. USAFA Preparatory School

The Preparatory School prepares USAFA candidates academically, physically, and in terms of military traits to enter the Air Force Academy. It is a school of an intensive program aiming at making applicants more competitive for entrance into the Academy. The school is located in USAFA campus and duration of education is ten months. The program starts in late July and the number of students -between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two- is approximately 240. The attendants of the USAFA Preparatory School are called “cadet candidates.” The focal points of the Preparatory School curriculum are academic, military, athletic, and character development which are the same areas emphasized in USAFA curriculum. Math, English, and science are the core courses in the Preparatory School curriculum (USAFA, 2008: 24). The Preparatory School graduates are more likely to attend USAFA and become a cadet, but graduation does not guarantee this (http://www.usafa.edu/?catname= Prep%20School, Access Date: 11.03.2015).

Lieutenant General Michael C. Gould, who was superintendent of USAFA from 2009 to 2013 and was also a graduate of Prep School, says (USAFA, 2013a: 6):

“The USAFA’s premise is to increase its population of diversity graduates, not only to enrich the USAFA educational and training experience, but to leverage the known benefits of diversity that can enhance Air Force capabilities and war fighting skills. Our graduates will serve as leaders of an Air Force already composed of people from widely diverse backgrounds and experiences and projected to become even more diverse. This diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and our leadership challenge is to optimize the effectiveness of that strength. The Air Force must be prepared to respond to a variety of threats throughout the world, so Airmen must be able to fight effectively in this dynamic global environment and successfully work with, or fight against, military forces and people of differing cultures and views.”

In order to achieve the ends stated by Lieutenant General Michael C. Gould, USAFA Preparatory School functions as an instrument for recruiting diverse cadet candidates for USAFA. Those cadet candidates are motivated to be Airman but needs to develop academically, physically, and in terms of military traits to enter the USAFA. So with its Prep School program, USAFA supports cadet candidates from the disadvantaged sections of society by providing them with a one-year program enhancing their readiness for USAFA and helping them to maximize their full potential.

USAFA Preparatory School’s mission is defined in USAFA Diversity and Inclusion Plan. According to this plan, USAFA Preparatory School’s first goal is to; “Recruit faculty, staff, and administration from a diverse, qualified group of potential applicants drawn from all segments of American society in order to secure a high-performing workforce better able to accomplish the USAFA mission” (USAFA, 2013a: 41). And the second goal is to “cultivate an organizational culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness to enable cadets, cadet candidates, faculty, staff, and administration to contribute their full potential and further retention” (USAFA, 2013a: 42).
3.3.2. Curriculum that Develops Intercultural Competence

USAFA’s Diversity and Inclusion Plan has a section entitled “The Superintendent’s Diversity Statement”. In this section, USAFA Superintendent states that Diversity and Inclusion Plan aims at creating a cadet Wing environment contributing every single cadet to attain the USAFA outcomes which are all based on USAF Core Values and clearly defined in the form of responsibilities, skills, and knowledge. USAFA cadets are supposed attain 19 USAFA outcomes by following the four pathways: ethics and citizenship, thinking and acting in a complex world, mental and physical resilience, and national security through diverse perspectives. The outcomes that are directly enhanced by the USAFA Diversity Plan are shown in Table 1: (USAFA, 2013a: 5).

Dean of Faculty has also a responsibility of fostering diversity in the academy. The faculty ensures a curriculum that develops intercultural competence and an appreciation for diversity and inclusiveness (USAFA, 2013a: 25). According to USAFA Diversity and Inclusion Plan, as the Air Force missions get more and more expeditionary, USAFA is supposed to offer academic courses promoting cultural diversity and global understanding (USAFA, 2013a: 21).

Table 1. The Diversity Plan Directly Contributes To The Following Outcomes

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<th>USAFA OUTCOMES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical Reasoning and Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for Human Dignity</td>
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<td>Lifelong Development and Contributions</td>
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<td>Intercultural Competence and Involvement</td>
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<td>Skills</td>
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<td>Teamwork</td>
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<td>Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic, Cultural and International Environment</td>
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<td>Ethics and Foundation of Character</td>
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Air Force officers of 21st century need a critical set of responsibilities, skills, and knowledge in order to succeed regardless of the military, technological, political, or cultural challenges they may face (Enger at al., 2010: 21). Within this respect, USAFA’s curriculum and learning outcomes were designed by an Air Force Academy team in 2006. USAFA learning outcomes were developed by bottom-up processes and these outcomes were supplemented by the curriculum team’s new learning outcomes emphasizing the Air Force Core Competencies. (Enger at al., 2010: 17).

As USAFA core curriculum entails cadets are to take 96 semester hours of Dean Faculty academic core courses and five semester hours of Physical Education courses for a total of 101 semester hours of core (approximately 60–75 percent of their total credits). USAFA courses are designed to ensure development in three main areas i.e. Culture and Global Awareness, Leadership and Human Behavior, and Science and Technology. These courses are designed in such a way that they form a coherent whole intending to promote learning and development of cadets. The 32 academic core courses consist of 29 common core courses and three (Two Foreign Language courses and one Science and Technology Energy/Systems option) tailored core courses (USAFA, 2013b: 84). As it is seen in Table 2, in order to develop a sense of personal and social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings, USAFA cadets are supposed to take core curriculum in three different fields which are culture and global awareness, leadership and human behavior, science and technology. This curriculum contributes USAFA cadets to fight effectively in this dynamic global environment and successfully work with, or fight against, military forces and people of differing cultures and views.
According to Born, who served USAFA as a first female Dean from 2004 to 2013, USAFA’s institutional outcomes reflect the intent and spirit of USAFA’s mission. All USAFA programs i.e. academic, military, and athletic and, airmanship aim at the same common objective which is the attainment of the USAFA’s educational learning outcomes. Born et al. states that USAFA cadets are challenged by a strong core program entailing proficiency in technical disciplines, such as mathematics, computing, chemistry, and physics; humanities disciplines, such as history and English; social science disciplines, such as political science; and, in some cases, one of several foreign languages. The USAFA core disciplines emphasizing critical thinking, inquiry and analysis, problem solving, and communication, foster teamwork, decision making, and commitment and discipline. Those skills are regarded as essential for USAFA graduates to be successful leaders (Born et al., 2012: 48-50).

Table 2. Core Curriculum: Organization and Sequencing by Content Area and Class Year

Liberal Education is an approach to learning which prepares the learners to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. Liberal Education not only presents the students a broad knowledge of the world i.e. science, culture and society, but also it makes them study in a specific area in-depth. Furthermore, liberal education helps students develop a sense of personal and social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. USAFA cadet education actually sets a good example of liberal education and USAFA outcomes satisfy the essence of a liberal education (Born et al., 2012: 48).

4. Conclusion

The concept of diversity management has been studied as a subject in administrative sciences for the last 25 years. This study aims at understanding the diversity management practices of USAFA which educates and trains leaders of character for United States Air Force. Diversity management policy of USAFA is investigated by analyzing the USAFA Diversity and Inclusion Plan. USAFA Diversity management policies aim at creating an environment in the organization to maximize individual potentials of all employees. This organizational
environment leads to a culture that fosters mutual respect embracing the diverse contributions of all who help accomplish the academy’s mission of education, training, and inspiring future officers of character. USAFA diversity management as a multi-dimensional process comprises of long term rather than short term practices. This study focuses USAFA diversity management process by highlighting the two specific USAFA practices i.e. Preparatory School and Core Curriculum. For a thorough analysis of USAFA diversity management policies further research is needed.

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