Creating MENA- The Middle East and North Africa Forum

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON (BAH)
ED NASER
Objectives

- Discuss the circumstances, conditions, and steps in creating MENA.
- Discuss Advantages to Firm and Staff.
- Develop a paper for publication.
Where is MENA?
Diversity Background

- Diversity is broken into two categories: **visible** and **invisible**.
- Visible traits are often what is emphasized and include race, gender, Language, age, physical abilities, and body type.
- Invisible traits include things such as education, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and parental status among other things.

(Diversity Journal, 2014, p.2)
DIVERSITY ICEBERG – THE WATERLINE OF VISIBILITY

Visible Aspects (20%)

- Race
- Gender
- Age
- Language

Invisible Aspects (80%)

- Physical Ability
- Religion
- Nationality
- Skills
- Education
- Background
- Social Class
- Values
- Sexual Orientation
- Personality
- Beliefs
- Culture
Diversity Background

- Inclusion, which closely related is a separate concept from diversity.
- SHRM defines inclusion as “the achievement of work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization’s success.” (Diversity Journal, 2014, p.2)
Diversity Background

• “Our primary concern is not ensuring that the largest possible number of nationalities is represented in the Nestle Group, but that different ways of thinking and/or ethnic perspectives are integrated and respected in all our decision-making processes.” Paul Bulcke, CEO of Nestle. (p.7)

• 42% Diversity programs are advocated by the CEO, top leadership, and HR heads. (p.11)

• Three systematically under-represented groups:
  1. Workers over the age of 50
  2. Individuals with disabilities.
  3. Religious and ethnic minorities. (p.11)

(Diversity Journal, 2014)
Diversity at BAH

- Booz Allen Hamilton has used diversity in recruitment just like any other large corporation but it also went one step further with the successful inclusion of its recruited employees. Booz Allen has empowered its employees to decide for themselves what diversity label to use on themselves.

- An example of one successful inclusion initiative is the creation of a new diversity group or “Forum,” namely the Middle East and North Africa Forum (MENA).

- The firm takes diversity so seriously that it has even made diversity one of its core values.
A Culture of Inclusion

“At Booz Allen, we celebrate and value diversity in all its forms. This view extends beyond gender, ethnicity, disabilities, sexual orientation, and cultural heritage to include the many ways our people identify themselves.”

(Diversity & Inclusion, 2017)
Forums allow employees to celebrate where they’re from, where they are, and where they’re going.

The first diversity forum was established almost two decades ago. Since that time, in response to staff needs, diversity and affinity groups have continually been added. They represent diverse global cultures and reflect current lifestyle and professional interests.

Through cultural celebrations, learning and development series, panel discussions, and other events, these employee networking resources create initiatives to help staff grow personally and professionally.

Diversity forums also enable staff to access senior leaders and provide support to the communities where we work and live.

Diversity Forums, (2016)
14 Diversity Forums at BAH

- African American Forum
- Armed Services Forum
- *Asian Pacific American Forum, (APAF)*
- DiverseABILITY Forum
- FlexWork Forum
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Transgender Employees Forum
- International Association of Administrative Professionals
- Latin America Forum
- **Middle East and North Africa Forum**
- Multinational Forum
- Native American Forum
- Parents' Forum
- Rising Leaders Forum
- Women's Forum

Diversity Forums, (2016)
Monthly Diversity Celebrations

Nov

June

Feb.

May

Native American Heritage Month

PRIDE

African American History Month

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
Launching MENA

- In October of 2006, after being a sub-committee under an existing forum (APAF) and with the support from two Booz Allen partners as well as the firm’s HR subgroup (Diversity), a handful of employees initiated the establishment of MENA forum.

- In November 2006, the committee held its first event at the Lebanese Taverna restaurant to introduce itself and discuss its goals.

- In addition to being a diversity forum, it also functioned as an informal internal center to support the firm’s growing business in the Middle and North Africa regions. MENA provided resources for coordinating cultural awareness training for staff assigned to work in the region, and linking professionals from the firm with deep knowledge and experience in the region with the rest of the firm.
Launching MENA

- MENA was headed by two co-chairs who have established several working committees to facilitate operations with volunteer members within the firm.
- The firm offered MENA a yearly modest budget which increases with its membership size. An internal website was created for the forum to advertise its activities.
- Shortly after it was launched, MENA was the fastest growing forum in the firm and attracted close to 200 members from various staff levels and teams within the firm.

(Diversity Forums, 2016)
“The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Forum promotes awareness and understanding of the MENA region’s unique cultural identity, traditions, values, and history. Through social and cultural events, the Middle East and North Africa Forum offers members professional development, networking, diversity, and community service opportunities.

Many MENA forum members have done business in the region and can provide insight into current events, languages, history, industry, policy, and US government relations with the region.

Booz Allen Senior Vice President Bill Wansley is the forum’s sponsor. “The MENA forum offers a collective community of professionals that are culturally informed and interested in the MENA region’s diverse business opportunities, “he says. “

(Middle East and North Africa Forum, 2016)
Booz Allen has defined Diversity as the process of valuing individual differences through action.

- **Diversity Objectives:**
  - **Recruitment and Sourcing**
    To have recruitment and sourcing processes that create a diverse pool of talent at all levels.
  - **Development**
    To have development strategies that create opportunities for all staff to be successful.
  - **Management Practices**
    To have management practices that demonstrate the knowledge and understanding of the skills necessary to manage a diverse workforce.
  - **Climate**
    To have an organizational climate that demonstrates to all Booz Allen employees that they are valued to at Firm.
  - **Visible Commitments to Diversity**
    To sustain a reputation for commitment to diversify both within and external to the Firm.

(Establishing a Forum, 2007)
Benefits to Employees

- Networking with people with various and similar backgrounds
- Learning how to be successful at the Firm
- Learning how to adapt to American business culture
- Appreciating diversity of: race, ethnicity, life styles, work styles, accents, ways of approaching a problem, etc.
- Understanding the importance of diversity locally and globally

(Establishing a Forum, 2007)
Consultants Levels at BAH

- Principal V
- S. Associate: IV
- Associate: III
- S. Consultant: II
- Consultant: I
How to Set up a Forum?

To start a forum, it is recommended that the individual(s):

- Identify a group of employees who share a common identity or characteristic not already covered by the existing groups
- Contact potential members to determine if enough employees are interested in joining the new forum to make it viable (aim for 15-20 individuals to start).
- Develop the mission and goals of the new forum
- Contact the Diversity leadership to express interest in starting a forum
- Submit a “new forum proposal”

(Establishing a Forum, 2007)
Who is Eligible to set up a Forum?

- Anyone interested in starting and leading a forum must:
  - Be at least a Level II
  - Have worked at Booz Allen for at least one year
  - Have received a rating of “effective” or higher on his/her last annual appraisal
  - Have his/her manager’s written approval
  - Have two sponsoring partners

(Establishing a Forum, 2007)
Recommendations when Proposing a New Forum

• **Express your goals clearly**
  - Clear, logically constructed goals provide a valuable roadmap
  - Avoid vague statements; be as explicit as you can

• **Don’t bite off more than you can chew**
  - Your mission and early goal statements should be both broad and realistic
  - “The phrasing is important; don’t set up your forum for failure – no one can change the world in a year.”

• **Always keep your constituents in mind**
  - Activities should always address one or more of your members’ interests
  - Remembering your original purpose ensures that you do not spend your limited energy and resources on events that have little impact on the people you mean to serve
Examples of MENA Activities

- **May 2006**, Booz Allen Hamilton in the Middle East panel speakers seminar, with the Multinational Forum
- **May 2007**, Egyptian Movie Night, with APAF
- **March 2008**, SVP Jim Woolsey did a presentation on “Energy and the Future of the Middle East.”
- **April 2008**, Seminar on Understanding Islam.
- Belly Dancing event.
Jean AbiNader’s Session

Rank Order of Arab Concerns for 8 countries:

- Religion
- Family
- Quality of Work
- Job Security
- Marriage
- Friends
- Political Issues
- Leisure Time

(AbiNader, 2007)
Jean AbiNader’s Session

Characteristics of Middle East Cultures:

- Conspiracy Theories
- Souk Mentality
- Survival Mentality
- Conflict of Interest?
- Intention vs Action

(AbiNader, 2007)
Jean AbiNader’s Session

Stereotypes of Westerners

- Confident
- Boastful
- Arrogant
- Hardworking
- Not Religious/Immoral
- Greedy
- No Family Ties
- Wasteful
- Always in a hurry
- Anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim

(AbiNader, 2007)
What is entailed in working in a Forum?

- Volunteers
- At own clock
- Activities can be used as diversity activity in the yearly assessment
- Sense of Identity, Belonging, Empowerment, Connections, Networking, Access.
- Opened collaboration with BAH staff in the MENA region for joint projects.
Lessons Learned

- Lessons learned may benefit corporations, large and small, by emulating Booz’s successful model of creating diversity and affinity groups that are employees-initiated.

- MENA did not only enrich Booz in the diversity dimension, but it was also used successfully to enrich the business experience and practices of its U.S. staff while working in the MENA region. This “dual use” of the diversity-business paradigm may not have been intentional with the creation of MENA, but it was the reality of the situation which ended up being a win-win situation for the employees and the firm.
Next Step

- Publish work as an example of Corporate Diversity & Inclusion program.
- Investigate the impact of having a host family for International students studying in the U.S. on the rate of success of assimilation and inclusion in the culture.
- Do the current race labels on HR forms/websites address the identity of those filling them?
- Personal Project educating the youngsters on personal finance.
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References