Course Title: MSA 698: Directed Administrative Portfolio

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Course Location: Rowe Hall

Submission Date: June 10, 2018

Research Project Title:

Strategic Analysis: Diversity in Information Technology at Alma College.

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I certify that I am the author of this paper and that any assistance I receive in its preparation is fully acknowledged and disclosed in this paper. I have also cited any sources from which I used data, ideas, or works, either quoted directly or paraphrased. I also certify that this paper was prepared by me specifically for this course.

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Strategic Analysis: Diversity in Information Technology at Alma College.

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Abstract

This paper will explore diversity and the Information Technology Services team at Alma College. Additionally, diversity strategies will be explored as well as the impacts and opportunities diversity has upon the organizational culture coupled with the decision-making process. A strategic analysis will be conducted including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and any potential solutions or recommendations.

*Keywords:* diversity, strategic analysis, higher education, information technology, Alma College
Executive Summary

Located about 45 minutes north of the capital of Michigan is Alma College. Alma College is a small liberal arts college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. The College enrolls about 1,450 students from 30 states and eight countries (Alma College, 2018). Alma College resides in the city of Alma, Michigan, which is Gratiot County’s largest city with a population of just over 9,000 residents. As an institution of higher learning, Alma College employs faculty, staff, and administrators charged with serving the needs of the enrolled student population as well as the surrounding community.

In order to support the College’s academic endeavors, research initiatives, business functions, and community engagement, Alma College relies heavily on information technology resources. Furthermore, a large part of the core organizational activities of the College relies on the underlying information technology infrastructure that includes networking, Internet connectivity, and student information systems. The Information Technology Services team at Alma College is strategically responsible for maintaining the critical infrastructure, systems, and technology services. Therefore, a diverse team is necessary to improve technology infrastructure and deliver technology services to the campus community.

History

The Information Technology Services department at Alma College started organically around 1980 due to the rising needs for technology and infrastructure support. Around the same time, the Internet and World Wide Web began increasing interconnectivity between educational institutions throughout the United States. Technology, as well as infrastructure, needs at Alma College continued to grow as the organizational demands for more efficient means of collaboration, curriculum enhancements, and research methods increased.
As the College’s business and academic environment continued to grow, more emphasis was placed on the role of information technology within the organizational structure of the campus community. Since the inception of the Information Technology (IT) Department was not strategically planned for, early Information Technology team members tended to focus on individual areas of interest; this resulted in inefficient workflows and undocumented processes. Due to the break/fix mentality of the College at that time, strategies for moving the Information Technology department towards a more diverse team were not encouraged or supported within the campus community.

Development

In 2011, the author became a member of the Information Technology Services department at Alma College. During the previous year, the Information Technology Services team underwent a reorganization that focused the department on four specific areas: User Services, Systems/Networking, Enterprise Information Systems, and Instructional Technology. Additionally, the name of the department was changed from Information Technology to Information Technology Services to help focus the department on providing broad technology services to the campus community. From 2011 to 2016, the Information Technology Services department at Alma College deployed new systems or services such as wireless networking, core switches/routers, firewall security appliances, and many other projects designed to increase the speed, resiliency, as well as the reliability of the critical technology infrastructure.

Additionally, from 2010 until 2018, Alma College’s Information Technology Services department was led by the Chief Technology Officer. The Chief Technology Officer (CTO) was a top-tiered strategic leadership position within the College. As such, the CTO position resulted in a focused and strategic direction for leadership within the campus community. A strategic
leader effectively manages an organization’s strategy-making process in order to create a competitive advantage (Hill, Schilling, and Jones, 2017). Alma College decided to solidify information technology decisions within the organization and explore holistic strategies that aligned with the College’s vision and mission statements in an attempt to gain a competitive advantage.

Growth

Today, Alma College is searching for a Chief Information Officer due to the recent departure of the Chief Technology Officer. As such, the Information Technology Services team is being led by interim leadership with a dual-based role as Director of Systems/Networking and acting Chief Technology Officer. Due to a retirement within the Library Services sector, the College has decided to combine the roles of Chief Technology Officer and Director of Library Services into a cross-departmental position entitled Chief Information Officer (CIO).

In addition, according to the job requirements for the new Chief Information Officer position, the College expects the CIO to be “a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion, and an active and engaged member of the community” (Alma College, 2018). Growth and sustainability of the College depend, in part, on the reliability and resiliency of the technology infrastructure. Thus, a diverse set of ideas and skill sets are critical to the continued support of the technology and infrastructure that are key components to the success of the College and the surrounding community.

SWOT Analysis

An effective way to help evaluate an organization’s current position, as well as strengths or weaknesses is by doing a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis includes an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Furthermore, the general purpose of this type
of analysis is to help identify any potential strategies to exploit opportunities, counter threats, identify and build upon an organization’s strengths, as well as to remove any weaknesses (Hill, Jones, Schiller, 2017).

**Strengths**

Alma College has been an established institution of higher learning since its inception in 1886. As a liberal arts institution, Alma College has a deep commitment to a student-centered learning environment embedded in the philosophy of creating a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary skills and academic knowledge which help set Alma College apart from other similar organizations. Additionally, Alma College believes that a liberal arts education “prepares students to pursue advanced work, independent research, and creative performances with the depth of understanding to excel in one’s discipline and to perceive the connections among disciplines” (Alma College, 2018). This commitment to an interdisciplinary education style creates a culture that permeates all business processes and organizational decisions.

Furthermore, a strength for Alma College is its small size relative to larger regional institutions such as Central Michigan University with an enrollment of more than 20,000 students compared to Alma’s enrollment of about 1,400. For many campus departments, including Information Technology and Library Services, the size of the campus allows tailored focus on the needs of stakeholder groups such as students, employees, and the surrounding community. However, in today’s interconnected world, it is extremely important for organizations to harness and manage the skillset of a diverse workforce in order to meet the needs of stakeholders. Indeed, “if diversity can be effectively managed in an organization, some potential benefits to the organization include greater creativity and innovation, and improved decision-making” (Friday, Friday, 2003, p. 864). As such, a more diverse information
technology department can increase workplace efficiency and improve customer support services.

Weaknesses

An internal weakness within Alma College’s Information Technology Services team is a severe lack of diversity among team members. Currently, 13 out of 14, or 92 percent, of Alma College’s Information Technology Services department employees are white males within the 35-55 age group. Generally speaking, women and minority groups are underrepresented within the information technology industry as a whole. As an example, in Google’s 2014 release of its workforce diversity numbers, one percent of its IT staff were black, two percent were Hispanic, and 83 percent of their technology employees were male (Weise, 2014).

This lack of diversity may also present management issues as the department increases its attempts to diversify members and ideologies within the team and the campus community. Friday and Friday (2003) state that “if diversity is not managed effectively, some potential major costs to the organization include, at a minimum, breakdowns in communication, interpersonal conflict, and higher turnover” (p. 864). Indeed, since 2014, six of the 14 members of the Information Technology Services team have left the department for other opportunities.

As previously stated, Alma College resides in the City of Alma, Michigan, and this may be seen as a deterrent for attracting new students as well as faculty or staff. Due to its relatively close proximity to larger cities and larger higher education institutions (30 minutes from Central Michigan University; 60 minutes from Michigan State University), the City of Alma may suffer from lack of employment as well as entertainment opportunities which may contribute to the lack of interest from a more diverse population of applicants.
Opportunities

Alma College has taken steps in recent years in an attempt to increase minority and international student enrollment (see Fig. 1). Focusing on inclusivity and engagement may help the College continue the trend of increasing minority and international student enrollments. As such, the new Information Technology and Library Services department could align employee recruitment efforts with the College’s overall enrollment outreach efforts in an attempt to attract talented individuals with more diverse backgrounds.

![Minority and International Enrollments 2008-2017](image)

**Fig 1. Minority and Enrollment Data (Alma College, 2017)**

Additionally, a safe and nurturing work/living environment may be attractive for information technology professionals looking for employment opportunities. Crime statistics and campus safety information needs to be made readily available in a strategic attempt to attract a more diverse field of applicants for job vacancies. Safety information and statistics from the City of Alma also need to be shared in order to help the College retain any future employees who may not be familiar with the area.

Threats

Information Technology is a rapidly changing landscape and requires flexibility, scalability, and adaptability. The slow-moving and sometimes overly bureaucratic processes of
academia will need to be considered in order to allow Alma College’s Information Technology Services team, and more specifically the new Chief Information Officer, the ability to take risks to creatively reach organizational goals. Furthermore, competition for talented employees from international and out-of-state locations has been steadily increasing due to the widespread need to fill strategically important information technology positions.

Additionally, a saturation of higher learning institutions within the region may contribute to a lack of a more diverse field of job applicants to Alma College. Furthermore, in order to retain more diverse individuals once employed by the College, specific organizational programs and support structures need to be initiated as well as properly funded. For example, Kieran Snyder, a former senior leader at Microsoft and Amazon and now CEO and co-founder of Textio, interviewed 716 women who held tech positions at 654 companies in 43 states. On average, these women worked in tech for seven years and then left (Marcus, 2015).

Many of these women left due to workplace discomfort and implicit discrimination related to their sex or age.

Lastly, it is important to note that entrenched barriers to the advancement of diversity exist within campus departments and Alma College as a whole. As Rose and Palma-Rivas (1998) stated the following:

There was consensus among the experts that the following four organizational barriers were most likely to inhibit the advancement of diverse groups in the workplace: negative attitudes to and discomfort around people who are different, …, discrimination and prejudice, …, stereotyping, …, and racism (p. 239).
Lack of awareness or acknowledgment of these barriers has been shown to hinder the advancement of diversity within an organization.

**Strategic Analysis**

If Alma College is to remain a relevant and competitive institution of higher learning, it must increase the diversity of its employees, specifically, the employees within the field of information technology. Additionally, diversity strategies and support systems will need to be evaluated on a continuous basis. As previously stated, Alma College has a deep commitment to a student-centered learning environment. This long-held philosophy of creating a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary skills and academic knowledge has helped Alma College differentiate itself from other similar organizations. As such, the Information Technology and Library Services department should capitalize and align its diversity strategies with the College’s own vision and mission.

**Recommendations**

An important distinction must be made between valuing diversity and managing diversity. Often times, valuing and managing diversity are considered similar organizational items when in fact, they are very different from one another. Friday and Friday (2003) state “Valuing refers to the relative worth, importance, or significance of something, whereas managing refers to taking charge or coordinating and supervision situations” (p. 865). Indeed, there is a substantial difference between the importance of diversity and the active involvement of increasing an organization’s diversity.

The diversity strategy for the Information Technology and Library Services team must align with Alma College’s stated values and mission. However, as one of the College’s values states “With knowledge comes obligation” (Alma College, 2018) therefore proper diversity
structures and programs need to be supported at the department level as well as campus-wide. As such, communication of the department diversity strategy must be communicated to the campus community and relevant stakeholders.

Implementation Plan

First, complete candidate selection and hiring for the newly created Chief Information Officer position. The selection process should include members from multiple stakeholder groups including students, faculty, staff, and members of the community. Filling the position of Chief Information Officer is an important step towards creating and implementing a strategic departmental diversity plan which includes plan formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Fig. 2).

![Diagram](Fig. 2. The Strategic Plan Process (Friday, Friday, 2003, p. 867))
Second, as a result of consciously differentiating between valuing diversity and managing diversity, a diversity continuum is created to help guide the organization the implementation processes “in moving from the more passive states of acknowledging diversity and valuing diversity, on through to the more active state of managing diversity” (Friday, Friday, 2003, p. 866). Additionally, it is important to note that a key component to managing diversity is for individuals and the organization to acknowledge or recognize the benefits of achieving a more diverse organizational environment.

Third, in order to help achieve a more diverse workforce, the Information Technology and Library Services department need to enumerate specific action items. These action items need to be measurable and achievable in order to increase accountability to the campus community. Additionally, these actions items need to be specifically laid out on a timeline with noted milestones that can be communicated to interested parties.

Lastly, the process of strategic planning helps an organization or business to identify ways in which to differentiate themselves from the competition. Not only is it important for the Information Technology and Library Services department to go through the formulation of a diversity strategy, but to follow through with the implementation of policies or procedures outlined in the plan. Additionally, the strategic plan to increase diversity within the workforce must be evaluated for progress as well as success.

Conclusion

Rapidly changing technology, budget constraints, entrenched barriers to change, as well as geographical limitations may be a few of the roadblocks to increasing the diversity of the Information Technology and Library Services team at Alma College. However, successful change towards a more diverse environment as well as campus culture requires planning, follow-
through, and evaluation. Additionally, balancing the diversity changes with the College’s tradition, mission, and values is a delicate process. This process requires key stakeholder engagement, strategic leadership, and open communication. Furthermore, a proper understanding of the College’s existing culture, strategic initiatives, enrollment goals, and financial situation are paramount to the successful creation of a more diverse campus community.

Lastly, research has shown that a more diverse workplace offers an organization the following benefits: increased knowledge and acceptance of other cultures, lessening of workplace anxieties, reduction in organizational conflicts, and increased productivity as well as performance (Friday, Friday, 2003). These benefits may give the Information Technology and Library Services team, as well as Alma College as a whole, the competitive advantage needed to help sustain the organization into the future.
REFERENCES


