

Theory Into Action

Joshua Williams

Colorado State University

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M. Ed. Jacqueline McGinty

The need to understand each other's cultures is vital to the overall well being of our society. The United States is made up of many different racial, religious, and cultural groups. According to Maurianne Adams in Readings for Diversity and Social Justice, in 2000 people of color made up 28 percent of the U.S. population, this group included African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. It is projected that by 2050 the population of this group will rise and make up 48 percent of the projected U.S. population (2013).

Educators have been trying to better integrate multicultural dimensions into our school systems and organizations. These efforts have proven to be difficult and are often met with resistance. The question is why are these efforts met with resistance? How can we change the attitudes of these individuals and have a more comfortable and multicultural workplace.

Diversity in the fire service is a different in each organization. Some departments are very multicultural while other departments are not. The reason for this is because it depends on the members of that specific department. Each employee has a culture of our own. Our own culture consists of the values, traditions, religion, and worldview that is shared by a group of people (Aragon, 2015). This is what makes each of us our own person. The cultural iceberg allows us to view each of these traits and see what patterns and norms are external vs internal (Aragon, 2015). These behaviors are traits are what allow us to each be individual but yet still belong to a cultural group.

The Problem

As with any other organization, there are issues with the fire service. One of these issues learning how to better integrate multicultural aspects into the fire service. As I stated earlier, some departments are very multicultural and others are not. The reason for this is because there is a huge push for fire departments and other governmental agencies to reflect the demographics of the citizens and towns they serve. For example if a department is protecting a city that is 75% Caucasian, and only 25% mix of all other minorities, then the fire department will reflect that with individuals in which it employs. The reason for this is because the fire departments want the citizens they serve to feel that their culture, language, and beliefs are respected and understood when we arrive on scene and they are in need of our services.

This is an advantage to the fire service but can also lead to accidental prejudice and racism. In the Frederick-Firestone Fire Protection District, the population of the communities we serve are very one sided and are mostly all Caucasian. This leads to a very small amount of "minorities" hired on with our department. The table below is presented by the International Association of Fire Fighters Diversity Initiative (2006). It shows a demographic representation of the whole fire service.

	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Women
US Census 2000	12.3%	12.5%	3.6%	50.9%
Firefighting Profession US Bureau of Labor Statistics	8.4%	8.6%	1.3%	5.1%
Group Ratio comparing percent represented in profession to percent of each group in population	.68	.69	.36	.10

Table 1. US Census Data Compared to Bureau of Labor Statistics Representation in the Fire Service.

The ability to hire employees who are of different cultures is the best way to bring in diversity into the fire service. But that leads to another issue, hiring. The fire service is a very competitive career field and rarely has open positions. It is often said the only way a spot opens up in the fire service is when someone retires or dies. This is a sad statement, but very true as it relates to the opportunities in the fire service. It then brings up the real question, how can we bring in multicultural training into the fire service.

The Description of Action Plan

At Frederick-Firestone Fire Protection District we only focus on a multicultural type of training once a year. The issue though, is that the current training is a legal and ethical training that explains to us protected classes and informs us what we legally can and can't say or do. The district has no specific multicultural training.

At Frederick-Firestone Fire Protection District each firefighter works about 10 shifts a month. Each shift is 24 hours long. The shifts are on a rotating schedule and each firefighter works about two Mondays each month. During each month, it is mandatory that every line firefighter completes 20 hours of fire training. This may not sound like a lot but it is often a hard task to accomplish. This training must be completed between calls and while on shift. What I would like to do is add in mandatory multicultural training every month. I would like to create "Multicultural Mondays".

On these Mondays, each crew would review a training that was sent out by myself or another member in the training division. The training would focus on a different culture each month. At the end the trainings there will be a recipe that coincides with the culture that was taught that month. These recipes would be highly suggested to the crews to cook and eat on Multicultural Mondays.

Multicultural Mondays will focus on multiple different cultures and will be able to be used in multiple different departments across the nation. The trainings will not only be focused on the diverse cultures found within our cities but they will be focused on a wide range of cultures that are found within the United States. This proposal will enhance multicultural awareness throughout the fire service.

The goal of this project is to better prepare the members of the fire service to protect and serve their communities. By better understanding their communities cultures and beliefs, firefighters will be able better assist community members in need. "As public safety and public service organizations, most Fire Departments want to better understand, communicate with, and enlist cooperation in our multicultural communities (Fox, 2006). Fire service members need to embrace diversity and recognize its importance. By recognizing its importance, member's skill sets will improve and they will be better prepared to respond to calls that are diverse in nature.

The Plan of Action

Researching and understanding the multiple cultures that exist in the U.S. and in the fire service is the beginning steps of preparing for the implementation of the plan. Firefighters respond to multiple different places and have the opportunity to experience a vast number of different cultures in just one day. The implementation of the plan will start at the research phase to understand what cultures firefighters will most likely encounter on a daily bases. The research will include cultures that will be experienced on calls, as well as cultures found within the organizations. Through this research, developing an action plan and proposed trainings will happen. Each month will be given a culture to focus on.

The research phase of the implementation process will take approximately three months. After this phase, different cultures will be assigned to specific months for the next 12 months. At the beginning of each year, we will revisit the research phase and adjust accordingly. Trainings will be different each month and will include but are not limited to: classroom demonstration, problem analysis, PowerPoint presentations, and video presentations. This plan will increase cultural knowledge of firefighters and allow them to serve their communities more competently and compassionately.

Preparing for Implementation

Once the proposal is fully completed and all lesson plans are created the Fire Chief will have to give the final approval to move forward with the trainings. The approval from the Fire Chief should not be an issue. The Chief wants what is best for the community and the department. Most fire departments leaders understand that “the more talent, skills, perspectives, insight, knowledge, and abilities acquired through diversity, the stronger and more effective and competitive the organization will be” (McNeil, 2008).

An obstacle that will exist is some individual firefighters on specific crews not wanting to participate in the trainings. Even if the department makes the trainings mandatory, these individuals will originally not understand the importance of multicultural trainings. Through more guidance and proper leadership these stubborn individuals will realize the true necessity of why it is

important to understand cultures and history that is different than our own. The individual will be reminded that this diversity training is not one-dimensional. Chief Wintson described in his article *5 Reasons Diversity Is Important in the Fire Service*, that “our diverse thoughts allow us to see things differently which may add to our situational awareness on a fire ground or other emergency incidents” (Winston, 2006).

Sustainability will fall under the training division. The training division has its own line item budget and has an allotted amount of money that is used for training personnel and for maintaining certifications. This plan will be organized and financially sustained through the training division.

The training division will work along side the Battalion Chiefs to ensure the training is completed and all members are engaged in the material. The Battalion Chiefs will monitor the improvements of the crew as it relates to cultural development. The Battalion Chiefs will then report back to the training division with any suggestions and recommendations that are needed.

Conclusion

Understanding different cultures is vital to the growth of the fire service. The fire service is focused on serving the community and helping them in a time of need. By incorporating Multicultural Mondays firefighters will be better prepared assist these individuals and make them feel more comfortable during their emergencies.

References

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