

Leadership Oversight Framework: Navigating Organizational Excellence



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Executive Summary

- Oversight of the Department of Defense's (DoD) DEI, EO, and EEO efforts should be based on deliberate and strategic decision making rooted in an understanding of the DoD's diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives. The DoD outlines the following goals in its *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022-2023*: increased diversity to enhance global joint warfighter capabilities in order to address complex emerging security challenges and to create a culture of organizational resiliency; expansion of equity and equality across the DoD; improved workplace inclusivity; and commitment to accessibility.
- Senior leaders must use strategic thinking in the development and implementation of diversity-and-inclusion-oriented oversight frameworks.
- A framework that can inform both leadership oversight and leadership accountability as it relates to diversity and inclusion is inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership means fully adopting the lens and practice of inclusion (Ferdman & Deane, 2014).
- To avoid a top-down approach, leaders at all levels should continuously assess the climate across the organization and seek out feedback across all levels as part of their leadership oversight (Corley, 2020).
- Oversight should focus on accountability across ranks, with top leadership modeling inclusive leadership behaviors for peers and junior leaders and serving as role models for all.
- The overarching goal of diversity and inclusion efforts must be systemic, not limited to individual or unit-level changes (Payne & Hannay, 2021).

- Ferdman (2020, pp. 19-20) recommends the following leadership behaviors while emphasizing that the overarching goals of inclusive leadership is to foster fairness and equity across multiple identities:
 - Hold yourself and others accountable for creating an inclusive culture.
 - Invite engagement and dialogue.
 - Model bringing one's whole self to work and give permission for and encourage others to do so.
 - Foster transparent decision making.
 - Understand and engage with resistance.
 - Understand and talk about how inclusion connects to the mission and vision.
- Lack of oversight and accountability around issues of diversity and inclusion poses a variety of risks to the organization, including psychological unsafety, which is taxing to individuals and can lead to recruitment and retention issues, resulting in increased costs.
- Strategies to improve diversity and inclusion rely on oversight and creating accountability; therefore, they should be tied to measures that can corroborate milestones toward achieving diversity and inclusion goals.
- An effective oversight framework remains responsive to emerging trends and adjusts policies and procedures based on 360-degree feedback throughout the organization as needed.

Leadership Oversight

Overview

The Department of Defense's senior leaders and strategic leaders are expected to execute and oversee DoD efforts to foster a climate supportive of diversity and inclusion while also capitalizing on the benefits of cognitive diversity. This document outlines strategies to develop frameworks for oversight to facilitate the effective implementation of strategic initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion across the DoD.

Definitions and Alignment

Oversight. While the DoD does not explicitly define oversight, the DoD does provide definitions and sets expectations for certain types of oversight entities, such as intelligence oversight: "Intelligence oversight is responsible for ensuring that Intelligence Oversight policies and regulations are carried out by DoD organizations that perform intelligence functions" (Department of Defense Senior Intelligence Oversight Official, n.d.). Applying the same logic to the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) space, we suggest that oversight with regard to DEI can be defined as: Oversight that is responsible for ensuring the DoD's strategic diversity and inclusion policies and regulations are carried out by the responsible DoD organizations and individuals that perform DEI, equal opportunity (EO), and equal employment opportunity (EEO) functions. This oversight responsibility falls heavily on DoD senior leaders.

For example, the DoD's *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022-2023* outlines the following oversight structure: The DoD appointed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness as the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO) to provide cohesive oversight for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) efforts. Additionally, the Secretary of Defense stood up a leadership oversight team, the

Defense Equity Team (DET), to inform and facilitate the DoD's progress on DEIA. The DoD's plan is to establish collaborative leadership channels with CDIO oversight, hereby tasking senior leaders across the DoD with oversight and accountability in achieving the DoD's DEIA goals.

Oversight of the DoD's DEI, EO, and EEO efforts should be based on deliberate and strategic decision making rooted in an understanding of the DoD's *DEIA Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022-2023*:

- increased diversity to enhance global joint warfighter capabilities in order to address complex emerging security challenges and to create a culture of organizational resiliency
- expansion of equity and equality across the DoD
- improved workplace inclusivity
- commitment to accessibility

Moreover, oversight frameworks should foster leadership accountability, especially as they relate to diversity and inclusion. These oversight frameworks must be 360-degree and multi-dimensional, as top-down or lateral accountability mechanisms tend to omit the voices and feedback of a diverse constituency (Corley, 2020).

Strategic Thinking. Senior leaders must use strategic thinking in the development and implementation of diversity-and-inclusion-oriented oversight frameworks. In doing so, senior leaders should formulate objectives and priorities. They should implement plans consistent with the long-term interests of the organization in a global environment by evaluating conditions, resources, barriers, and organizational goals and values (e.g., Corley, 2020). Senior leaders thereby capitalize on opportunities while managing risk and contingencies and recognizing the implications for the organization (Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service, 2022).

Alignment with DOD Initiatives. In addition to aligning with the DoD’s strategic planning goals as outlined in the DoD’s *DEIA Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022-2023* (listed above), training senior leaders on leadership oversight in the DEI space also aligns with the below outlined DoD policies:

- DoDI 1350.02, titled *Military Education Program*, requires training on leadership accountability and oversight framework while charging senior leaders with the responsibility to assess and improve their command climates to ensure a diversity-supportive climate of inclusion.
- The U.S. Secretary of Defense memorandum titled *Immediate Actions to Address Diversity and Inclusion and Equal Opportunity in the Military Services*, dated July 14, 2020, further tasks commanders with the responsibility of initiating candid and effective conversations as a specific initiative against discrimination and to promote morale, cohesion, and Force readiness through inclusion.
- DoDI 1020.03, *Harassment Prevention and Response in the Armed Forces*, dated December 29, 2020, states “DoD will hold leaders at all levels appropriately accountable for fostering a climate of inclusion that supports diversity, is free from harassment, and does not tolerate retaliation against those filing harassment complaints” (p. 3).

Research has shown that even with D&I training throughout an entire organization, change will only occur if adjustments are made to the organizational climate, and these changes need to start with the top levels of leadership by establishing leadership accountability (Prieto et al., 2016). Oversight frameworks should therefore strive to create leadership accountability as it relates to diversity and inclusion across all organizational leadership levels.

DoD Leadership Expectations. As retired U.S. Army General Martin Dempsey, who served as the 18th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, “the distinction between ranks lies in our level of responsibility and degree of accountability” (Dempsey, 2012). President Biden’s Executive Order (EO) 14035, Diversity Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, issued June 25, 2021, acknowledges the vital role of DEIA in the cultivation of a workforce that can mitigate the complex threats of tomorrow. EO 14035 outlines the government-wide priority for each agency to provide DEIA leadership at the senior-most level. In response to EO 14035, the DoD appointed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness as the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDOI). The CDOI provides oversight for the DoD’s DEIA efforts.

In response to EO 14035, the DoD submitted its *DEIA Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2022-2023*, which aligns with the November 23, 2021, government-wide strategic plan. The DoD’s *DEIA Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2022-2023* outlines the below principles and expects senior leaders to support them and foster a profound level of accountability:

- **Informed decision making** driven by an evidence-based data collection, analysis, and assessment framework;
- **Integrated and collaborative DEIA approach** “with fully engaged and integrated DoD senior leadership that supports the effective and measurable execution of strategic goals across all global mission operations” (p. 6);
- **Improved access** that removes barriers and enhances opportunities for qualified individuals;
- **Increased agility and adaptability** that ensures DoD’s capability to integrate new aspects of DEIA, and to combat barriers to DEIA to support joint warfighters.

As the strategic decision makers of the DoD, it falls on senior leadership to provide oversight and foster a culture of accountability surrounding the DoD's diversity and inclusion efforts, ultimately driving the transformation and continuous improvement of the organization. Further, senior leaders have a direct impact on and responsibility to lead toward unit cohesion, mission effectiveness, and total Force readiness. It is in their best interest to increase accurate decision making, promote fair and equitable policies in commands, promote fair and equitable Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) actions, and enhance cross-cultural operational strategies. Senior leaders are further expected to acquire strategies that assist them in executing their commitment to fair and equitable leadership, from strategic planning to action, with the overall goal of maximizing cognitive diversity, thereby maximizing total Force readiness across the DoD. Additionally, these strategies should ultimately be reflected in these leaders' decision and policy making. In sum, senior leaders are expected to develop and initiate strategic efforts to develop and execute oversight frameworks as the DoD reaches toward diversity and inclusion goals in support of the mission.

Inclusive Leadership and Oversight

A framework that can inform both leadership oversight and leadership accountability as it relates to diversity and inclusion is inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership means fully adopting the lens and practice of inclusion (Ferdman & Deane, 2014) in a manner that transforms mindsets, behaviors, and collective practices to fully benefit from people's many differences (Ferdman et al., 2020). Inclusive military leadership develops and implements a strategic oversight framework that is based on the needs of the DoD. Senior leaders who embody inclusive leadership can identify the needed conditions for systemic change, along with associated challenges and opportunities, and begin the process of effecting said change.

Inclusive leadership transcends being culturally competent and managing diversity. According to this model, senior leaders are to create and foster conditions that make everyone feel psychologically safe, fairly treated, and appreciated so that each unique team member can be and do their best (Ferdman, 2020). With increased rank and seniority comes an increased responsibility to ensure diversity and inclusion efforts are accurately reflected in policies and doctrines. Subsequent leadership oversight is needed to monitor the implementation of these efforts.

Barriers

Senior leaders need to identify and address challenges and barriers when striving to create oversight and accountability around DEI. Some of these challenges may be inherent to individuals the leader is responsible for, while other challenges may be inherent to the culture of the organization. Additionally, some of the most difficult and most relevant to address issues may be encountered in the form of systemic barriers.

Individual-level barriers. Senior leaders need to consider the below-listed individual barriers that can negatively impact oversight and accountability surrounding DEI efforts:

- lack of awareness of DEI issues (e.g., Devine & Monteith, 1993; Plant & Devine, 2009)
- lack of motivation for change (e.g., Blair, 2002; Petty et al., 2009)
- lack of commitment to behavioral changes (Petty et al. 2009)
- exposure to counter messaging in mainstream culture (Petty et al., 2009)
- incongruence of new information with existing beliefs (Petty et al., 2009)

While it is relatively easy to provide Service members with formal training on EO, EEO, and DEI, it is important to note that awareness should not be confused with effectiveness. The challenge lies in moving individuals from awareness to skill development and accountability;

sustaining long-term attitudinal and behavioral change relies on leaders motivating individuals by providing relevant content. The content must stimulate motivation, and the messages must provide salient text, images, or messages that encourage careful consideration and comparison to existing beliefs—leading to persistent attitude change, stronger resistance to counter messaging, and stronger commitment to behavioral change (Petty et al., 2009).

Catalyst's (2021) report on inclusive leadership across 352 large corporations in the United States found that while inclusive experiences are beneficial for both employees and employers, less than half of employees reported experiences of inclusion. Among those who had positive experiences of inclusion at work, 52% attributed these experiences to their managers' inclusive leadership behavior. Senior leaders have the opportunity to provide inclusive experiences by actively engaging in inclusive leadership behaviors with mid-level leaders who can then directly impact individuals in their unit; some inclusive leadership behaviors include fostering interdependent leader-follower relationships and paying attention to how followers perceive their leadership (Hollander, 2009). To avoid a top-down approach, leaders throughout the organization should continuously assess the climate across the organization and seek out feedback at all levels as part of their oversight (Corley, 2020).

Systemic barriers. Systemic barriers refer to norms and routine practices that by their very design perpetuate disparities, whether intentionally or unintentionally. These barriers include implicit and systemic biases and other contributing factors that challenge the realization and sustainment of inclusivity (Henkhaus et al., 2022). Systemic barriers include any routine practices, procedures, and policies that by their very nature contribute to the marginalization of groups and undermine inclusion efforts. Examples of such barriers in the Military are recruitment or promotion procedures or such military norms that systematically disadvantage

certain groups of individuals. Recent changes to military recruitment and promotion practices have sought to amend these discrepancies, for example:

- The Army's rigid, pre-determined career timelines do not accommodate well for changing household structures, e.g., single parents, dual-career households, and it has been suggested that a more flexible career model would be better able to accommodate these changing household structures (Holt & Davis, 2022).
- Former Defense Secretary Mark Esper had removed photos from consideration on promotion selection boards in 2020 to achieve a more unbiased selection process (Esper, 2020).
- Additionally, the Army plans to remove race, ethnicity and gender data from Officer and Enlisted Records Briefs (U.S. Army Public Affairs, 2020).

The above listed initiatives demonstrate parts of an ongoing effort to remove systemic barriers from the talent management process. Traditional leadership approaches often reinforce systemic, institutionalized beliefs that can be a barrier to achieving a truly inclusive environment. Oversight frameworks must be inclusive in nature and remain responsive to the needs of all stakeholders in the organization. Leadership oversight should aim at creating a climate of psychological safety and trust that fosters a sense of accountability around diversity across the organization (Corley, 2020).

Opportunities

In addressing the aforementioned challenges, senior leaders should seek to determine points of impact that provide them with opportunities to effect change from the individual level to the unit level while ultimately seeking to transform the organization toward excellence in EO, EEO, and DEI.

Individual Commitment. Individual commitment to create an inclusive environment should be modelled by leadership in order to be instilled in followers. Leaders who are credible role models and lead by example can inspire their followers to act in an ethical manner (Brown & Treviño, 2006). More specifically, inclusive leaders serve as role models, which allows followers to learn by observation (Bandura, 1986). The expectation is that each Service member develops a sense of personal commitment to and personal accountability for creating a unit and organizational environment that promotes diversity.

Command Climate. A pro-diversity command climate is created jointly by all members in a unit. Bye (2005) suggests designing accountability into diversity and inclusion strategies by identifying general roles that allow leaders and individual contributors to change the organizational culture. These roles range from role model and leader, to change agent and communicator, and at the lowest involvement level, engaged participant. Leaders, in addition to serving as role models, should mentor subordinates and identify communicators throughout their command that encourage each individual Service member to become an engaged participant in the pursuit of diversity. These engaged participants should become personally invested in the pro-diversity mission, a change that can be inspired by inclusive leaders who, jointly with their followers, create a pro-diversity command climate (Bye, 2005). Leadership's oversight strategies should foster accountability at all levels of the organization, from policy and doctrine development, to holding each and every Service member accountable for their behavior, while expecting excellence in diversity and inclusion efforts.

Addressing Institutional Barriers. The overarching goal of diversity and inclusion efforts must be systemic, not limited to individual or unit-level changes (Payne & Hannay, 2021). Systemic barriers are often passive; they represent longstanding practices and norms that

are viewed as “the way things are done” (Henkhaus et al., 2022). Therefore, senior leaders must evaluate routine practices and policies that may inherently marginalize groups and hinder inclusion efforts, such as recruitment or promotion procedures, military norms and rituals surrounding grooming standards, and others.

Theoretical Framework of Oversight

While inclusive leadership can provide leaders with strategies and behaviors that facilitate experiences of inclusion and a positive diversity climate (Catalyst, 2021), leaders also must develop an oversight framework to specifically address EO, EEO, and DEI concerns in their respective organizations.

Inclusive Leadership Behaviors. Ferdman (2020, pp. 19-20) recommends the following leadership behaviors, emphasizing that the overarching goals of inclusive leadership is to foster fairness and equity across multiple identities:

1. Hold yourself and others accountable for creating an inclusive culture.
2. Invite engagement and dialogue.
3. Model bringing one’s whole self to work and give permission for and encourage others to do so.
4. Foster transparent decision making.
5. Understand and engage with resistance.
6. Understand and talk about how inclusion connects to the mission and vision.

Leadership Accountability Framework. A leadership accountability framework for the enhancement of DEI, EO, and EEO should be based on deliberate and strategic decision making. It should also be based on an understanding of the DoD’s overall DEIA objectives of increasing total Force readiness by optimizing diverse talent in support of the joint warfighter. Leadership

accountability frameworks, especially as they relate to diversity and inclusion, must be 360-degree and multi-dimensional, as top-down or lateral accountability mechanisms tend to omit the voices and feedback of a diverse constituency (Corley, 2020).

Impacts of Accountable Oversight

The effects of a strategic approach that holds all members of the organization accountable for the DoD's diversity and inclusion goals can profoundly impact the organization across levels, from individuals to the organization at large. See Corley (2020) for a discussion of the beneficial impact of DEI efforts across organizational levels.

Impact on the Individual

Accountability around issues of diversity and inclusion is necessary for any organization; lack of intentional effort and accountability around DEI can undermine the psychological safety of the work environment and lead to a loss of trust in the organization (Corley, 2020). For example, the affected individuals are less likely to be engaged at work, which may result in reduced workplace creativity (Carmeli et al., 2010), compromised individual performance (Holmes et al., 2021), and withdrawal (Corley, 2020). An adverse diversity climate impacts employees affectively, lowering their work satisfaction and commitment, resulting in concerning employee behaviors including withdrawal from the organization and intention to leave the organization (Holmes et al., 2021). The implication is that creating a non-adverse diversity climate mitigates those negative outcomes.

Impact on Groups and Organizations

Lack of oversight and accountability around issues of diversity and inclusion poses a variety of risks to the organization. For example, psychological unsafety is taxing to individuals and can lead to recruitment and retention issues, which can have a negative impact on readiness

and result in increased costs. More overt instances of exclusion can lead to litigation, damage to the organization's reputation, and reduced trust in the organization; it can threaten the talent supply, directly undermining the overall vision of the organization (Corley, 2020). Ineffective diversity management from leadership is also associated with compromised organizational performance (Sabharwal, 2014).

These adverse impacts can be mitigated and prevented through inclusive, responsive oversight, and accountability. Hughes et al. (2018) conducted a review of the literature on leadership, creativity, and innovation, and asserted there is clear empirical evidence that leadership approaches can either hinder or enhance workplace creativity and innovation. An inclusive leadership style, characterized by openness, accessibility, and availability, enhances psychological safety, leading employees to be more engaged in creative work (Carmeli et al., 2010). Employees whose companies make efforts to create a pro-diversity climate report more favorable work attitudes and perform better, thereby enhancing unit performance as well as overall organizational performance (McKay et al., 2007, 2008, 2011).

Strategies for Senior Leaders

This section outlines strategies for senior leaders to address the challenges and opportunities of EO, EEO, and DEI. These strategies include: assessing organizational performance as it relates to pro-diversity climates; strategic initiatives to foster inclusion; approaches to communicate strategies; and best practice examples from corporate settings.

Performance Assessment

Strategies to improve diversity and inclusion rely on leaders that provide oversight and create accountability. Therefore, these strategies must be tied to measurable milestones that can demonstrate improvements are indeed leading toward the established diversity and inclusion

objectives. These measures should also warn leaders and policy makers when efforts are falling short and a change in approach is needed. Clear and measurable accountability in DEIA relies on capturing the diversity climate, defined as “the degree to which a firm advocates fair human resource policies and socially integrates underrepresented employees” (McKay et al., 2008, p. 352).

The Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity (IMCD) (Cox, 1994) posits that human resource practices that foster fairness and social integration promote supportive diversity climates, which in turn impact employees affectively (e.g., satisfaction, commitment), thereby impacting employee behavior (turnover, withdrawal). Diversity climate therefore impacts individual and organizational performance via attitudinal perceptions. The model further suggests that diversity and inclusion are interrelated and that a positive diversity climate requires fair treatment and effective structural and social inclusion across the entire organization, especially as it pertains to historically disadvantaged groups. A large body of diversity climate research has been primarily based on the IMCD (Holmes et al., 2021). The model has been used to examine employee outcomes of perceived work discrimination (Chapa et al., 2020; Del Carmen Triana et al., 2015), customer satisfaction (McKay et al., 2011), and diversity management (Del Carmen Triana et al., 2010). When assessing diversity climates, researchers most typically assess individual perceptions of the diversity climate (Holmes et al., 2021).

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators for diversity and inclusiveness can be obtained from survey data containing employee self-reports regarding their companies’ diversity and inclusion efforts. Sanyal et al. (2015) argue that employees’ level of engagement regarding DEI efforts can be a relevant performance indicator. Other suggested measures include demographic diversity or

talent acquisitions data (ChapmanCG, 2015). However, a diverse organization is not necessarily also inclusive, which means limiting measures to demographics may fall short of providing a full picture. While some believe numeric measurements are needed to hold individuals and organizations accountable in their diversity and inclusion efforts, qualitative measures in the form of interviews and focus groups across the organizational hierarchy may be better able to capture minority voices (ChapmanCG, 2015) and should therefore be used in addition to and in conjunction with statistical data.

Strategic Leadership Initiatives

Strategic leadership initiatives rely on competent leaders possessing the skills, knowledge, and abilities (KSAs) to foster a pro-diversity climate and to create and implement oversight and accountability frameworks throughout their respective organizations.

Fostering a pro-diversity climate. Holmes et al.'s (2021) meta-analytic review of diversity climate research confirmed the consistent, positive effect of an inclusive diversity climate on important work outcomes. They recommend:

Organizations that value diversity would be wise to make or increase investments in diversity management initiatives. As part of such initiatives, the senior leadership in firms must endorse diversity as a strategic objective, adopt policies that ensure fair treatment and inclusion of all personnel, allocate resources toward maintaining pro-diversity work climates, and hold management personnel accountable for diversity-related outcomes. (p. 1374)

Additionally, Holmes et al. (2021) outline that positive diversity climates can be fostered through the following:

- Human resources practices that promote fairness across the organization, to include selection, performance evaluations, promotions, professional development opportunities, and resource allocation.
- Leaders making strategic diversity-focused investments as necessary, such as employee resource groups and leadership pipeline programs.
 - Affirming diverse, individual identities, developing cultural competency, and creating a psychologically safe environment.
 - Ensuring that members of underrepresented groups are recruited, supported, and promoted in their organizations.

Accountability Framework

Accountability is a hallmark of effective oversight frameworks. Workplace accountability has traditionally focused on ensuring processes are followed while considering outputs produced. An accountability framework should be the product of strategic decision making based on a solid understanding of the organizational environment, its culture, and the organization's goals. A well-developed accountability framework enables the organization to tell a convincing story that is based on evidence of the value added by an initiative (Dwyer, 2017). For example, the organization and leadership must:

- Establish a performance measurement regime.
- Be willing to be evaluated at the individual, unit, and organizational level.
- Focus on continuous improvement and performance measurement to develop and adjust new initiatives as needed.
- Increase transparency and accountability with internal and external stakeholders.

Leadership competencies

Leadership competencies are based on *knowledge* about diversity and inclusion, *skills* to address related challenges and opportunities, and leaders' *attitudes*, that is, their commitment to change and willingness to act. Besides leadership competencies, institutional support and mentoring are also vital in ensuring the DoD's goal of fostering a climate of inclusion that supports diversity (Ramirez et al., 2021). Ramirez et al. (2021) emphasize that leadership competencies are developed when leaders are exposed to sufficient, multiple opportunities to apply their knowledge. Leaders should practice taking action and receiving feedback through workshops, case studies, guided practices, field work, and other experiences. Different levels of leaders' professional development will also require different types of education and training strategies to facilitate ongoing learning and mastery of competencies (Fick et al., 2018). High performing leaders view formal leadership development and continuing leadership training to be an important factor in their own development as successful leaders (Longenecker & Insch, 2019).

Ethical Decision Making. Brown et al. (2005, p. 120) define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making.” The antecedents and outcomes of ethical leadership can be explained via Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, which suggests that leaders must be attractive and credible role models in order to be seen as an ethical leader. “Ethical leaders are credible because they are trustworthy and practice what they preach” (Brown & Treviño, 2006, p. 597). They are seen as fair and principled decision makers who care about people and societal

issues while behaving ethically in both their personal and professional lives (Treviño et al., 2000).

Effective leadership contains an ethical dimension. Johnson (2005) emphasized that being a leader goes beyond task expectations and includes ethical challenges. These challenges involve “issues of power, privilege, deceit, consistency, loyalty, and responsibility” (Johnson, 2005, p. 10). Leaders’ ability to handle ethical challenges is a major factor in the quality of their leadership (Johnson, 2005). They may be able to reduce the incidence of discriminatory decision making when making expectations for fairness and equity explicit (Umphress et al., 2008). Managers in most working environments experience ethical dilemmas and are expected to make decisions that uphold organizational ethics and policies (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Jhamb & Carlson, 2020), and DoD leaders are not the exception.

Ethical leadership is associated with increased trust and a reduction in turnover (Eisenbeiss, 2012). When leaders make ethical decisions, they can create credibility and respect for an organization (Community Tool Box, n.d.) as well as foster a desirable command climate, which can lead to a successful organization (Garza, 2014). Leaders who exhibit ethical behaviors and ethical decision making can positively impact and influence their organization (e.g., Brown & Treviño, 2006; Kaptein, 2015). For example, in a study by Schaubroeck and colleagues (2012), ethical leaders in the Army were shown to impact the ethical thoughts and behaviors of those reporting to them. Additionally, there was a ripple effect, where the actions of ethical leaders at the top influenced multiple levels of the organization (Schaubroeck et al., 2012).

Strategic Leadership Communication. Following identification of challenges and opportunities, senior leaders should strive to develop and implement strategic plans to foster a

climate that supports diversity and inclusion in their organization. The communication of the strategic plan across the organization begins with the document itself.

Strategic plans should contain a mission statement that serves as the foundation; it should outline institutional values and goals while developing a vision for the future. In addition, it should further outline clear objectives toward goal accomplishment. Finally, strategic plans must contain an implementation strategy that identifies people and resources needed and outlines action steps (Hinton, 2012; McPhail & McPhail, 2020).

Strategic leaders must ensure mid-level leaders are fully engaged in order to implement the strategic plan effectively throughout the organization (McPhail & McPhail, 2020). Depending on rank and associated level of responsibility, senior leaders should identify and communicate the plan with other leaders, who in turn will serve as change agents or communicators. Communication among leadership should be ongoing, with a shared commitment to remaining aligned with the strategic plan and its overall goals while remaining responsive to emerging needs (Bye, 2005). An effective oversight framework remains responsive to emerging trends and adjust policies and procedures based on 360-degree feedback throughout the organization as needed.

Training Recommendations

The following section outlines considerations for training senior military leaders on oversight frameworks in the DEI space.

Motivation and Value Alignment

Training should establish the incompatibility of prejudice and discrimination with military values and present strategic approaches to creating accountability and oversight frameworks that foster systemic, organizational change. Senior leaders should receive an

opportunity to reflect on how service values of fairness, equity, and merit can be best reflected in their decision making, to include strategic planning and policy development.

Modalities

Training should include multiple modalities and provide ample opportunities to apply newly acquired skills. Recommended formats of training methods include lecture, interactive group discussions, small-group experiences, role playing, and case studies. Scenario-based learning, which promotes authentic learning through real-world examples, has been shown to be equally effective regardless of whether it was delivered in person or via e-learning (Mehall, 2022), and it should be utilized to provide learners with opportunities to practice how they can implement accountability frameworks in their organization.

Modes of Delivery

In general, diversity training is most effective when integrated into a comprehensive organizational change effort as opposed to a one-time training event (Ely & Roberts, 2008). Another rationale for training to occur over an extended period of time is provided by the “spacing effect.” Spacing the presented information over time allows for information to be presented and acquired in diverse contexts, which is conducive to better learning outcomes (e.g., Glenberg, 1979; Kornell, 2009). Training should be provided in a live, synchronous classroom setting, either virtually or in-person, to allow for group discussions and small group activities. Virtual delivery accommodates commanders who cannot be absent from their posts for extended periods of time. Virtual workshops are conducive to discussions and review of both peer and individual progress (Saghafi et al., 2014). In-person seminars support hands-on skills training, peer engagement, and spontaneous feedback (Saghafi et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Senior leaders across the DoD are tasked with developing and implementing policies and procedures that are consistent with the DoD's diversity and inclusion efforts and goals. Inclusive leadership behavior and an oversight framework that stresses accountability are best suited to inform these efforts. Effective oversight does remain responsive to feedback from all levels of the organizations while taking command climate and other performance indicators into consideration. Throughout this effort, senior leaders should serve as role models and establish channels of communication across the organization that can provide ongoing feedback on DEI, EO, and EEO performance.

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Activity Appendix

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Reflections to Set the Tone

The below activities can serve as an icebreaker activity setting the tone for the seminar or could be utilized later in the seminar to provide an opportunity for reflection.

Reflection on Accountability. Dr. Lorén Cox is an advocate for educational equity, managing the federal policy and advocacy portfolio for a large nationwide non-profit, and a former member of the Obama administration's community solutions team. She discussed the need to develop organizational accountability with regard to DEI. Have attendees watch her Ted Talk before presenting the below listed discussion prompts. Suggested discussion topics include the following:

- What does personal accountability in DEI work mean to you?
- How can personal accountability translate to organizational accountability?
- How can your organization's strategic plan create organizational accountability?
- Create a vision/mission statement for organizational DEI accountability in your organization. Discuss and compare the statements created across seminar participants.

TEDx Talks. (2019, April 22). *The Missing Link in DEI* | Lorén Cox |

TEDxColumbiaUniversity [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpU6kP3sI24>

Creating a Culture of Accountability. Participants will read the below article by Michael Timms, then follow the discussion prompts.

Timms, M. (2017, September 8). *Creating a culture of accountability, not blame.*
<https://michaeltimms.com/culture-of-accountability/>

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Creating a Culture of Accountability, not Blame

If you're a leader, you've probably heard the quote "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." Unfortunately, when it comes to which one gets more attention from executives, it's strategy, without question. This is perhaps because, to most executives, strategy is easier to manage. What many leaders fail to realize is that if they aren't managing their culture, their culture is managing them. If you have any doubt as to which category you fall in, ask yourself this question, is your culture working for you, or against you?

If you've ever felt like your culture wasn't working for you, odds are it was a culture of blame. Blame is an accountability killer. Ironically, we live in a society that has blurred the lines between the words "accountability" and "blame." In fact, many people use those words interchangeably. Leaders who don't distinguish between the two are laying the groundwork for a culture that works against them. Blame is an accountability killer.

The Difference Between Accountability and Blame

When people say "That politician must be held accountable for his actions," what they're really saying is "That politician is to blame and must be punished for his actions." Accountability is not the same thing as blame or punishment. To be accountable means to take responsibility for results, good or bad. It means finding solutions to problems and applying

lessons learned in order to improve future results. Being accountable is constructive because it focuses on the future.

To be blamed, on the other hand, is to be accountable for culpable actions. Blame is often assigned before all the facts are known, and often assumes that people, not the systems they operate in, are the problem. Blame is focused on the past and on punishing the offender. The thinking behind assigning blame is that identifying the offender and punishing them will correct the poor behavior. The reality is that the only thing people learn from being blamed is to become better at hiding their mistakes.

	Culture of Blame	Culture of Accountability
Believes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are the problem Problems are headaches Admitting weaknesses is career limiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are problem solvers Problems are learning opportunities We are all still learning
Focused on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is wrong The individual Fault-finding The past Assigning punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is wrong The process Fact-finding The future Improving future results
Results in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making assumptions Hoarding decision-making authority Hiding problems Finger-pointing and CYA behaviour Distrust Turf wars Risk adverse Wait until told Lack of innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering alternatives Delegating decision-making authority Surfacing problems and solutions Learning from mistakes Trust Cross-functional cooperation Calculated risk taking Taking initiative Innovation

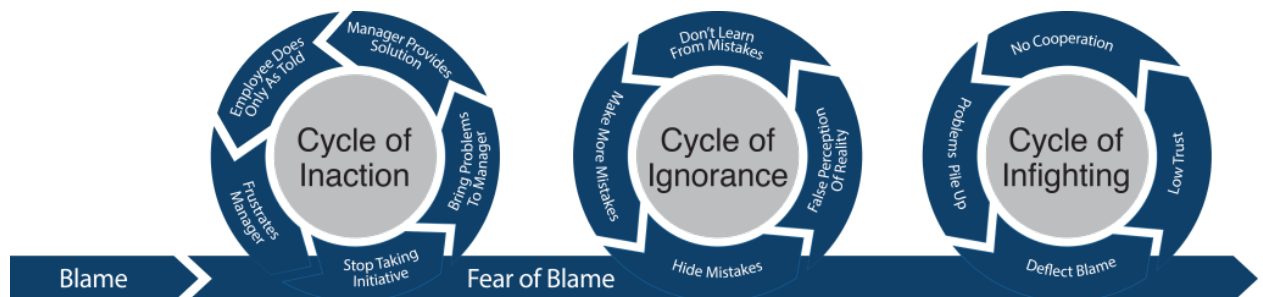
The Misnomer of “Human Error”

Historically, most workplace problems and accidents have been blamed on “human error.” Why? Because it’s easy. It’s human nature to take mental short-cuts and look for simple explanations and scape-goats. The old adage “To err is human” is more accurately stated “To blame is human.”

We now know that most unintended outcomes are usually caused by a combination of factors, and that flawed systems (or “processes”) are often the prime culprit. Take for example the CEO whose sales team was providing lack-luster results. The CEO was frustrated that the salespeople weren’t working together as a team despite his continued urging to do so. He discovered that when his sales associates came across a lead in another salesperson’s territory, they wouldn’t pass on the lead to the other salesperson. “How could they behave so selfishly?” the CEO wondered. What the CEO didn’t consider is that he was offering an all-expenses-paid trip to Bermuda only to the top salesperson. As the saying goes, “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.”

Blame Spawns Three Deadly Cycles

Cultures of blame are inherently inefficient. Countless dollars are essentially thrown out the window (think stacks of \$100 bills) from the three self-destructive cycles that are put into motion as soon as someone in the organization is blamed. These three cycles are the Cycle of Inaction, the Cycle of Ignorance, and the Cycle of Infighting.



Cycle of Inaction

The very act of blaming someone is a form of punishment. Its primary intent is to shame the accused. People tend to fear punishment and shaming, and fear is generally paralyzing. When a manager blames an employee for making a mistake, the employee tends to recoil into the safety of “wait until told.” Almost overnight, employees stop taking the initiative, and instead, bring all problems to their manager to await instructions on how the boss wants them to be resolved. This, of course, frustrates their manager. Employees sense their boss’s frustration with them, but aren’t quite sure why. This state of uneasiness causes once confident, competent employees to turn into mumbling, bumbling, mindless servants paralyzed by fear.

Stephen Covey aptly named this cycle of behaviour “Gofer Delegation” because the boss ends up doing all the thinking and the employees simply carry out the boss’s orders. The fear of blame not only causes employees to lose confidence and shrink from action, but it also stalls their career development. Employees caught in the Cycle of Inaction tend to either stagnate in their careers, or they eventually leave so they can use their brain where it’s appreciated.

Cycle of Ignorance

The ostensible rationale for blaming someone is that if you sufficiently rub their nose in their mistake, the offender will think twice before making the same mistake again. Studies (and common sense) have proven otherwise. Instead of making fewer mistakes, people in blame and shame cultures simply get better at hiding their mistakes. Meanwhile, executives are oblivious to what is really going on in the trenches. They aren’t getting the results they want, but they don’t know why. So, they aimlessly introduce new incentives or quality programs hoping this will change things. The real reasons for the poor results remain obscured and no learning occurs. The new ‘fixes’ cause an onslaught of unintended consequences and produce more problems, which people try to hide.

Cycle of Infighting

When people within an organization fear their leaders and each other, they naturally expend a tremendous amount of energy trying to protect themselves. Simon Sinek taught this principle in his TED Talk entitled “Why good leaders make you feel safe.” When people inside an organization fear each other, they engage in a subtle war called “corporate politics.” The goal of this war is to deflect blame and defend your ‘turf.’ Obviously trust and cooperation cannot exist in such an environment. This makes everybody engaged in this war less effective at their jobs for two reasons:

- 1. the more time they spend crafting meticulous emails designed to deflect blame, the less time they have to do their job; and,*
- 2. they won’t be able to access help from their ‘enemies’ – people who would otherwise share their knowledge and resources.*

The more that people engage in blame wars, the more unresolved problems will pile up, which in turn increases the need to deflect blame onto others.

The 8 Accountability Practices

The following eight practices lay the foundation for creating a culture of accountability.

- 1. **Delegate effectively.** This includes taking the time to clearly articulate the desired results in writing, specify the delegate’s decision-making authority, provide required resources, and provide regular feedback. Most, if not all, problems would be mitigated if leaders followed this pattern of delegation.*
- 2. **View problems as learning opportunities.** The Kaizen Institute has a saying “Where no problem is perceived, there can be no improvement.” Never forget that we are all still*

learning to do our jobs better, and we learn best from our mistakes. Most importantly, make sure the people you lead know that you hold this belief.

3. **Lead with inquiry.** *Don't assume you have all the facts. When you ask questions with a sincere desire to learn, you are less likely to provoke a defensive reaction.*
4. **Remove emotion.** *Feedback and guidance turn to blame the instant the person on the receiving end perceives angry and frustrated tones. Even if the anger isn't directed at the person accountable for the results, they will likely interpret the emotion as blame. Additionally, emotion interferes with the brain's ability to problem solve and think logically.*
5. **Focus on the problem and solution, not the person.** *Focusing on the issue or problem, not on the person, creates an open, trusting, communication-rich environment.*
6. **Look for breakdowns in the process.** *Flawed systems, or processes, contribute to most workplace problems. We tend to assume that the cause of problems happened right before and in the same vicinity where the problem occurred. Think beyond the obvious to discover contributing factors separated from the problem by time and proximity. Poor leaders ask "Who's at fault?" Strong leaders ask "Where did the process break down?"*
7. **Act like a leader.** *When things go right, good leaders deflect the credit. When things go wrong, good leaders take all the responsibility. That's tough, but that's the price of admission to leadership (or rather, it should be). It's just a shame that most people in leadership positions didn't get that memo.*
8. **Ask yourself "How did I contribute to this problem?"** *If you are part of the same system in which the problem was discovered, your actions probably had a role in the situation.*

Asking yourself this question will help you apply all the other seven accountability practices.

Poor leaders ask “Who’s at fault?” Strong leaders ask “Where did the process break down?”

Suggested discussion questions:

- How can you apply the aforementioned 8 accountability practices in your organizational context? Create your personal action plan.
- How can you shift your organizational climate from blame to accountability?
- How can you apply the discussed concepts (8 accountability practices, climate of accountability) specifically to DEI efforts in your organization?

Brainstorming Accountability Ideas

We suggest a two-part small group activity. First, ask participants to make a list of the five most important things (a) the general public and (b) military personnel should know about prejudice and discrimination and the reasons why each is important. Tally how often various points are made and have participants discuss why some are mentioned more frequently than others.

Second, break participants up into small groups of three to five people and have them brainstorm ideas on how prejudice and discrimination can be addressed in their organization.

Suggested discussion questions the following:

- What policies and procedures has your organization put in place to address prejudice and discrimination? Can you think of areas in which these policies and procedures can be improved?

- How can you establish effective oversight to ensure the implementation of these policies across your organization?
- What barriers do you anticipate and how can you address said barriers?

Strategic Planning Activity

The materials outlined in this section are part of the University of Michigan's Diversity Equity and Inclusion Strategic Planning Toolkit. While developed for institutions of higher learning, the materials can be adapted for the military/ DoD context. For further instruction, please visit the below link.

Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion. (2022). *Building an Institutional DEI Strategic Plan*. University of Michigan. Retrieved December 12, 2022, from <https://diversity.umich.edu/strategic-plan/building-an-institutional-dei-strategic-plan/>

The toolkit represents U-M's own efforts to share its model, as well as what has been learned by implementing this plan to the larger community – as many institutions of higher learning are striving to create their own DEI Strategic Plans. Included on this page are a set of individual guides that cover key steps and processes involved in creating and sustaining an organization-wide DEI plan that may be adapted to your own environment, including foundational components and signature initiatives. (Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, 2022 – see link in references for further instruction)

Goals and Objectives for Strategic Plan Development

- Create a substantive, clear, and well-organized strategic planning process.
- Provide tools and resources to participating units and/or partners, including guidance for unit-based planning and implementation along with templates for communications.

- Model inclusive and equitable approaches for engagement, decision making, and communications.
- Develop a planning process that is flexible and capable of evolving over time.
- Implement ample feedback opportunities for constituents and partners.

Planning and Implementation.

Before the strategic planning process itself can begin, it's imperative that you plan the planning process. That includes organizing human, financial and technical resources and developing the communications and tools that will support a coherent planning process across the organization.

Inadequate support for your campus-wide DEI strategic plan could diminish both the process and the outcomes. Those charged with leading the strategic planning process will need strong and consistent support, along with collaboration and honest feedback, from top-level leaders.

They will also need capable administrative and professional staff. Leaders may need to regularly remind the community that the DEI strategic plan is a top priority for the institution, and one that exerts a direct impact on its successful future.

For example, you could create an organizing structure similar to the one UM established, including an executive leadership team; a working group involving unit leaders from across campus; and student, staff and faculty advisory boards to inform your planning process and prioritize your goals.

It's important to be realistic in evaluating the potential scope of your initiative and the staffing needed to support it. Better to have a contained but well-run effort than a huge initiative with inadequate resources.

Ask key questions of key stakeholders: Should we have one single plan for the campus? Or, as with U-M, should individual campus units develop their own strategic plans that become part of the campus-level plan? How should we define our campus-level vision and goals?

Implementation

Implementing a campus-wide, centralized and decentralized strategic planning process requires steadfast commitment. It is vitally important to create basic infrastructure to support this endeavor over the course of time. Recommended elements for a multi-year DEI strategic plan implementation include the following:

- Creating a highly visible campus launch event, with an annual anchoring event in subsequent years. At U-M, this was our DEI Summit.
- Hosting regular meetings with DEI leads or other campus leaders and liaisons to share information, exchange ideas and develop best practices.
- Continuing to engage the campus through regular town halls and community events to allow feedback, new ideas and priorities to surface.
- Responding to negative incidents that may occur on campus or at the local, national or international level. Providing support for those who are directly or indirectly feeling their impact is important. It's also advisable to offer guidance for leaders across campus on ways to be responsive and to maintain communications at the campus level.
- Provide professional development on DEI topics for all "layers" of the campus community, from executive officers to deans, department chairs, students, faculty and staff at all levels and from all functional areas.

Evaluation and Impact

- An annual reporting process highlights progress in support of action plans and strategic objectives for each participating unit. An online tool is pre-populated with each unit's stated annual actions to support achieving the objectives, to which units add completion status and statements of progress and impact.
- A Central DEI Progress Report is produced annually and provides both transparency and accountability by describing progress to date and work underway for all annual action items that support strategic plan objectives. This report covers initiatives at the central campus level as well as spotlighting endeavors across campus, based on unit progress reports (see item 1 above). A listing of all unit objectives, action items, and completion status is published as well.
- A set of metrics, including demographic and campus climate data, are being tracked across the five-year implementation period. Large-scale campus climate surveys were conducted in year one of our implementation period and will be repeated at the end of the five-year window.

The impact of our DEI efforts has also been documented through the evaluation of signature initiatives at the unit level, through the tracking of quantitative and qualitative metrics, and in a notable shift in campus culture toward viewing DEI efforts as integral to our mission as a public institution and essential to our achieving excellence in teaching, research, and service.

We should note that this effort is ongoing, and progress is uneven and difficult to fully assess. As further evidence that our work is having an impact, mechanisms are now in place to identify areas in need of attention and to address those needs.

Suggested activity prompt for SEEOS participants:

- After reviewing the University of Michigan's ideas for the development of a strategic DEI plan, develop goals and objectives for a DEI plan in your organizations.
- Develop a strategic plan (high-level, brief summary format) based on these objectives.
- How would you implement your strategic plan? What resources and collaborators will you need?
- How will you know your plan is successfully implemented? How can you evaluate progress on an ongoing basis? How do you plan to respond to setbacks in the implementation of your strategic DEI plan?