Effective Strategies for Command Team Leaders: Implementing Leadership Accountability and Oversight

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Overview

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

Definitions and Alignment

Accountability. Accountability can be defined as holding self and others accountable to foster an environment that administers all resources in a manner that instills public trust while ensuring integrity, responsibility, and transparency in all actions (Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service, 2022). Wood and Winston (2007) propose that accountability consists of responsibility, openness, and answerability. The leader accepts the responsibilities inherent in the leadership position to serve the well-being of the organization. There is an implicit or explicit expectation that the leader will be publicly linked to his/her actions and words. Lastly, the leader may be called on to explain his or her beliefs, decisions, commitment, or actions (Wood & Wilson, 2005). Accountability provides "a method by which leaders proactively reveal their behaviors and underlying motives to their followers" (Frederick 2016, p. 303).

Leadership Accountability Framework. A leadership accountability framework for the enhancement of D&I, EO, and EEO should be based on deliberate and strategic decision making rooted in an understanding of the DoD's overall objective of increasing total force readiness by ensuring return of investment on D&I. 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).

Strategic Thinking. Senior leaders must use strategic thinking in the development and implementation of diversity- and inclusion-oriented leadership accountability frameworks. In doing so, senior leaders formulate objectives and priorities, and 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 hereby 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. DoDI 1350.02 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 (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, September 4 2020). 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 Forced*, 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" (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, December 29 2020, 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).

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). As the strategic decision makers of the DoD, it falls on senior leadership to create accountability surrounding the DoD's diversity and inclusion efforts, ultimately driving the transformation and continuous improvement of the organization.

As strategic decision makers, senior leaders have a direct impact on unit cohesion, mission effectiveness, and total force readiness. Senior leaders are expected 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 strategy. Senior leaders are further expected to acquire strategies that assist them in their commitment to fair and equitable leadership with the overall goal of maximizing cognitive diversity and, hereby, total force readiness across the DoD; additionally, these strategies should ultimately be reflected in their decision and policy making. Therefore, senior leaders are expected to develop and initiate strategic efforts to create accountability in working toward diversity and inclusion goals.

Inclusive Leadership

A framework that can inform leadership accountability as it relates to D&I 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 our many differences (Ferdman et al., 2020). Inclusive military leadership develops and implements a strategic accountability 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 put those changes into practice. Inclusive leadership transcends acquiring cultural competence and managing diversity. Senior leaders are to create and foster conditions that make everyone feel psychologically safe, fairly treated, and appreciated so each unique team member can be and do their best (Ferdman, 2020).

Challenges

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

Individual level barriers. While it is relatively easy to provide service members with formal training on EO, EEO, and D&I, 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 to sustain long-term attitudinal and behavioral change, which also relies on leaders motivating individuals to change by providing relevant content. The content must stimulate motivation, and the communication 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, fewer 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. Leaders have the opportunity to provide inclusion experiences by engaging in inclusive leadership behavior.

Systemic barriers. Systemic barriers refer to military norms and routine practices that by their very design perpetuate disparities. These barriers include implicit and systemic biases and other contributing factors that challenge the realization and sustainment of inclusivity (Henkhaus et al., 2020). Traditional leadership approaches often reinforce systemic, institutionalized beliefs that can be a barrier to truly inclusive environments. Accountability frameworks must be inclusive in nature and remain responsive to the needs of all stakeholders in the organization. Accountability systems should aim at creating a climate of psychological safety and trust that fosters a sense of 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 D&I.

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). Inclusive leaders serve as role models and allow followers to learn by

observation (Bandura, 1986). The expectation is that each service member develops a sense of personal accountability and commitment 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 to communicator, and, at the lowest involvement level, engaged participant. Leaders, who serve as role models, should mentor subordinates and identify communicators throughout their command who 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).

Addressing Institutional Barriers. The overarching goal of diversity and inclusion efforts must be systemic, not simply 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 in the military (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 or military norms and rituals surrounding grooming standards, to name a few.

Theoretical Frameworks

While inclusive leadership can provide leaders with strategies and behaviors that facilitate inclusion experiences and a positive diversity climate (Catalyst, 2021), leaders also

must develop a leadership accountability framework to specifically address EO, EEO, and D& I concerns in their respective organizations.

Inclusive Leadership Behaviors. Ferdman (2020, p. 19-20) recommends the following leadership behaviors while emphasizing that the overarching goals of inclusive leadership are 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 D&I, EO, and EEO should be based on deliberate and strategic decision making and grounded in an understanding of the DoD's overall objective of increasing total force readiness by ensuring return of investment (ROI) on D&I. 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

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 the individual level to the organization at large.

Impact on the Individual

Accountability around issues of diversity and inclusion is necessary for any organization; not doing so can lead to the exclusion of individuals, which undermines psychological safety. 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, which lowers their work satisfaction and commitment resulting in employee behaviors such as withdrawal from the organization and intentions 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 accountability around issues of diversity and inclusion poses a variety of risks to the organization: psychological unsafety that is taxing to individuals and can lead to recruitment and retention issues, which can be costly to the DoD. More overt instances of exclusion can lead to litigation and damage the organization's reputation and trust in the organization; it can threaten the basic 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 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 to employees being 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 as well as overall organizational performance (McKay, Avery, Liao, & Morris, 2011; McKay et al., 2007; McKay et al., 2008).

Strategies for Senior Leaders

This section outlines strategies for senior leaders to address the challenges and opportunities of EO, EEO, and D&I. These strategies include how to assess organizational performance as it relates to pro-diversity climates, strategic initiative to foster inclusion, and ways to communicate these strategies, followed by best practice examples in corporate settings.

Performance Assessment

Strategies to improve diversity and inclusion rely on accountability and should be tied to measurements to achieve diversity and inclusion goals. Clear and measurable accountability 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 (ICDM) (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. 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 D&I efforts can be a relevant performance indicator. Other suggested measures include demographic diversity or talent acquisitions data. However, a diverse organization is not necessarily also inclusive. While some believe numeric measurements are needed to hold individuals and organizations accountable in their D&I efforts, qualitative measures in the form of interviews and focus groups across the organizational hierarchy may be better able to capture minority voices (Chapman CG, 2015).

Strategic Leadership Initiatives

Strategic leadership initiatives rely on competent leaders possessing the skills, knowledge, and abilities to foster a pro-diversity climate and to create and implement an accountability framework 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. Holmes et al. (2021) recommend the following:

> 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. (Cox, 1994; McKay & Avery, 2005, p. 1374)

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

1. Human resources practices that promote fairness across the organization, to include selection, performance evaluations, promotions, professional development opportunities, and resource allocation.

2. Leaders who make strategic, diversity-focused investments as necessary, such as employee resource groups or leadership pipeline programs; leaders who affirm diverse, individual identities, develop cultural competency, and create a psychologically safe environment, and leaders who ensure that members of underrepresented groups are recruited, supported, and promoted in their organizations.

Accountability framework. Workplace accountability traditionally has focused on ensuring processes are followed while considering inputs utilized and 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 in evidence about the value added by an initiative (Dwyer, 2017). For example, the organization and leadership must do the following:

1. Establish a performance measurement regime

2. Be willing to be evaluated, at the individual, unit, and organizational level

3. Focus on continuous improvement and performance measurement to develop and adjust new initiatives as needed

4.   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, lastly, leaders' commitment to change and willingness to act, i.e., leaders' *attitudes*. 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, ideally multiple opportunities to apply their knowledge. Leaders should practice taking action and receiving feedback through, e.g., workshops, case studies, guided practices, or field work 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

Effective leadership also 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). Leadership may be able to reduce the incidence of discriminatory decision making by setting explicit expectations for fairness and equity (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).

Brown at 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. As noted by other researchers, "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 their professional lives (Treviño et al., 2000, 2003).

Strategic Leadership Communication

Following identification of challenges and opportunities, senior leaders should strive to develop and implement strategic plans to foster a diversity-supportive climate of inclusion in their organization. The communication of the strategic plan across the organization begins with the strategic plan itself:

Strategic Plan. Strategic plans should contain a mission statement that serves as the foundation of the strategic plan. It should outline institutional values and goals while developing a vision for the future. A strategic plan should further outline clear objectives toward goal accomplishment. Finally, strategic plans must contain an implementation plan that identifies people and resources needed and outlines action steps (Hinton 2012; McPhail & McPhail, 2020). Strategic leaders must ensure midlevel 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 identify and communicate the plan

with other leaders who will serve as change agents or communicators respectively.

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).

Methods of Instruction

Motivation/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, is

equally effective regardless if delivered in-person or via e-learning (Mehall, 2022) and 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 one-time training events (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 learning outcomes (e.g., Glenberg, 1979; Kornell, 2009). Training should be provided in a synchronous classroom setting, either live, virtual, 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).

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Activity Appendix

PRIOR TO ANY AND ALL USE OF THE ACTIVITIES IN THIS APPENDIX, PLEASE VERIFY THAT

AUTHOR/OWNER PERMISSION IS OBTAINED WHERE NEEDED AND THAT USE OF THE

MATERIALS DOES NOT RESULT IN COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT.

Reflections to Set the Tone

The activities below 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 Multiple Narratives

The novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues that, "the problem with stereotypes is not that

they are untrue, but that they are incomplete." Have attendees watch her TED Talk, "*The*

Danger of a Single Story," and allow space for attendees' independent reflections on the social

groups that they still hold "single stories" about. Suggested discussion questions include the

following:

- Can you think of some single or predominant stories you hold yourself?

- What are the common single stories in your organization?

- How can you encourage multiple stories/narratives in your organization?

- How can you develop accountability around ensuring a pro-diversity climate that

  encourages multiple stories/narratives in your organization?

Ted. (2009, October 7). *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story* [Video].

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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 discusses the need to develop organizational accountability with regard to DEI. Have attendees watch her Ted talk before presenting the discussion prompts listed below. Suggested discussion questions 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). *Lorén Cox: The missing link in DEI* [Video].

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

Creating a Culture of Accountability

Participants should read the below article by Michael Timms, followed by 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 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 behaviour. The reality is that the only thing people learn from being blamed is to become better at hiding their mistakes.

The only thing people learn from being blamed is to become better at hiding their mistakes.

	Culture of Blame	Culture of Accountability
Believes	People are the problem	People are problem solvers
	Problems are headaches	Problems are learning opportunities
	Admitting weaknesses is career limiting	We are all still learning
Focused on	Who is wrong	What is wrong
	The individual	The process
	Fault-finding	Fact-finding
	The past	The future
	Assigning punishment	Improving future results
Results in	Making assumptions	Considering alternatives
	Hoarding decision-making authority	Delegating decision-making authority
	Hiding problems	Surfacing problems and solutions
	Finger-pointing and CYA behaviour	Learning from mistakes
	Distrust	Trust
	Turf wars	Cross-functional cooperation
	Risk adverse	Calculated risk taking
	Wait until told	Taking initiative
	Lack of innovation	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.
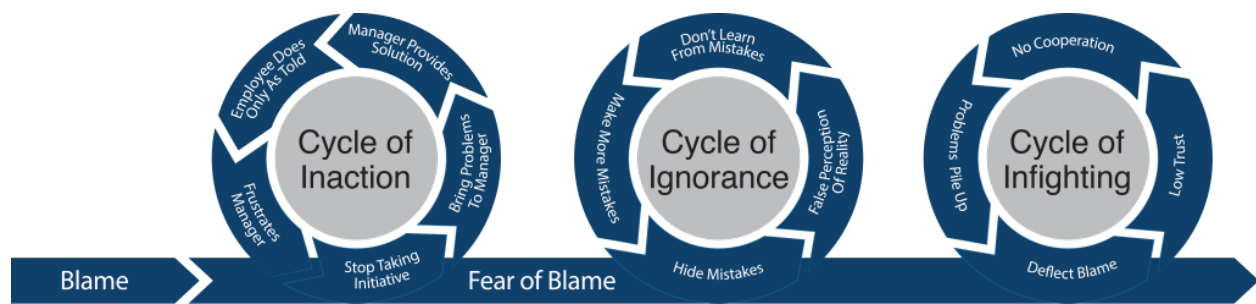
Cycle of Inaction

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?

Developing Accountability in Confronting Prejudiced Comments

The below scenarios were adapted from Lawson and Veraldo (2022) who used similar scenarios to assess the effectiveness of a prejudice response training exercise among a sample of collegiate

athletes. The scenarios were adapted for a military context and can serve as an opportunity for leaders to rehearse how to respond when confronted with prejudiced comments and how to develop accountability around responding to prejudice in their respective organizations.

Scenario 1

Speaker: White male soldier

Responder: White male soldier

Background: Comment was made in a private, late-night barracks room conversation about why there are so many Black professional athletes.

Comment: "It is a proven fact that Blacks are not as developed intellectually as Whites, but over the years have genetically become better athletes."

Discussion: You are informed of this conversation by another soldier in the unit. How do you respond? How do you develop accountability around these types of comments across the unit/your chain of command?

Scenario 2

Speaker: White middle-aged female officer

Responder: White middle-aged male officer

Background: Both parties are discussing the news over lunch. Comment was made about a Latina woman who had pretended to have U.S. citizenship in order to get a job.

Comment: "I felt like saying to her, 'Go back to Spain you filthy immigrant!'"

Discussion: You overhear this conversation. How do you respond? How do you hold the speakers accountable?

Scenario 3

Speaker: recently married Hispanic sailor

Responder: fellow married White sailor

Background: Comment was made during a discussion of what married life was like and how to make marriages succeed.

Comment: "Women should be barefoot and pregnant in the house."

Discussion: A female sailor overheard this conversation at lunch and shares her concern with you. How would you respond? What will you do to create accountability around these types of statements and ensure a healthy command climate?

Scenario 4

Speaker: 30-year-old Civilian contractor

Responder: another contractor

Background: They are talking about politics.

Comment: "Trump is right. America was once a great nation, but the Muslims have ruined it. They need to leave."

Discussion: You witness this conversation while walking into the office. How do you respond? What could motivate the speaker for change? How can you hold yourself and others accountable when dealing with these types of comments?

Scenario 5

Speaker: African American female airman

Responder: African American female airman

Background: They are looking at a photo of a party that someone went to, and all of the people at the party were Black.

Comment: "Aw, good, the people at the party didn't get shot."

Discussion: You overhear this comment at a lunch facility on base. How do you respond? How can you develop a command climate of accountability regarding prejudicial statements?

Core Value Exploration

This exercise was adapted from the University of Michigan, Organizational Learning (2018). The activity was modified to include an exploration of military Service values and how these values can inform initiatives to develop DEI accountability.

The Core Values exercise is designed to allow participants an opportunity to explore their professional military service values on a profound level. By examining a list of values and ranking each of them from "always valued" to "least valued," individuals will engage in self-reflection and evaluation. By the end of the activity, everyone will have a chart of core professional values that define them; participants can also be prompted to share their list of core values with the larger group and generate a list of shared values. Doing so will give everyone the opportunity to observe one another's core values, and will promote dialogue about any differences present as well as any common values.

Suggested list of values: fairness, justice, service, loyalty, duty, responsibility, honesty, integrity, creativity, humility, tolerance

Suggested discussion questions:

- Looking over your most important values – how should these values be reflected in your efforts towards holding yourself and others accountable with regard to DEI efforts?

- How are these values incompatible with prejudice and discrimination?

- How can you utilize a value-based approach to motivate others in your command to hold themselves accountable in their DEI efforts?