

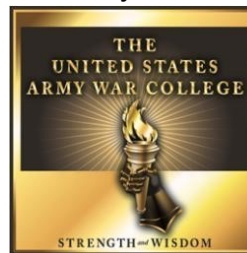
USAWC Fellow
Strategic Research Project

**“A Commanders Model for Effective
D.E.I.B. Efforts”**

by

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<p>Army commanders at every echelon are responsible for establishing organizational culture for the units they lead. Cultural considerations are multi-faceted. , A particularly challenging area of culture and leadership is Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. My research project researches, develops, and offers a 24-month model by which a commander can assess, design, implement, sustain and transfer an effective unit culture with specific emphasis on DEIB. Using a well-tested existing Army Leader Transition model, I have overlaid a conceptual framework that demonstrates key components for a commander to consider in regard to DEIB. The research methodology is based on interviews with both civilian and military leaders in the DEIB space, a yearlong case study, and an expansive literature review. The 24-month maturity model provides a framework that a commander can use to sequentially lead in the area of organizational culture and DEIB. The model is designed to be sufficiently flexible such that it can be adapted across contexts and commanders resulting in long term sustainable change at the unit level and across the Army.</p>					
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A Commanders Model for Effective D.E.I.B. Efforts.

(5429 words)

Introduction

Military commanders work to ensure that their units function effectively secure the most the most productive environments possible. Commanders, however, are often faced with numerous and varied challenges towards achieving this compelling objective. Organizational cultural frameworks, when combined with an emphasis on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) can serve as a powerful tool towards realizing the range of goals supporting this interest.

Large gaps typically exist between individual personal cultural assessments and world views and the culture and world view of the Soldiers military leaders are responsible for guiding. “The individual as a cultural entity can be analyzed in terms of artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying basic assumptions. We all carry within us assumptions about the state of the world and about the correct ways to engage relationships we share in it.”¹ Additionally, in terms of DEIB, Soldiers are accustomed to “check the block” efforts by the Army that are reactive in nature and are not permanent parts of how the Army functions. “Indeed, the breadth of DEI provides a tantalizing opportunity to conduct performative, check-the-box training events, then skip any real follow through and instead just move on to the next disadvantaged group all under the auspices of “inclusion.” Meanwhile, systemic and structural inequities persist (or increase) in the absence of specific, intentional sustained focus...”² Moreover, the topic is often surrounded by so much emotion that clarity and effective change is never

¹ Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 1985. 5th ed., Hoboken, New Jersey Wiley, 2010.

² Brownlee, Dana. “This Is Why Corporate DEI Tragically Fails Many Black Professionals.” *Forbes*, 11 Aug. 2022, www.forbes.com/sites/danabrownlee/2022/08/11/this-is-why-corporate-dei-tragically-fails-many-black-professionals/?sh=c8fd65defbcc.

accomplished. “When ideologies, such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and individualism are challenged, intense emotional reactions are common.”³ Lastly, there are conversations that occur amongst the Soldiers in regard to DEIB that never reach the ear of the commander. These conversations are full of information that a commander could action if the Soldiers felt comfortable enough to present their ideas and feelings.

This research is intended to assist a commander in understanding the cultural nuance that Soldiers bring with them to the unit, eliminate “check the block” efforts, reduce the emotions that surround the discussion, and get the conversations from the parking lot, barracks, and the water cooler to the commander’s ear. “At the core of every successful conversation lies the free flow of information. People openly and honestly express their opinions, share their feelings, and articulate their theories. They willingly and capably share their views, even when their ideas are controversial or unpopular.”⁴

Definitions

Throughout this research project I quickly learned that there exists no standard universally agreed upon singular definition of DEIB. While this lack of conceptual consensus creates challenges for starting new DEIB efforts, it also provides opportunities for innovation. To help address such challenges each commander should utilize scholarly evidence to develop a clear conceptual definition best suited for his unit’s unique needs. Additionally, DEI efforts have in recent years been subjected to both social critique and political attack. Simply mentioning DEIB conjures varied

³ DiAngelo, Robin J. *White Fragility: Why It’s so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. Boston, Beacon Press, 2018.

⁴ Grenny, Joseph, et al. *Crucial Conversations*. 3rd ed., New York, McGraw Hill, 2023.

thoughts and emotions from individuals and organizations. For this reason, and per the suggested guidance above, my research informs that DEIB in the context of an Army unit is best defined as follows:

1. A unit where Soldiers are accepted with the differences that exist amongst people from diverse backgrounds and world views.
2. A unit where everyone receives fair treatment, access to resources, protection from risks and opportunities to advance, succeed, and thrive.
3. A unit culture where everyone feels valued, respected, supported, and safe to be authentic. A place where offering differing ideas is expected and well received. An environment where critical feedback is given and received, and people seek to uplift each other in their differences.
4. A feeling of community, connectedness, acceptance, and value. The sense that varied perspective are useful, and diverse ideas and inputs are encouraged to be voiced.

If you believe all Soldiers, regardless of ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, socioeconomic background, or any other diverse identity characteristic are entitled to a fully humanizing unit culture as described above, this research may be beneficial to you. Martin N. Davidson emphasized the direct correlation between recognizing and valuing social differences and organizational effectiveness. He says: "The foundational competency for seeing difference is identifying what difference is relevant. A relevant difference is one that is strategically

meaningful to the organization and that has the potential to help it perform more effectively.”⁵

Each organization will define its own DEIB efforts. This notwithstanding, below I share widely accepted identity categories that are most often referenced in DEIB efforts as found thorough a scholarly literature review and via participant observation through lived experience.

1. Ethnicity
2. Gender
3. Gender identity
4. Sexual orientation
5. Age
6. Military/veteran status
7. Physical ability
8. Disability status
9. Religion
10. Socioeconomic Position
11. Mental ability

The organizational leader sets the tone for how units function!

Military organizations are run by an identified leader based on title, position and/or rank. Leaders are directly responsible and accountable for organization functioning, including both successes and failures. While influential subordinate leaders inevitably exist at each echelon, the most senior leader determines and establishe

⁵ Davidson, Martin N. *The End of Diversity as We Know It : Why Diversity Efforts Fail and How Leveraging Difference Can Succeed*. Editorial: San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2011.

workplace culture.. DEIB efforts are most effective when organizational leaders clearly articulate, demonstrate and promote desired behaviors. This practice extends to DEIB efforts. Indeed, “Effective DEI work is entirely people-driven and requires expertise in navigating cognitive, perceptual, social processes, and behaviors.”⁶

Organizational members look to leadership to establish the policies governing both permission and acceptance of behaviors. Leaders can either be proactive, passive, or permissive in setting the tone for productive DEIB behavior. Passive or permissive leaders typically set a tone counterproductive to the success of DEIB efforts.

Conversely, proactive leaders provide the necessary example and foundation upon which a team can create an effective culture of DEIB. “When it comes to the strategy and implementation of a diversity program, responsibility for the success of company’s diversity/inclusion efforts lies with senior management...Since 2003, L’Oréal USA’s office of diversity has reported directly to the CEO. “I have to be the champion of diversity and inclusion,” said L’Oréal CEO Rozé. “It is my job to be a role model and show how important this is to our company. It is part of my responsibility to set objectives and monitor progress within our teams.”⁷

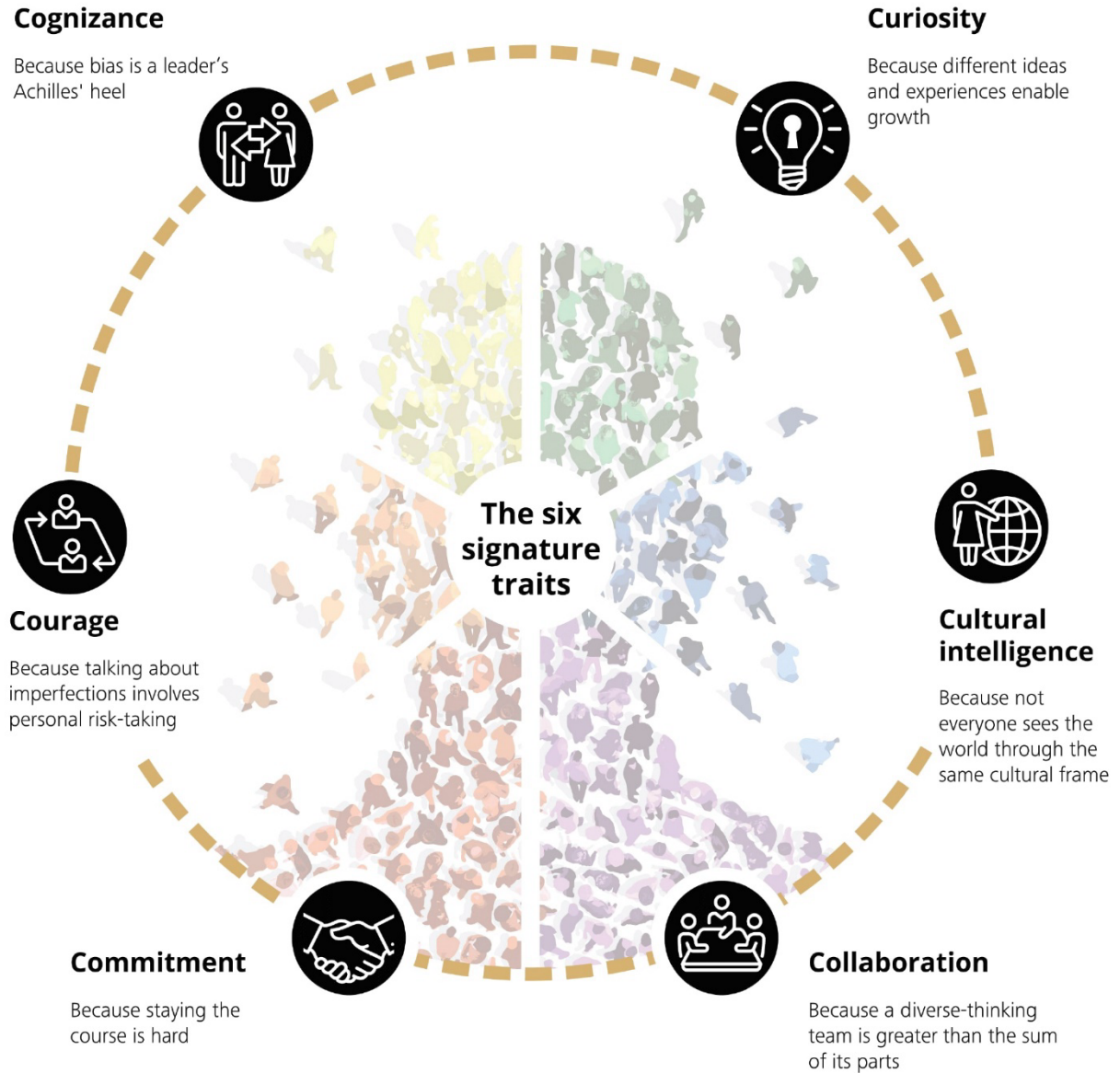
Deloitte research has identified the following six signature traits of highly inclusive leaders: Commitment, Courage, Cognizance of bias, Curiosity, Culturally

⁶ Jenkins, Netta. *The Inclusive Organization*. John Wiley & Sons, 14 June 2023.

⁷ *Fostering Innovation through a Diverse Workforce*. Forbes Insights, 2011.

intelligent and Collaboration.⁸

FIGURE 5 | The six signature traits of an inclusive leader



Deloitte Insights | deloitte.com/insights

⁸ Bourke, Juliet, and Bernadette Dillon. "The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution Eight Powerful Truths." Deloitte Review, vol. 22, no. 22, Jan. 2018, www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/4209_Diversity-and-inclusion-revolution/DI_Diversity-and-inclusion-revolution.pdf.

A commander's commitment to DEIB efforts is paramount because the journey can often be long and filled with challenges. Commitment is also an imperative because real change takes time. Research shows that most organizational change takes multiple years at a minimum, and sometimes a decade or more of intentional efforts.

The commander must have courage to attempt any cultural change, let alone around DEIB. Even if DEIB changes will make an organization more effective, people are often resistant to change, particularly in well-established cultural environments. This resistance is because it requires effort, time, resources, mental investment, hard conversations, uncomfortable self-reflection, perspective adjustment and possible changes to institutional policies and procedures. "The most powerful mechanisms that founders, leaders, managers, and parents have available for communication what they believe in or care about is what they systematically pay attention to."⁹

All humans hold and display social biases. Commanders seeking to be proactive in DEIB must be aware of their personal biases and blind spots. This is more than a notion, given the evidence demonstrating wide ranging unconscious biases. Acknowledging and taking steps to meaningfully address biases, conscious or unconscious, is among the most challenging of individual endeavors. Critically important to commander leadership and success in establishing a culture of DEIB is recognition and open acknowledgment that personal bias does not equate to poor character, ineffective leadership, or ill intent, but is a crucial step in leading DEIB.

Finally, the ability to be open minded while combatting social judgement, to learn about diverse cultural orientations and to create an environment where diversity of

⁹ Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 1985. 5th ed., Hoboken, New Jersey Wiley, 2010.

thought and viewpoint is welcomed and encouraged are critical traits of effective DEIB commanders.

Step 1: Asses the current state of the organization

Before DEIB efforts begin, a commander must assess and provide a clear and accurate accounting of the unit's current state. Identifying strengths and areas for growth and improvement in a unit does not mean the current culture is dysfunctional, bad, broken, or divisive. A commonly occurring theme in this case study was resistance to identifying growth areas. There existed concern for the sentiment that if growth areas existed then the leader or individual members were being accused of counterproductive behavior or being held accountable for the historic actions of others from the past. The current research offers 4 key questions that should be answered in the assessment phase of DEIB initiatives:

1. Does our demographic distribution reflect the communities or populations we propose to serve?
2. Is the organization characterized by disproportionate attrition and retention?
3. How is the organization perceived externally ?
4. Are we adequately prepared to begin DEIB efforts?

A key consideration regarding DEIB is the desired outcomes for the organization. Unfortunately, DEIB is often reduced to numbers, proportions or percentages. For example, in non-military organizations, a common sentiment might be: "We are an organization of 100 employees, and we will be diverse if 20 of our employees are from underrepresented populations." The problem with such a sentiment is twofold. First, the numbers will only really address the "D" in "DEIB". Second, the numbers are often

arbitrary in nature. Although numbers do not necessarily mean that equity, inclusion, and belonging are present, they can be a part of the overall holistic approach to DEIB. In most military units, the commander does not determine the demographic of the unit in the same way civilian hiring practices operate. Therefore, an Army commander must concentrate more on the unit culture that exists for the people that are assigned by the Army to his/her formation. A good start for assessing organizational diversity is how well it represents the demographics of the nation we serve. Additionally, do leadership positions also reflect population demographics? Is diversity represented in meetings, decision making, and advising the commander? Are diverse perspectives represented amongst those “sitting at the table”? Asking and honestly answering these key questions can begin to paint a picture of how diverse a unit is or is not.

The popular saying goes: “People vote with their feet.” A clear indication of the current state of an organization is retention. One of the best ways to assess why people leave the organization is to conduct exit interviews with those leaving the formation with intentional DEIB questions that can ascertain if behaviors counterproductive to DEIB were perceived by the persons choosing to leave. Even if such counterproductive behavior was not the primary reason for departure, the feedback about their experiences is critical to informing and improving subsequent efforts.

Examining the external perception of an organization is often an arduous task. Members of the organization may tend to dismiss external perception as a form of assessment because perception is not always accurate. However, using perception as a tool to assess your organization is not about whether the perception is accurate. Instead, this practice is about gauging observed behaviors that have, over time, created

such external perceptions. In most cases, external perceptions are wrought of not entirely inaccurate assessment. Although perception may be from an inaccurate conclusion drawn between observed behaviors and culture or intent, the perception should still compel the organization to examine the observed behaviors. Before starting DEIB efforts to identify what idiosyncrasies outside agents may perceive as contrary to DEIB it is helpful to determine if those idiosyncrasies should be adjusted.

The final area to consider when assessing the current state of an organization prior to starting DEIB initiatives is readiness. An organization should not assume just because DEIB is both virtuous and beneficial that it is ready to integrate efforts into the current culture. A hasty start that lacks intentionality is likely to produce an effort that either dies quickly or lacks sustainable change value over time. In addition to a thorough assessment of the current state, there likely exist additional challenges that should be explored prior to starting DEIB. One such additional area involving DEIB readiness is diversity specific retention strategies.

As with all effective assessments it is imperative to track findings during the assessment process. Such findings should be organized, synthesized, and reported to the commander such that they can then be appropriately framed and shared with the broader organization. Leaders may be hesitant to share early reports and findings across the entire organization. Research and experience show that this is a misguided practice. Transparency and buy in are essential components to be established early in the process for change to be effective. **Kotter's change model, referred to earlier lists the first two steps of lasting organizational change as "creating urgency"**

followed by “forming a coalition”. Additionally, sharing findings early creates an opportunity to receive organization wide input and feedback.

Finally, assessment is not just the first step in initiating DEIB it is also a critically important ongoing component of the process. DEIB done correctly requires regular assessment of organizational culture to be ongoing. Doing so ensures that efforts do not become stagnant or status quo and DEIB endeavors remain fresh, practical, and relevant to the culture of the organization.

Step 2: Design your unique approach & plan.

As commanders begin to design a DEIB plan of action, it is important to avoid attempted application of universally appropriate, one-size fits all frameworks and models. Even if the plan of action you are copying has been effective in other contexts, such success is contingent upon that organization’s culture. The starting point, key players, leadership, community demographics, support, and challenges are context specific and highly variable. Consequently, while lessons can be drawn from other DEIB action plans, individual organizations demand a plan that is specific, personalized, and unique to its cultural values and needs.

Another imperative before designing an effective DEIB plan of action is creating a good working conceptual definition of what DEIB means for your organization. DEIB was first conceived and constructed during the US Civil Rights Movement, albeit the components were called by different names. In the late 1980’s prominent companies began to implement diversity considerations into the structure of their organizations. However, it wasn’t until the mid 1990’s that research began to support the efficacy of workplace DEI. More recently, as the United States has been faced with numerous

highly public race based social injustices, DEIB has become more popular across numerous and varied organizations.

A major challenge with the DEIB movement over the last 60 years is that it is often poorly defined. In other cases, people and organizations have used DEIB as a platform to achieve goals and objectives that are not congruent with holistic DEIB cultural values. Unfortunately, this has caused many to associate negative sentiments at just hearing the term DEIB. Consequently, it may be beneficial for organizations to steer away from the language of DEIB and use language that is unique to their community, but still communicates the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

A helpful tool in designing a DEIB plan is a DEIB Maturity Model. There are many versions of DEIB Maturity Models produced by various organizations. All the models examined in this project contained either 4 or 5 phases with minimal differences between them. A DEIB Maturity Model serves as a strategic plan for moving from the starting point of having no strategy at all, through various stages of required compliance and adaptation to full integration and cultural change.

Based on this review of DEIB Maturity Models, I have constructed an integrated conceptual framework of a DEIB Maturity Model. My framework contains the following 6 phases:

1. Pre-awareness – in this phase the organization is unaware of the benefits of DEIB or the necessity to devote time, energy, and resources to DEIB efforts. There is no DEIB strategy, and nothing has been started.
2. Awareness – in this phase the organization has been made aware of both the need and benefits of DEIB through a person and/or series of events. A

conversation begins about how to assess and incorporate DEIB effectively. The leadership is unsure of exactly what to do and how to do it. However, the commander begins to assess the current cultural environment and brainstorm how to productively incorporate DEIB into institutional practices. At this stage, little to no data, formal or informal, has been collected. The organization discusses and decides what DEIB metrics should be utilized and what questions should be asked.

3. Compliance – in this phase the organization seeks to answer the question: “What are we required to do?” The answer to that question is provided by Federal and state laws and policies of the institution and governing bodies. The organization commits to productively responding to DEIB challenges. Diversity is a now considered, but equity, inclusion, and belonging remain future concepts and objectives to be realized.
4. Initial attempts at integration – in this phase the organization seeks to make DEIB an integral part of regular functioning and operation. Data is used to inform and support the need for DEIB efforts. Policies, programs, and practices are analyzed based on DEIB data. DEIB is not a program or presentation, but instead core guiding principles that are infused across all elements of the organization. The DEIB strategy is well defined and legitimate efforts are made to have it function efficiently. Trainings are established to ensure understanding and empathy across the organization. Significant resources are dedicated to DEIB. Regular organizational practice is considered through the lens of DEIB.

5. Initial attempts at culture change – in this phase the organization has an established mission, vision, and core values as they relate to DEIB. Leaders at multiple levels are drivers of DEIB in their sphere of influence. Hiring practices, recruitment, retention, and professional development all are informed by DEIB.
6. Continuity plan – Evidence suggests and confirms that cultural change usually takes longer than the typical 24 months of command in the Army. Consequently, commanders must create plans transferable subsequent commanders such that continuity sufficient to secure long term momentum and change is created.
7. Sustained culture change – in this phase the organizational efforts remain strong and sustainable over time. DEIB is ingrained in the cultural practices of the organization. DEIB efforts are robust against oppositional challenges and changes in personnel. All organizational leaders have a proactive mindset towards repeated DEIB advancement. Organizational cultural values are recognized by outside agencies.

An important consideration in designing a DEIB action plan is identifying key personnel who can champion programmatic efforts. Contingent upon organizational size, DEIB is likely to be a full-time job. Consequently, programmatic efforts should be distributed across a coalition of team members and must have the backing of the most senior organizational leader, empowering them to accomplish the vitally important DEIB mission. Some organizations may consider DEIB an afterthought relegating it to an extra duty or responsibility of select individuals or small groups of individuals within the organization. While some situations may necessitate such practices, this is not ideal. Ideally, a well-organized team of individuals with experience, expertise, passion and

intimate knowledge of current organizational culture. The team must be comprised of Soldiers senior enough in the organization to influence far and wide, who possess interpersonal skills, and have the institutional authority to drive productive change.

The team can assist the commander in executing the following key tasks in the designing of the action plan:

1. Create the DEIB vision, mission, and strategy that nests with the overall unit vision, mission, and strategy.
2. Garner the support of key stakeholders.
3. Coordinate DEIB meetings.
4. Incorporate DEIB into professional development training for the unit and facilitate DEIB specific onboarding actions steps for new team members.
5. Establish DEIB measurements and accountability.
6. Create a DEIB coaching program.
7. Create DEIB mentoring programs.
8. Develop and execute the professional development of inclusive leaders.
9. Create effective messaging initiatives.

As with all steps in incorporating DEIB, demonstrated commander commitment is paramount. Variable perspectives from across the organization should be modeled via invited, collaborative listening sessions. With more than 41 years in Army service, General Martin Dempsey commends the following to leaders: “Listen to Learn. Listen to make it clear to those who follow that you value their insights, their judgements, and their advice. Listen to understand the organization and to become mindful of

opportunities and vulnerabilities.”¹⁰ The process must be transparent to all, and open communication must be prioritized.

Step 3: Implement your plan.

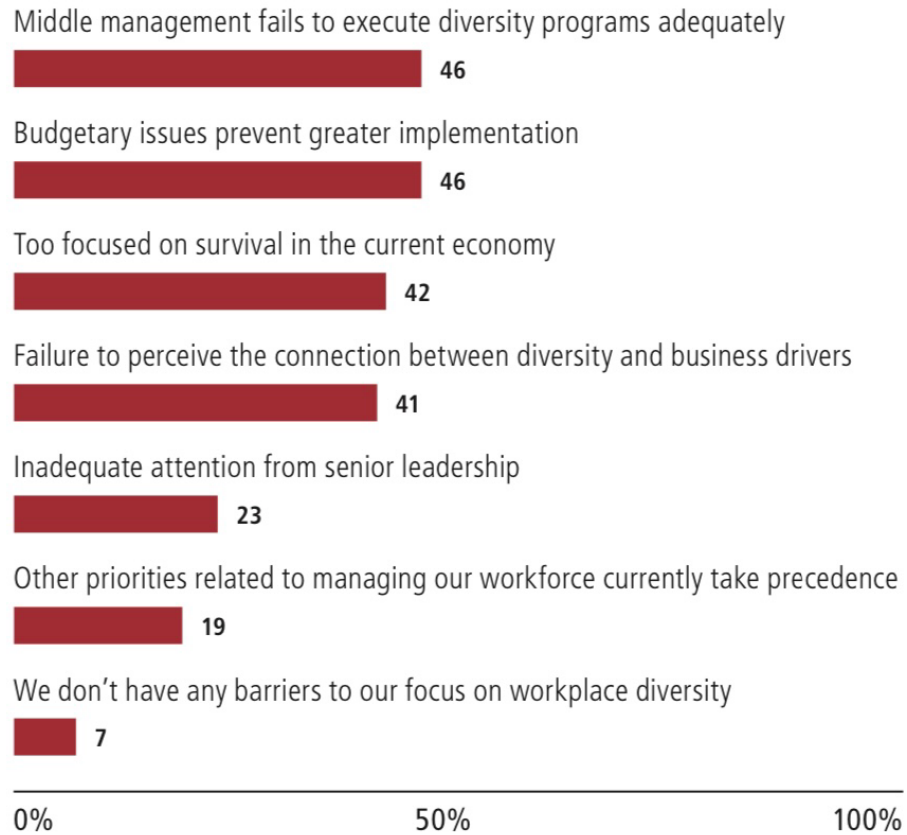
After establishing buy in and support from senior leadership as well as conducting an accurate assessment of your organization designing a plan that is specific, personalized, and unique to your organizational needs, you are now ready to begin implementation.

DEIB represents a significant change for most if not all organizations. There is no cultural change that does not encounter challenges and barriers. This fundamental truth makes it important to consider potential barriers before encountering them. Forbes presents six barriers to DEIB implementation in the below graph:¹¹

¹⁰ Dempsey, Martin E, and Ori Brafman. *Radical Inclusion : What the Post-9/11 World Should Have Taught Us about Leadership*. United States, Missionday, 2017.

¹¹ *Fostering Innovation through a Diverse Workforce*. Forbes Insights, 2011.

FIGURE 16: What barriers do you see to continuing to develop or implement a strategy for workplace diversity and inclusion?



The support of senior leadership at every phase of DEIB is essential to successful organizational efforts. Senior leadership sets the tone for efforts and drives momentum in beginning phases and pushes progress by helping to raise awareness, conduct assessments, build coalitions, and designing a strategic plan. However, successful implementation requires more than just senior leadership. Subordinate leaders and those holding key positions of influence must commit to working collaboratively in all DEIB efforts. If this is not the case, it will be difficult for growth to permeate the entire organization.

DEIB culture change involves annual trainings, informational and educational materials, events, and likely hiring of new staff. . Moreover, DEIB change is not just intellectual, educational, and heartfelt, it is also financial. Such requirements consequently require change to the organizational level budgetary commitments.

Each organization has a mission, a “bottom line”. That mission is why organizations exist. Effective organizations never lose sight of the mission and prioritize time, talent, and resources towards its accomplishment. When incorporating DEIB into organizations, exclusive focus on the existing mission can be a barrier if actively incorporating DEIB is not viewed with a perspective making it essential to organizational and mission success. “Every culture is nested in some larger culture and can do only what the larger culture affords, tolerates, or supports.”¹² If DEIB is viewed as just “another thing” in a long list of tasks for the organization to accomplish, it may become difficult to devote the time and resources needed for it to succeed. Successful DEIB efforts occur in organizations that recognize DEIB is not just good for historically underserved populations, but that DEIB is good for everyone and the entire organization. Furthermore, a culture that incorporates DEIB principles normally results in more effectiveness, higher retention, and more innovation.

Implementation of DEIB in most cases does not require dismantling an organization and starting over. In fact, DEIB has seen its greatest efficacy when DEIB goals are synchronized with the existing mission, vision, and core values.

Depending on how organizations DEIB strategic plans develop, the role of key stakeholders can develop and emerge at different times. Some commanders can elect

¹² Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 1985. 5th ed., Hoboken, New Jersey Wiley, 2010.

to form a diversity team at the very beginning of DEIB consideration. Others will form a team during the design phase. However, the team of key stakeholders should be identified and organized no later than the implementation plan.

Research supports leveraging those in the unit who have relevant lived experiences as part of an underserved or minoritized population as well as continuing to solicit those of Majoritized groups. Learning how to integrate both types of perspective is as the single greatest resource of such efforts. “Organizations are designing DEI ‘solutions’ and strategies without the perspectives and leadership of diverse people,” notes diversity, inclusion, and equity trainer and consultant Setche Kwamu-Nana.”¹³ Their experiential background gives the commander greater perspective in the area of DEIB. Combined with any amount of study in the field, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, passion, and balance such Soldiers can serve as an excellent coalition of subordinate leaders. Leveraging those with a broad range of lived experiences is beneficial for three primary reasons. Firsthand lived experience assists with the empathy and understanding needed to address the needs of previously poorly represented underserved populations. Second, lived experience provides a foundation in establishing trusting relationships across social difference with disproportionately underrepresented and well-represented Soldiers because they will most often assume that a person of similar experience shares a level of understanding that others do not have. Third, evidence confirms that members of both overrepresented and underrepresented populations may be skeptical of intentions of members from the other

¹³ Brownlee, Dana. “This Is Why Corporate DEI Tragically Fails Many Black Professionals.” Forbes, 11 Aug. 2022, www.forbes.com/sites/danabrownlee/2022/08/11/this-is-why-corporate-dei-tragically-fails-many-black-professionals/?sh=c8fd65defbce.

group. Soldiers of similar lived experience sharing the opportunity to engage with others different from them can potentially help eliminate that barrier.

This review identified organizational transparency as an oft repeated theme in successful DEIB cultures. Transparency during implementation creates buy in, occasions for feedback and opportunities for allies within the community to support.

Implementation is not dependent on having all the answers. Many organizations will be tempted to wait until they feel like that have all the answers to the questions and a total solution regarding DEIB. However, organizations do not need to wait for a total solution. If the team was effective at conducting an initial assessment and has a well-designed strategic plan, execution can begin. The implementation of DEIB is not a one-time event, or a one phase event. Implementation involves ongoing processes and opportunities for growth that continual for the life of the organization. The key is to implement, measure the results, adjust as needed, improve, and then implement again.

Lastly, don't give up! Implementation of DEIB is not without resistance, challenge, and barriers. In some organizations the resistance may be larger than in others. If you truly believe that DEIB is beneficial to the overall organization and its members then you must persist in your efforts. In the end it will be worth it to all.

Step 4: Sustain your efforts.

The commander's role is key at every stage of DEIB cultural change. Strong leadership that sets the tone for practice and behavior remains important as the organization seeks to sustain the hard work of assessment, design, implementation, and integration. One of the key contributions of the commander during sustainment is

to ensure that the subordinate leaders are fully empowered to promote and execute DEIB initiatives across the organization.

The subordinate leaders, together with the senior leaders of the organization must continue to engage the entire unit with the key principles of DEIB. Sustaining DEIB requires consistency, continued promotion, and periodic reporting of success to the organization. A well thought out and executed messaging campaign that highlights successful DEIB milestones is imperative.

For DEIB to have continued efficacy all levels of leadership must carefully listen to the Soldiers and Family members of the unit. Sustainability is dependent on a culture where feedback is welcomed, received, and actioned. Additionally, the honest and open discussions that were had during the assessment and design phases, must be encouraged to continue. Organizations personnel and constituents change over time. As these changes occur, so will the perspectives and needs of the group. For this reason, it is important to continue to dialogue about DEIB and how it can be applied to the organization.

Another key component of sustaining DEIB is ongoing and continual training. Leader training, professional development training, and the establishment of DEIB resource groups. (Internal communities of people with shared identities and interests) Establishing sponsorships for new diverse team members will also contribute to the sustainability of DEIB.

Lastly, the organization should seek to create what is termed “psychological safety” for all members of the organization. Psychological safety centers around four main feelings:

1. Feeling included & accepted.
2. Feeling safe to make mistakes while learning.
3. Feeling safe to contribute.
4. Feeling safe to challenge the status quo.

These four feelings create an atmosphere that allows team members to benefit from, learn about, contribute to, and be inquisitive about all aspects of DEIB in the organization.

Key Findings

Below are 20 key findings from my research. They can be applied broadly to any time of unit in the Army, at any echelon, and of any size.

1. The level of success is directly correlated to the level of candid, intentional, persistent efforts of the organizational leader.
2. Intentional efforts don't necessarily mean you were counterproductive before. It is merely an opportunity to grow around caring for all the people of your team.
3. Open, honest, candid conversations are one of the most important tools.
4. Progress begins with an accurate, well-informed assessment of the current state of the organization.
5. Broadly ranging social representation is essential to success!
6. The retention rate in an organization is a key indicator of how well the organization has a productive culture.
7. Transparency with the organization is crucial.
8. Assessing a productive versus counterproductive culture is a continual and cyclical process.

9. Strategic plans must be contextualized to the organization. There is no “one size fits all” strategy.
10. You must define terms early for your organization. What do each of those words mean?
11. A contextualized maturity model is a key document in an overall strategic plan.
12. Success is much more than programming or legal and policy compliance. If it is effective, it is one of the lenses through which everything an organization does is filtered.
13. To be efficacious, you must garner the support of key stakeholders and form a coalition of support as early as possible. Key stakeholders and subordinate leaders must buy in and champion efforts.
14. All initiatives must be nested with the organizations overall vision, mission, and strategy.
15. Leverage existing professional development as training opportunities.
16. Those who have lived experience as part of an underserved or minority population will often serve as great resources. This experiential background combined with study in the field, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, passion, and balance create excellent subordinate leaders.
17. An organization does not need to have everything figured out to start.
18. Receiving feedback and the ability to listen on the part of leadership directly contributes to the sustainability of initiatives.
19. It is not enough to say: “We are not against it.” You must work for it!
20. Culture change is often difficult. Don’t give up!

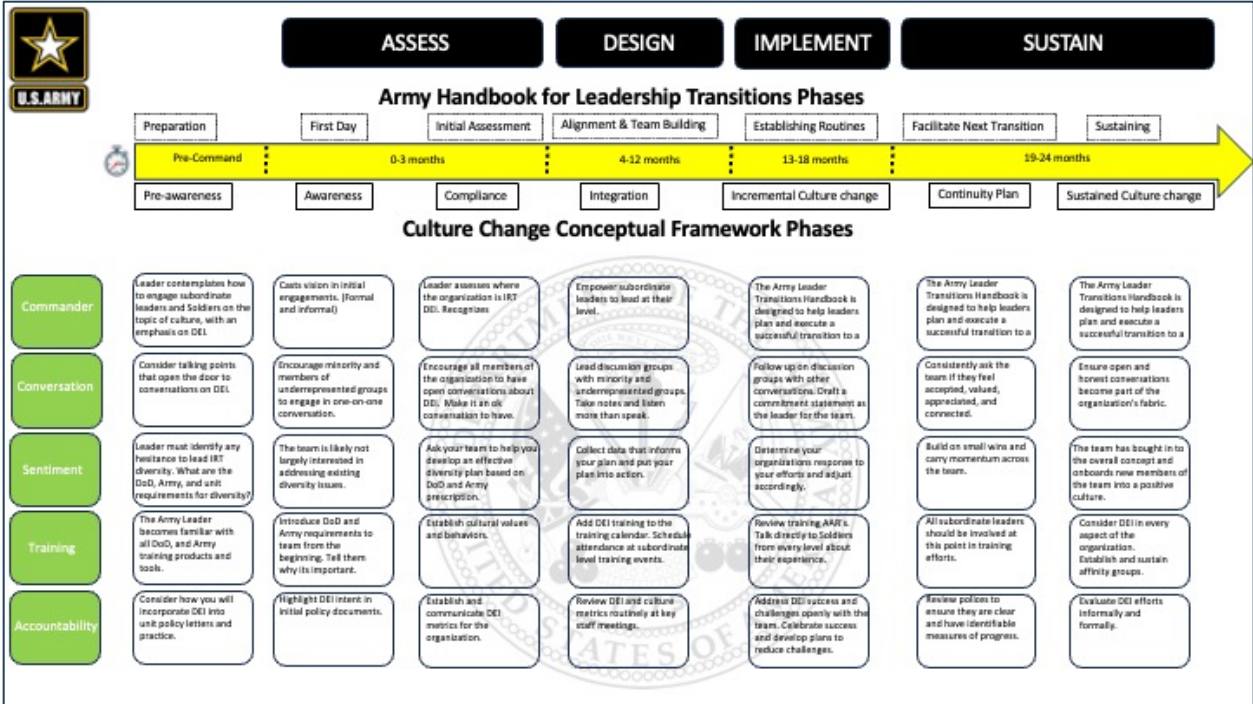
Key Questions

The following questions are useful to help all members of an institution, team, community continually assess the well-being of its members. Imagine a place where the answers to the following questions were yes 100% of the time for 100% of the people. Some may scoff as 100% as a goal but remember: Although we may never achieve 100%, the quantitative goal encourages to never give up on the pursuit of a community where everyone is celebrated.

1. Do all the people, cultures, worldviews, and perspectives of our community feel represented?
2. Do we more than tolerate differences?
3. Do we celebrate and accept differences?
4. Does everyone receive the same fair treatment?
5. Does everyone have the same access to resources?
6. Does everyone have the same opportunities for advancement and success should they choose to take advantage of them?
7. Does everyone feel valued, respected, and supported as themselves?
8. Does everyone feel it is safe to be their authentic self without fear of judgement?
9. Does everyone feel welcome to share differing ideas than the norm? Do they feel those ideas will be listened to?
10. Do people actively uplift each other regarding their differences?
11. Does everyone feel a sense of community and connection?
12. Does everyone feel valued?
13. Does everyone have a voice and are encouraged to use it?

Conclusion

The above research is the foundation upon which the following conceptual framework is constructed. The framework takes the commander through 4 sequential phases: assessment, design, implementation, and sustainment. The 7 steps of the Army's Leadership Transition Guide, correlate to the 7 steps of the culture change in regard to DEIB. Finally, there are 5 categories that a commander can navigate through over 24 months in command. Those categories are commander responsibilities, meaningful conversations, the evolving sentiments of the unit Soldiers and leadership, training, and finally accountability. It is my hope that the conceptual framework, undergirded by research can serve as a tool for commanders and the Army to create effective unit cultures specifically in regard to DEIB.



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