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Assessing Inclusion Behaviors and Impact of Inclusion within the Fleet

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NAVAL RESEARCH PROGRAM
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ASSESSING INCLUSION BEHAVIORS AND IMPACT OF INCLUSION WITHIN THE FLEET

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Summary

This project supports the Navy's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion (D&I), which are recognized as strategic imperatives that give the Navy a warfighting advantage against our adversaries. The study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand the major contributing factors to an inclusive and diverse command, accomplishing four research objectives: (1) developing metrics to assess behaviors of inclusion within the fleet; (2) assessing inclusion behaviors within the fleet using the developed metrics; (3) determining the most impactful D&I competencies for building inclusion; and (4) identifying command practices that contribute to greater acceptance of diversity. We develop and introduce a survey instrument to assess Personal Inclusion Factors (individuals' feelings of being personally included within their command) and Command Core Inclusion Competencies (individuals' beliefs about how their commands demonstrate practices that promote diversity and inclusion) suitable for a Navy context. The instrument captures best practices and validated metrics for promoting and assessing D&I in organizations and tailors them to the Navy and Sailors' work. We fielded this survey to 489 active-duty Navy personnel (enlisted and officers) asking them to report on both their current and past commands. We find that females across all race/ethnicities on average report lower feelings of inclusion and rate commands lower on Core Command Inclusion Competencies than their male counterparts. This gender difference is stronger for sea versus shore commands. Participants also answered open-ended questions about the competencies that they believed were most important for promoting D&I in the fleet. *Inclusive leadership* emerged as a dominant theme; in particular, participants felt most included in commands where leadership valued their perspectives and ideas and where Sailors felt heard on a day-in, day-out basis.

Keywords: *diversity, inclusion, competency model, training*

Background

The overarching goal of this study is to understand how to best assess diversity and inclusion in the fleet. Prior work (Arkes et al., 2020) examined how greater diversity on ships affected retention of Sailors from traditionally underrepresented groups. Their quantitative study found evidence that, for black Sailors, having more peers and superiors of the same race/ethnicity led to a greater likelihood of reenlisting. Their qualitative study, using data collected through interviews, found that the main reason retention was lower in less diverse environments was a diminished sense of belonging among members of underrepresented groups.

In our study, we aimed to further investigate factors that contribute to experiences of inclusion or exclusion in the fleet and to develop a survey instrument for assessing D&I in Navy commands.

Our research objectives are the following:
1. Develop metrics to assess behaviors of inclusion within the fleet.
2. Assess inclusion behaviors within the fleet using the developed metrics.

3. Determine which D&I competencies are the most impactful for building inclusion.
4. Determine what command practices and policies contribute to greater acceptance of diversity.

Our metrics of D&I were based on accepted best practices for promoting inclusion in organizations as well as validated/established questionnaires for assessing D&I, which we tailored to the context of the Navy and Sailors' work. The study builds directly from Arkes et al.'s (2020) qualitative study, which involved ship interviews with 45 first termers about their experiences with D&I. Our study uses insights derived from those interviews to develop a survey tool for assessing Personal Inclusion Factors (individuals' feelings of being personally included within their command) and Command Core Inclusion Competencies (individuals' beliefs about how their commands demonstrate diverse and inclusive practices) suitable for assessing D&I climate in the fleet.

To assess inclusion behaviors in the fleet, we administered the survey to two groups of participants: officers attending the Naval Postgraduate School and members of a closed Facebook group for Navy Officers. A total of 617 participants (NPS students and the Facebook Naval Officers group) responded to the survey. Of these, 489 responses were retained for data analysis, having responded to at least some of the diversity and inclusion questions. Participants rated both their current and past commands on Personal Inclusion Factors and Command Core Inclusion Competencies. The sample consisted of a wide variety of experience levels in the Navy, with a larger fraction of female and officer respondents. The group is predominantly a white sample but includes respondents from several traditionally underrepresented race/ethnicity backgrounds.

To determine which D&I competencies are most impactful for building inclusion, participants responded to open-ended questions and ranked various D&I competencies according to perceived importance.

Collectively, the study identifies command practices either currently in place or that can be implemented to promote the Navy's D&I efforts.

Findings and Conclusions
For the Personal Inclusion Factors, questions with the strongest factor loading (indicating a larger contribution to feelings of personal inclusion) were *My opinion is valued by my supervisors for important decisions* and *My experiences at the command made me believe I have equitable opportunities for a future in the Navy.* The item assessing fair distribution of outcomes (training opportunities, awards, recognition, and leadership opportunities), although important, had the weakest factor loading. For the Command Core Inclusion Competencies, the questions with the highest factor loading were *Demonstrate respect for others' values and customs*, *Acknowledge cultural differences*, and *Check [oneself] for personal biases.* For our primary analyses, items comprising the two respective scales were averaged, resulting in two scores for each command, present and past.

Many of the patterns reflected in our data track with broader themes and issues the Navy is currently tackling. When looking at personal inclusion, in general, men tended to feel stronger personal inclusion in their commands (present and past) than women. This largely held true across different race/ethnicity groups, paygrades, and years of service. Women's feelings of personal inclusion tended to increase proportionate to their tenure in the Navy.

For the Command Core Inclusion Competencies, men tended to rate commands as more inclusive than women. Similarly, members of underrepresented groups tended to rate commands as less inclusive than White respondents did. Differences between men and women in ratings of Command Core Inclusion Competencies were more pronounced in sea versus shore commands. Our results suggest that shore commands were, on average, more inclusive for women than sea commands.

Participants ranked command core inclusion competencies according to their perceived importance for promoting a diverse and inclusive command. The most important items were *listening carefully and considering others' perspectives* and *demonstrating respect for others' values and customs*. In open-ended responses, the most prominent theme across demographic groups was that inclusion entails feeling valued and heard on a day-in, day-out basis. D&I was seen largely as a "leadership problem"—something that was supported (or eroded) by leadership practices that actively included (or excluded) individuals up and down the chain of command. Interestingly, equity of outcomes and opportunities did not factor strongly into respondents' sense of an inclusive environment.

In conclusion, both personal inclusion and command competency metrics suggest that commands that tend to do better (or worse) on one aspect of D&I tend to do better (or worse) on most/all other aspects. Despite emphasis on D&I initiatives, there remain "inclusion" gaps between underrepresented and majority Sailors, particularly at sea. Educating and developing Navy leaders who are adept at promoting inclusion throughout the command is one step the Navy can take to respond to themes surfaced by participants' responses to our survey. Our respondents looked to their leaders to set the norms and expectations for D&I in their respective commands. Leaders who showed that they valued Sailors' unique experiences and knowledge and who engaged people across the command in decisions (where appropriate) were critical to respondents' sense of inclusion.

Recommendations for Further Research
Sailors look up at their leaders to set the norms and expectations for diversity and inclusion (D&I) in their respective commands. To support the Navy in educating and developing leaders who are adept at promoting inclusion throughout command, one future study could examine whether educating leaders about concrete, actionable D&I-promoting behaviors and practices carries a lasting impact for Sailors' perceptions of D&I in their commands. Measuring the impact of concrete practices on the broader D&I climate is an important next step toward prioritizing the Navy's D&I efforts over the short-, mid-, and long-term.

References

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Acronyms

D&I   diversity and inclusion