



by Jakob Hutter

A unique characteristic of the United States military is the diverse makeup of people and their ideas.

When service members of different races, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and other identities have a shared understanding and commitment to the same mission the team can perform at a higher level, are more likely to be innovative and adaptive to shifting circumstances, and more likely to achieve organizational outcomes.

As a values-based organization, service members are expected to treat everyone with dignity and respect. On 26 June 2020, [*Project Inclusion*](#) was announced by the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army to develop a holistic effort to listen to Army personnel and enact programs to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some of these changes have included upgrading hairstyle and grooming policies, redacting identifiable information for promotion boards and Officer/Enlisted Record Briefs (ORB/ERB), and deliberate training on discrimination, prejudice, and bias.

These initiatives will help leaders who want to be more inclusive foster an equitable and inclusive environment that can facilitate stronger, adaptive, and cohesive teams that

ultimately build and sustain personal and unit readiness.

However, American society and norms in history have either prohibited or excluded military service to Americans for the color of their skin, their gender, or their sexual orientation. Over time, there has been a more inclusive and diverse development to be more reflective of the society the men and women of the armed services serve. These inclusion efforts include, for example, women being more fully accessible in serving in combat positions and transgender personnel currently allowed to serve openly as their identified gender.

Chances are that you are a part of an organization with a diverse range of people.

Practicing inclusion is relevant to everyone, especially to those in positions of leadership. Everyone has a responsibility to make their organization inclusive and integral to the workplace culture. This includes ensuring that there is a real deliberate effort in behaving inclusively, and not simply 'check the block' initiative to create a 'bullet-point' for someone's performance review.

Recently, I finished [*Inclusive Leadership: Global Impact*](#) by Dr. Ernest Gundling and Dr. Cheryl Williams. This book provides a practical and timely guide for leaders at all organizational levels who want to make real progress against the impacts of racial bias and other forms of exclusion. These other forms of exclusion can occur against groups and individuals' economic, social, birth or background, societal, political, and so on. A strong organizational culture with inclusive leaders will be aware of the five inclusive behaviors and five organizational levers to connect people at various levels and locations.

[Inclusive leadership](#) behaviors are important for leaders to role model to allow others to feel included. These can include self-awareness, humility, open-mindedness, and effective collaboration. The five inclusive behaviors that Dr. Gundling and Dr. Williams highlight include: learning about bias, building key skills, working across boundaries, becoming a champion, and getting results.

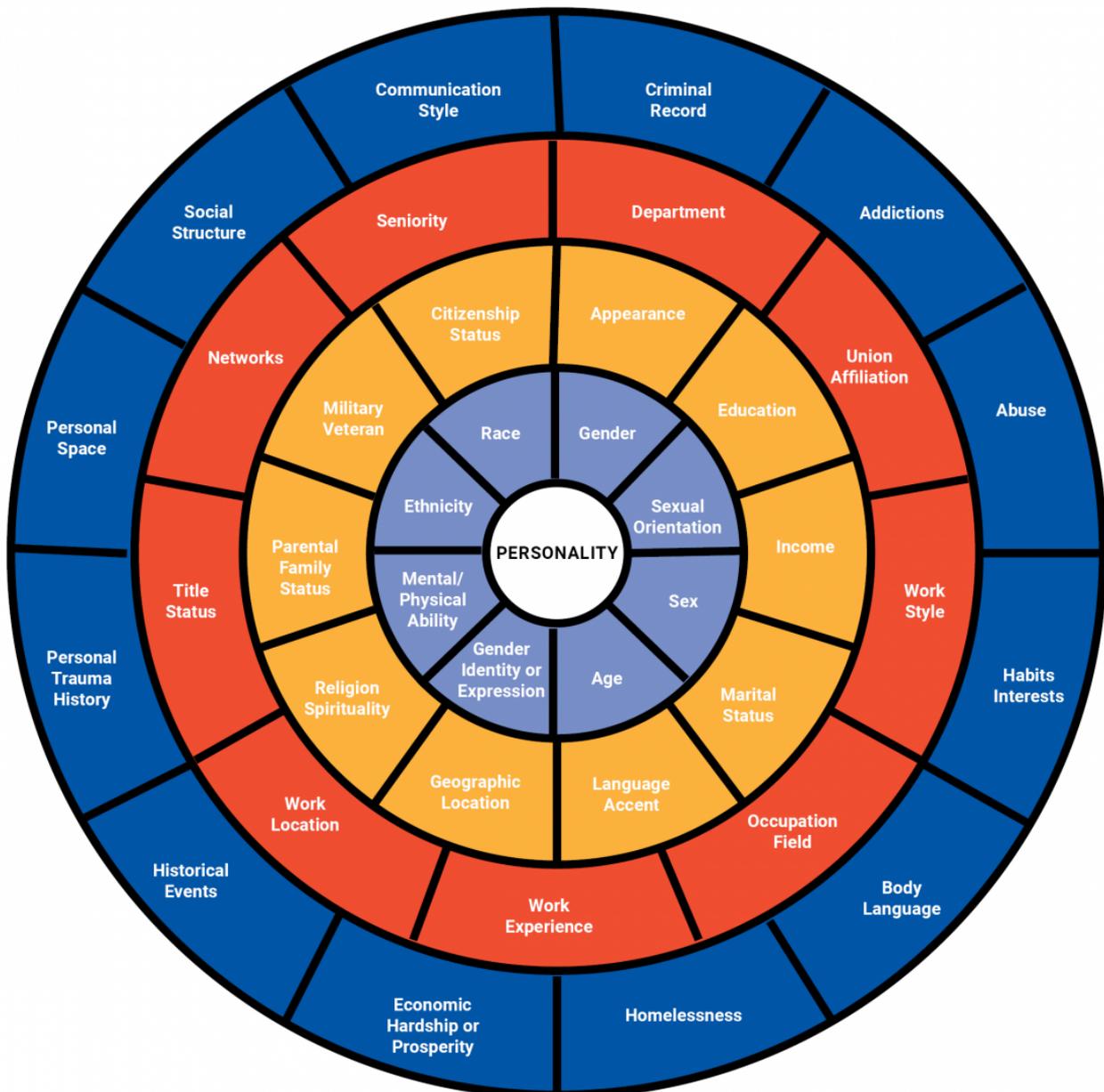
First, learning about bias must start with the individual.

[Implicit bias](#) refers to unconscious attitudes, reactions, stereotypes, and categories that affect behavior and understanding. The authors highlight this behavior by having the individual ask themselves, "How aware am I of my own biases, and how do I begin to learn about others who are different?" Each of us has our own biases, shaped by our experience, beliefs, education, values, and family and friends. Being aware of our personal biases allows us to increase our level of empathy and mitigate the influence our biases have on our

decision-making.

Second, inclusive leaders work towards building key skills that will look to build relationships with members of their team by communicating and engaging others and soliciting feedback from everyone. Inclusive leaders will work to ensure that the organizational culture is one where people feel that they belong and that they are cared for as individuals. Building key skills as inclusive leaders means that there is a conscious effort to act inclusively and value each person fairly.

Next, working across boundaries is essential to transition from the “*us versus them*” mentality to “*we are in this together.*” To work across boundaries, it is important to self-reflect on our strengths and weaknesses at a personal level and as an organization. One self-reflective tool to facilitate this is the [Diversity Wheel](#). The diversity wheel provides the four dimensions of diversity that are present and active within someone’s everyday relationships. This can shed light on explicit and hidden aspects where diversity is present. Inclusive leaders can use this tool to be more aware of the people they work with and look for opportunities in which they can be exposed to different perspectives and accept more people into their network.



The next inclusive behavior is becoming a champion of inclusion. Inclusive leaders work to rethink, redesign, and restructure the way things work within the organization. This is the behavior when words are turned into action, with leaders making a conscious effort to advocate for others, even when their styles differ from their own, and role model these behaviors. In addition, the organizational environment must have a foundation in which

trust and respect where there is a shared belief by each team member that others will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up.

Finally, the last inclusive behavior is getting results. The authors ask, “How well do you link inclusion to organizational results?” Leaders should implement idea generation, planning, and an implementation process to enhance inclusiveness organization-wide. Idea generation allows the team to consider novel ideas that may have been previously ignored. Then, developing a strategic plan with a focused objective to ensure the implementation stage does not go astray. In the final stage, the team leverages its diversity to execute the plan. While this is easier said than done, these steps are a useful guide to help inclusive leaders and the team get results.

Inclusive leaders who can model these five behaviors can effectively create an inclusive environment where people feel a sense of belonging, respect, and value within the team. This enables the team to individually and collectively work together as never before.

At the organizational level, building an inclusive strategy should include every aspect of the organization, from recruiting to training to culture. The U.S. military is a stronger fighting and capable force when the organizational culture allows people to feel welcomed. In this effort, Dr. Gundling and Dr. Williams provide five key levers of organizational support.

The first lever is recruiting. In the military profession, recruiting is essential as it is the lifeblood of the organization. Recruiters provide information regarding service, training, and career opportunities to those interested in joining the military. The recruiting team should have a common goal of finding recruits that are both well-qualified and diverse. Finding well-qualified and diverse candidates to join the military will mean that recruiters will have to pursue non-traditional methods, such as social media and video games.

Ultimately, recruiters should include in their strategy the importance of building relationships with members of their community to find the best recruits. This critical work ensures that the U.S. military has the organizational readiness it needs to fulfill its mission.

The next lever is executive engagement. Senior leaders can exercise their leadership, knowledge, and experience to ensure they cultivate a culture in which inclusive behaviors can sustain and grow. Senior leaders must have enthusiasm in appreciating the benefits of inclusion and communicate this to their subordinate leaders. In addition, including inclusion efforts into their recruiting and retention strategy can help contribute to organizational effectiveness. If leaders want an inclusive work environment, then they will need to embrace and model that vision.

The Army's [Leadership and the Profession](#) publication states that leaders have three principal roles in developing others - counseling, coaching, and mentoring. This lever is important in providing feedback to recruits who may find themselves behind the learning curve than those with more experience and training. In addition, this development process enables people to get from the out-group into the in-group. Done effectively, the sponsor and their mentee can bridge this gap and benefit the organization to be more successful.

[Key performance indicators](#) (KPIs), the next lever, are an important tool used in civilian organizations. KPIs provide quantifiable information to determine and explain the organization's progress to meet its goals. While the organization could find it beneficial to account for racial, ethnic, gender, educational, and socioeconomic differences, it does not mean that a diverse range of service members will positively impact organizational outcomes. Common metrics can include recruitment, retention, promotions, and workplace climate that examine different aspects that can impact a soldier's willingness to stay in the military or get out. A good starting point would be examining the five inclusive behaviors as a framework for metrics that aligns with the organizational goals.

The last organizational level that can be utilized is shaping policies and processes. As mentioned at the start of this article, Project Inclusion is the U.S. Army's initiative to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion across the force and build cohesive teams. Conducting a holistic, people-first approach to the implementation of these initiatives should encourage its members within the organization to participate and share responsibility and develop a process for improving it. The range of initiatives helps deliberate thinking and keeps the attention on building a stronger fighting force.

Each service member has raised their right hand and taken the oath for any number of reasons. Each has made the effort to complete their training to be immersed in the military lifestyle and culture. Nobody joins to feel excluded, unwelcomed, and undervalued in their organization. An inclusive culture that values the diverse background and experiences of each team member results in better engagement, improved innovation, and a stronger team that meets organizational objectives. It is the responsibility of each current service member, especially organizational leaders, to utilize the five inclusive behaviors across five organizational levers to make their organization thrive.

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