



## **DIVERSITY DISCUSSION: INTENTIONALITY AND BLINDSPOTS**

**Date:** November 22, 2022

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS:**

On November 22, 2022, Dr. Michael Peters, Director of the Naval Reserve Professional Development and Mentorship Program for the Royal Canadian Navy presented *Diversity Discussion: Intentionality and Blindspots*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the benefits and challenges surrounding Diversity and Inclusion programs, the need for intentionality and accountability in the creation and implementation of the programs, and the ways in which role modelling and mentorship from those in leadership positions helps to foster and sustain an environment conducive to diversity and inclusion.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

#### **Presentation**

Dr. Peters presented on the benefits and challenges of implementing Diversity and Inclusion programs, highlighting the institutional and conceptual factors that impact the success of the programs. He also noted the crucial role of leadership and intentionality in both the creation and maintenance of the programs.

#### **Question & Answer Period**

During the question-and-answer period, Dr. Peters reiterated the importance of intentionality and leadership in program establishment, specifically as it pertains to organisational recruitment and preventing “diversity fatigue.” He also emphasised that Diversity and Inclusion programs are powerful tools, but only when properly understood and pursued.

## BACKGROUND

### Presentation

Dr. Peters began the presentation with a discussion of the commonly cited benefits of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs, suggesting that they generally fall into three categories: profit increase, increased innovation in the workplace, and increased recruitment capability. He noted that the latter is specific to organisations with strong D&I programs, as they have the potential to recruit talent in strong support of the programs. Dr. Peters argued that D&I programs are not solutions in and of themselves, however, stating that the programs bring many potential challenges. He suggested that intentionality and an awareness of blind spots are key to mitigating and alleviating these challenges as they allow for adequate anticipation. Dr. Peters noted that more than half of diversity initiatives fail due to inability to meet the challenges presented to them and the tendency of organisations to take a tokenistic approach when implementing programs.

Regarding the challenges facing D&I programs, Dr. Peters suggested that they fall in two principal categories: institutional and conceptual. Institutional challenges include unclear motivation as to why the programs are desired and pursued, a lack of strategic planning, an absence of structured goal setting, and the inability to conduct proper assessment. Conceptual challenges include a lack of shared vision, communication issues, cultural misunderstandings, and slower decision-making owing to increased participation. He also noted the challenge of “diversity fatigue,” in which members of organisations lack motivation in pursuing D&I programs owing to the perceived lack of substance in the process.

Dr. Peters emphasised the importance of leadership in avoiding or mitigating the above challenges. He suggested that good leadership is a catalyst for action and provides irreplaceable ways and means of empowering followers, both of which are central to strong D&I programs. Dr. Peters discussed the crucial part of mentorship and role modelling from individuals in leadership, noting the incomparable ability of the positions to pass on wisdom, create accountability, and increase networking potential.

Lastly, the essential nature of practicality to D&I programs was discussed, with emphasis on intentionality and accountability. Dr. Peters suggested that intentionality is paramount when implementing D&I programs, as organisations must consider and understand the purpose, motivation, and importance of introducing or building on an existing program. He noted the usefulness of

SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) goal setting, as this builds on intention and allows for the creation of an assessment plan, sustained analysis of the program, and shared responsibility among organisation members. He stated that a focus on inclusion and not merely diversity is essential, as diversity is an important step but not the ultimate goal.

Dr. Peters closed by briefly discussing his current role and outlined the ways in which the Royal Canadian Navy has sought to implement D&I programs as well as provide mentorship to junior sailors, officers, and enlisted individuals preparing for leadership roles.

### **Question & Answer Period**

During the question-and-answer period, Dr. Peters reiterated the importance of intentionality and leadership in the implementation of D&I programs, stating that, in order for the initiatives to be of assistance, they must first understand what it is they would like to achieve and why they would like to achieve it. Dr. Peters stated that there is the potential for D&I programs to have a positive impact on recruitment, but this depends on increased planning and coordination. He also noted the balancing act of those in leadership roles when implementing D&I programs, as there is potential for criticism and resistance if the initiatives are pushed too far and too fast.

Dr. Peters also discussed the possibility of “diversity fatigue” in the process of implementing D&I programs, noting perceptions of inauthenticity, inefficiency, and inadequacy as the principal components of the phenomenon. He stressed the importance of good leadership, the sharing of responsibility, cohesive planning, and time investment as crucial, in that they allow the programs to move beyond aspiration into material success.

## **KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

### **Presentation**

- Diversity and Inclusion programs come with many concrete benefits to organisations, namely profit increase, increased innovation in the workplace, and increased recruitment capability.
- Diversity and Inclusion programs on their own are not “silver-bullet” solutions, and the programs bring many institutional and conceptual challenges.

- Intentionality is essential when implementing the programs, as a clear focus and understanding allows for SMART goal planning, accurate assessment of a program's success, and accountability for all members of organisations seeking Diversity and Inclusion.
- Leadership is a crucial element to the mitigation and alleviation of challenges. Additionally, the mentorship and role modelling provided to junior organisation members allows for the transfer of knowledge, the creation of accountability, and increased networking opportunities.
- Practicality must be pursued first and foremost in the implementation of Diversity and Inclusion programs, as well as an understanding that – while diversity is an important step – the end goal is inclusion.

### Question & Answer Period

- Intentionality and leadership are essential to the success of Diversity and Inclusion programs, and both require and enable increased efficiency, coordination, and understanding.
- “Diversity fatigue” is a significant challenge to the success of Diversity and Inclusion programs, as perceptions of inadequacy, inefficiency, and inauthenticity can hinder organisational commitment. Good leadership and increased intentionality are key in the mitigation of the phenomenon.
- The impact of Diversity and Inclusion programs on recruitment is unclear at the moment. Increased planning and a shift from the aspirational into the material is required before any conclusive results can be determined.



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