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A Qualitative Study of the Impact of Social Stressors from March 2020 to March 2021 on Naval Forces and Commanders' Reactions to Stressors

March 2023

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I study responses by Navy unit-level leadership to external social stressors from March 2020 to March 2021 such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement and associated events, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the U.S. Capital riots, as they relate to fostering inclusion. Current training for Navy leaders does not include guidance or general practices on how to address such events at the unit level. These external events have a negative impact on sailors' mental well-being and readiness. Therefore, the ad-hoc nature of responses by Navy leaders, with varying results on the cohesion and sense of inclusion, has room for improvement. Prior studies have indicated that an inclusive approach increases a leader's ability to manage negative feelings during periods of social upheaval. In this thesis, I use a design thinking framework to conduct a series of interviews with members of majority and minority communities in the Navy, followed by in-depth focus groups. Further, the focus group results are briefed to a test group of senior Navy and academic officials to collect and analyze their feedback. My findings help identify and recommend a set of best practices for leaders to address external social stressors in a manner that promotes inclusion.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
BLM	Black Lives Matter
CMEO	Command Managed Equal Opportunity
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
CO	Commanding Officer
COA	Course of Action
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
DH	Department Head
DIVO	Division Officer
DOD	Department of Defense
DON	Department of the Navy
EO	Equal Opportunity
ISIC	Immediate Superior in Command
JOPA	Junior Officer Protection (or Protective) Association
NA	Narcotics Anonymous
OIC	Officer In Charge
PAO	Public Affairs Officer
POC	Point of Contact
RL	Restricted Line
SECNAV	Secretary of the Navy
SJA	Staff Judge Advocate
SME	Subject Matter Expert
URL	Unrestricted Line
USN	United States Navy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MOTIVATION

From March 2020–March 2021, the Navy saw an unprecedented level of external social stressors that impacted the fleet, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the #BlackLivesMatter movement and associated events, and the events at the Capitol on 06 JAN 2021. Currently, Navy leaders receive little training in how to respond to divisive issues. This has produced a patchwork of approaches to respond to social stressors, with mixed results in fostering an inclusion and discouraging negative behaviors. While research has shown how diversity is beneficial to the fleet and can be increased, little research has been conducted on how inclusion impacts the fleet, though research in the civilian market has demonstrated the benefits of inclusive leadership.

The individuals who make up the modern Navy are far from homogenous in any context, with the modern fleet making up the most diverse Navy in America's history (ICF Incorporated, 2021). As periods of social upheaval are unlikely to dissipate in the coming years, and will continue to have a mental and emotional effect on service members, the Navy needs to better understand how divisive issues, external to the fleet, can be addressed to foster an inclusive and productive work environment. Failure to do so has the potential to impose negative impacts on the Navy for generations to come.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What practices by Navy leadership during socially stressful events (such as a the COVID-19, the BLM protests, the 2020 election, and the subsequent Capital riots) have been observed to succeed in fostering inclusion?

2. What practices have failed to foster inclusion and what practices would sailors like to see in attempts to foster inclusion?

3. What set of best practices could be employed by Navy leadership to foster inclusion and diversity during socially stressful events?

METHODOLOGY

1. One-on-one qualitative interviews with a diverse set of sailors regarding their experiences during the period outlined above.

2. Varied majority/minority focus groups that performed design thinking workshops to analyze trends in interview responses and craft proposed command responses.

3. Testing interviews with senior leaders to screen proposed command responses.

4. Analysis of testing feedback and collation into a proposed set of guidelines for leaders in the face of social stressors.

RESULTS

Interview participants believed that social stressors warranted command acknowledgement and response, but identified successes and failures at different rates along a majority/minority divide.

Common Traits from One-on-One Interviews

Positive Traits in Responses	Negative Traits in Responses
- Empathy - Interest in knowing the team - Effective Collaboration - Flexibility	- Lack of cultural intelligence - Lack of interest in knowing the team - Decisiveness - Discounting alternative views

A robust set best practices were crafted with both proactive responses to improve gathering information on stressors and preparing leaders to address them, and suggested evolutions for commands following the onset of a stressor.

This study also identified that, despite good intentions on the part of leaders, a number of shortfalls in the training offered to Navy leaders creates significant barriers to leaders implementing these desired behaviors and responses in a consistent manner.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

Between March 2020 and March 2021, the Navy saw an unprecedented level of external social stressors that impacted the health of the fleet, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement and associated events, and the events at the Capitol on 06 January 2021. Currently, commanders and other leaders receive limited or no training in how to respond to divisive issues beyond several hastily developed and loose trainings that must be relayed to troops. This resulted in a patchwork of approaches to respond to social stressors, with mixed results in fostering an inclusive work environment and discouraging negative behaviors. While research has been conducted as to how diversity is beneficial to the fleet and can be increased, little research has been conducted on how inclusion impacts the fleet, though research in the civilian market has demonstrated the benefits of inclusive leadership. The Navy needs to better understand how divisive issues, external to the fleet, can be addressed by commanders and junior leaders so as to foster an inclusive and productive work environment. Failure to do so has the potential to hamper recruiting and retention efforts among other negative effects that could impact the Navy for generations to come.

Periods of social upheaval are unlikely to dissipate in the coming years and will continue to have a mental and emotional effect on service members. Inclusive leadership practices have the potential to mitigate these negative effects.

This study aims to address the following questions to better understand these circumstances.

1.   What practices by Navy leadership during socially stressful events (such as a the COVID-19, the BLM protests, the 2020 election, and the subsequent Capital riots) have been observed to succeed in fostering inclusion?

2.   What practices have failed to foster inclusion and what practices would sailors like to see in attempts to foster inclusion?

3.   What set of best practices could be employed by Navy leadership to foster inclusion and diversity during socially stressful events?

To address these questions, I conducted an initial literature review covering a wide range of topics including the mechanics of design thinking, the demographics of the modern fleet, and academic research on diversity and inclusion. Following this review and the subsequent construction of a human centered, design thinking approach to the study, another student researcher and I conducted a series of qualitative interviews with a diverse set of sailors regarding their experiences during the timeframe under study. The feedback from these interviews was then presented to a series of focus groups which were taken through the design thinking process to generate proposed guidelines for COs. These guidelines were then presented individually to a collection of senior Navy officers from a variety of backgrounds and human resources academic professionals for refinement. The three focus group solutions were then analyzed and collated with the feedback from the testing phase into a single set of guidelines for commanders to foster feelings of inclusion during socially stressful periods of time.

As outlined below, the study was successful in producing generalized guidelines for leaders to follow, both before and after the onset of a social stressors and identified several fascinating differences in the perceived experiences of majority and minority sailors. The study also identified a dramatic gap in the ability of leaders to respond to these events based on the training they currently receive, indicating that the Navy should reexamine how leaders are trained to interact with and understand their fellow sailors with an eye towards enabling leaders to facilitate the kinds of training and care needed by the modern fleet.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will cover a broad range of topics associated with the challenges facing leaders within the Navy as they attempt to manage the negative impacts inflicted by external social stressors as they pertain to perceptions of inclusion. We will begin by reviewing prior studies on the diversity of the fleet, inclusion in the workplace and it's impacts on both individuals and the work environment as well as the roles that leaders play in fostering inclusion in diverse teams. We will also examine the process of design-thinking in-depth to better frame and contextualize the methods used when conducting our study. Covered topics in design thinking will include the process's historical background, mechanics and successful applications in solving real-world challenges.

A. DIVERSITY

The individuals who make up the modern Navy are far from homogenous in any context. A 2021 study of the Navy found that while men still make up the bulk of the fleet, comprising roughly 79% of all active duty and selected reserve personnel, the number of women in uniform is increasing (ICF Incorporated, 2021). This study demonstrated that divides in the officer to enlisted ratio remain stark regardless of gender, with the ratio of active duty enlisted to officers sitting at 5.1:1 while the ratio of active duty to female enlisted to female officers sitting at 5.3:1. Also noted in this study was that this divide is also present in the select reserves which reports an enlisted to officer ratio of 3.1:1 while the female enlisted to female officer ratio sits at 4:1. ICF also demonstrated that while racial disparities reflect a similar divide, with white service members making up a preponderance of those represented, there has never been a more diverse fleet in service than is seen today, as is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1.   United States Navy 2020 Personnel Totals by Race. Adapted from
ICF Incorporated (2021)

Race	Active Duty		Selected Reserve	
	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer
Native American or Alaskan	5,974	575	1,105	101
Asian	16,739	3,159	2,812	777
Black or African American	55,503	4,425	8,459	945
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	3,726	287	518	59
Multi-racial	19,836	2,664	3,246	633
Other/Unknown	13,919	1,901	2,959	711
White	170,640	42,648	25,646	11,181

Individuals identifying as Hispanic or Latino also find themselves underrepresented when compared to their 18.7% proportion of the U.S. population (Marks et al., 2022), comprising 16.4% of active duty sailors and 16.6% of those in the selected reserve (ICF Incorporated, 2021). While sailors with a wide range of ages serve in both on active duty and in the selected reserves, the average age of officers and enlisted firmly span the millennial generation (ICF Incorporated, 2021).

Table 2.   Average Ages in the Fleet. Adapted from ICF Incorporated (2021).

Active Duty			Selected Reserve		
Enlisted	Officer	Total	Enlisted	Officer	Total
27.6	34.9	28.8	32.7	41.9	34.9

The Navy is also comprised individuals who represent a broad spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities, with estimates from 2021 surmising that 7.7% of female sailors identify as lesbian, and 1.7% of male sailors identify as gay (Breslin et al., 2022). The same study estimated that an even larger portion of the fleet identify as bisexual with

12.3% of women and 2.5% of men identifying as such. As noted by Breslin et al,. these figures represent growth from 2018, where individuals were significantly less likely to identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. Information regarding transgender individuals in the military is somewhat more elusive, with a preponderance of the current research on the prevalence and issues associated with transgender individuals in uniform being based on small, nonrepresentative and self-reported samples (Schaefer et al., 2016). One of the most extensive studies was presented in a 2016 report by the RAND Corporation which estimated that there are 1,320-6,630 transgender individuals are currently serving on active duty, with an additional 830–4,160 transgender individuals in the selected reserves (Schaefer et al., 2016). While these individuals may not be present in every command, let alone every division, they represent a portion of our fleet that should be considered when commanders devise messages to their personnel (Schaefer et al., 2016).

B.   INCLUSION

Sailors often begin their service with vastly different feelings of inclusion, both within society and the Navy. Highly publicized events that shine a light on racial inequities in America, such as the killing of Michael Brown by a police officer in 2015, have sparked a rippling discussion of the inequitable state of many facets minority communities (such as treatment by governmental agents, educational statuses and opportunities, and access to economic resources) that endures to this day (Dixson, 2017). Dixon found that while many social movements such as the #Black Lives Matter (BLM), and the 1619 Project have made great strides in recent years toward spearheading discussion both within and outside educational settings about the struggles of Black (as well as other minority) communities, these efforts have often been undercut by the public education system which often resists efforts to implement multi-cultural education in a manner that focuses on systemic challenges, barriers and the movements that challenge them, choosing instead to lionize or demonize individuals for their actions, as if they are separate from said systems. Dixon asserted that this practice harms the ability of individuals outside of the afflicted minority groups to enter the workplace with a common understanding of the realities faced by said minority groups and as such presents issues for leaders and followers at all levels to effectively engage their coworkers on matters relating to their status as members of said

minority groups. They also found that compounding this issue, in many areas of the United States, minority communities still struggle to gain access to resources needed to affect a high quality of life when becoming adults, including a high-quality education delivered by trained professionals with access to quality educational resources . Such experiences, Dixon surmised, can form differential foundations of perspective on public institutions, through interactions with educational and other government institutions, that follow individuals into their adult lives, including those (both minority and majority) who decide to join the Navy.

Further divisions and misunderstandings between servicemembers about the role of the service and acceptable behaviors can be seen in how a disproportionate number of white American civilians, majority military members and veterans engaged in the riots at the capital on January 6, 2021, with most of these individuals exhibiting a preference for the use of military force, vilifying the opposition and groupthink in response to divisive issues (Hodges, 2021). Hodges found that these individuals were primarily motivated by three driving factors, militarism, subscription to the narrative of mass election fraud, and patriotism (though this aspect of their motivation could also accurately be described as nationalism associated with a political sect). Among these individuals, Hodges noted a disproportionate number of veterans also stated that military training, and combat exposure motivated participation in these violent activities. Hodges asserted that of these factors, two points raise the most concern for military commanders, those points being the identification of an enemy and the manifestation of the patriotism that the military attempts to instill in its members, due to their direct association with the teachings of the armed forces. Hodges also noted that studies have indicated that groupthink is likely linked to the kind of media a person consumes, both mass media and social media, as well as the words of leaders that they are exposed to, and as such, leaders should focus attention on the difference in goals of the opposition, not on demonizing the individuals in the opposition, as well as targeted media campaigns aimed at encouraging proper behavior.

When determining how to effectively lead their personnel, organizations should consider these dynamic factors, and ask themselves what will be required to provide exceptional leadership not just today, but in the decade to come (Dillon & Bourke, 2016).

Dillon and Bourke asserted that included in this questioning should be the goal of understanding the trends that shape how businesses, and indeed all organizations, interact with the world and its people. They note that a greater amount of diversity is being seen in the available markets as new middle classes emerge in places that previously lacked a class with excess income. Dillon and Bourke also asserted that having leaders embedded in these emerging cultures and markets will better enable them to rise to the challenges their involvement presents. They also determined that a greater amount of diversity is being seen in the kinds of customers that wish to do business with companies as new technologies, spurred on by the growth of access to the internet, expose customers to a wider range of choices. They further deduced that this wide range of choices in the products that may be consumed also contributes to the tendency of customers to expect a larger degree of personalization and input in molding what they consume or engage in. As companies attempt meet these individualized desires while remaining efficient, customer driven reform efforts are taking center stage (Dillon & Bourke, 2016).

Dillon and Bourke further found that due again to the growth of internet access, individuals around the world are exposed to a greater diversity of ideas, which in turn demands a greater amount of innovation from those wishing to server these individuals who may hold different viewpoints. They also asserted that companies who were successful in crafting innovative solutions have often been credited with casting a wide net when searching for information, ideas and experiences to inform their new designs. They suggested that to foster this kind of success on a continual basis, leaders must understand how to support efforts to include individuals with a broad range of ideas. Dillon and Bourke believe that this inclusion can also help shield leaders from being caught unaware of an impact or brewing event that an inclusive team would have identified earlier. They also found that due to changes in a variety of factors including the average educational profiles, age, and expectations of workplace conditions and treatment, a greater diversity of the talent seen in the labor pool has developed. As individuals live longer and have access to resources that were previously denied to them, the demographics of personnel who make up organizations will fundamentally change (Dillon & Bourke, 2016).

Quantitative studies have shown that managers ought to create work environments that promote respect, support differences and equitable treatment in the workplace because of the positive relationship between an inclusive work environment and organizational outcomes (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021). Leaders who learned to lead in less diverse organizations are now required to shift their practices in order to accomplish the same missions they previously accomplished with a more homogenous workforce (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). In order to facilitate this shift, organizations will need new models of leadership and new methods to assess the effectiveness of leaders (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). Diverse teams are more capable of delivering innovative solutions and covering blind spots in knowledge than traditional homogeneous teams (Sinar & Wooll, 2021). This kind of diverse input is often not readily offered, but must rather be drawn out by members of the organization's leadership (Sinar & Wooll, 2021).

Research also shows that negative emotions that accompany times of uncertainty can be mitigated to some degree through the presence of an environment that values the opinions of employees and their concerns so that they can be addressed directly and in an open forum (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021). Moreover, such an environment decreases the attrition rate of an organization (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021). Even outside of these tumultuous periods, undesired attrition amongst employees from minority communities continues to plague many organizations, creating a critical gap in the knowledge available for decision-making and organizational growth (Sinar & Wooll, 2021). Even when these underrepresented employees remain within organizations, failures by the organization to promote an inclusive enforcement can result in them declining to provide divergent input, resulting in the same gaps in organizational knowledge (Sinar & Wooll, 2021). For leaders, counteracting these negative influences means consciously engaging in behaviors to foster such as environment including treating individuals and groups in a fair manner based on their individual characteristics, personalizing individuals in a manner that ascribes value to what makes them unique and acknowledges their place in the group, and utilizing the diverse perspectives of group members to increase the information available for decision makers (Dillon & Bourke, 2016).

While there is no singular definition of organizational inclusion or inclusive leadership, Dillon and Bourke note that several key attributes of inclusion include fair and respectful treatment, to include equal distribution of opportunities, in addition to a feeling of belonging to and connectedness with the group. They further assert that inclusion also consists of a feeling amongst group members that the unique attributes of the individual are recognized and valued both by leaders and other members of the group. These group members should also possess the confidence to provide honest input to group operations, and the motivation to provide their best effort in the team environment. (Dillon & Bourke, 2016).

Organizations can promote inclusive leadership practices throughout their ranks through a mixture of strategic messaging, selective recruitment, performance appraisal, and coaching (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). Dillon and Bourke also assert that when comparing organizational messaging, inclusion should play a prominent role in not only the DEI plan, but also in articulations of how it facilitates successful business operations and is in line with the organization's core values. They also state that recruiting materials and processes should denote the organization's desire for inclusive leadership and challenge applicants to articulate their experience with and views on the subject. When a new hire joins an organization, a senior leader in the chain of command should meet with them shortly after they join the organization for a brief, exploratory conversation regarding the new individual's values, history and goals, demonstrating an interest in growing and developing the individual on the part of the organization. (Sinar & Wooll, 2021). Once employees and leaders have been onboarded, performance appraisals should systematically examine the efforts of leaders to put inclusive practices into action and take a direct aim at coaching those who's efforts to not yield success on alternative methods to produce an inclusive environment (Dillon & Bourke, 2016).

While an endorsement of inclusive behavior by senior organizational leadership is important, research has indicated that the individuals responsible for direct management are often the most critical individuals in creating an inclusive environment due to their daily interactions with employees (Sinar & Wooll, 2021).   The six signature traits of an inclusive leader that have been outlined by Dillon and Bourke, based on their series of

interview and assessments with leaders and followers from a diverse set of organizations, are commitment, courage, cognizance of bias, curiosity, cultural intelligence and collaboration (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). Additional behaviors, as identified by Sinar and Wooll include positive relationship building, recognition of effort and achievement, empathy, social connection, encouraging participation, demonstration of alignment (Sinar & Wooll, 2021).

In demonstrating commitment, leaders should demonstrate that they believe the equitable treatment of their coworkers to be a personal priority and responsibility as it aligns with their own personal values (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). Dillon and Bourke state that the leader also should also understand, believe in, and authentically articulate the positive strategic effects that inclusive practices have on the business culture, environment and outcomes when effectively practiced. Dillon and Bourke believe that in demonstrating courage, a leader should be able and willing to publicly demonstrate both empathy and bravery. The also instruct that leaders should be willing to admit shortcomings and mistakes while seeking feedback and criticism regarding their own performance. This is due to Dillon and Bourke's view that in acknowledging their own limitations, they solicit the input of others who are currently more capable of overcoming, or providing a more unique insight into, the present challenge in order to better serve the organization and grow personally. They also instruct that leaders should demonstrate bravery in part by taking an authentic and enthusiastic approach to ensuring that inclusive practices are championed and enforced. Dillon and Bourke also state that these leaders should issue challenges to other individuals and the status quo when not aligned with the practices and principles of organizational inclusion and holds those who fall short accountable.

In demonstrating cognizance of bias, leaders should commit to practices of self-regulation and enforcement of fair play within their organization (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). Dillon and Bourk state that in self-regulating, leaders must be able to admit that they themselves, as well as their organization, have implicit biases at play when operating and take meaningful steps to mitigate these biases. The further state that, in particular, leaders should be in tune with personal biases such as stereotyping, and process biases such as group-think in addition to the factors that can exacerbate them such as limitations in time

and physical/mental/emotional fatigue induced both internally and externally to the organization.

In enforcing fair play, leaders should take time to address the outcome, process and communication utilized in decision-making (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). They further state that when addressing outcomes, leaders do not aim for the same outcome for every individual, but rather focus on the outcomes providing for basic needs at a minimum while being predicated on performance and potential. Dillon and Bourke also assert that when examining the processes by which decisions are made, leaders consider if they have applied the same fact-based thought process consistently. In communicating their decisions, Dillon and Bourke asset that leaders should consider if they have been effectively transparent in their thinking with subordinates and superiors, providing additional insight when desired.

Leaders must also remain curious about the world and its residents, both in and out of their immediate purview, as this openness allows leaders to continually pursue new avenues to learn so as to better serve their organizations (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). One method that Dillon and Bourke note inclusive leaders utilize to this end is deliberately seeking out a diverse set of perspectives which they engage in judgement-free manner when ideating solutions. When engaging those with different perspectives, Dillon and Bourke suggest that leaders should actively listen while engaging in direct but respectful questioning so as to better understand the viewpoint of the person being questioned. They further assert that this questioning process can further assist inclusive leaders by strengthening the empathy leaders feel for individuals and groups they previously had less understanding of. Dillon and Bourke also state that leaders should also be adept at coping with uncertainty and change throughout their organization, responding to these events in a manner that encourages divergent thinking and utilizes them as a means to collaborate with a new and diverse collective of individuals.

When developing and demonstrating cultural intelligence, inclusive leaders should make active efforts to immerse themselves in diverse settings and bolster their confidence in leading culturally diverse groups (Dillon & Bourke, 2016). Cultural intelligence in this context is best defined by Dillon and Bourke as a leader possessing the knowledge of (and motivation to continue learning about) cross-cultural interactions, norms, and general

practices, as well as the demonstration of appropriate behaviors during these interactions. They further state that in immersing themselves in other cultures, they take a direct approach to learning about local operations, such as policies or business strategies, in context. This study also found that inclusive leaders are able to adapt when cross-cultural teams make it necessary, amending their verbal and non-verbal communication to ensure smooth operations. To this end, Dillon and Bourke suggest that leaders (even junior leaders at the division level and below) should enact dynamic collaboration by empowering team members to take action on matters effecting their work and resolve challenging situations that arise, while holding them accountable for the results they deliver. The study states that these leaders should take an active role in forming teams with diverse points of view that mesh without forming cliques and be willing to intervene if conflict arises. Dillon and Bourke further assert that inclusive leaders should also take active strides to create a psychologically safe work environment where all team members are welcomed to contribute to discussions and decision-making.

Rather than treating employee-manager relations as a transactional matter, leaders should actively engage in relationship building efforts to better understand their employees' as unique individuals with motivations, needs and skills all their own (Sinar & Wooll, 2021). Sinar and Wooll assert that these relationships can assist in fostering feelings of appreciation and respect amongst employees, which in turn can help make employees more comfortable in providing honest feedback and divergent suggestions. This study also suggests that inclusive leaders should take personal responsibility for ensuring that the unique and meaningful contributions of individuals are personally recognized in a way that contributes to employee motivation. Sinar and Wooll believe that these efforts on the part of the inclusive leader reinforce that the contributions of the employee are valued by the organization enough to warrant publicly lauding their contributions to the team.

Leaders that aim to create an inclusive work environment should engage in empathetic interactions with employees that foster an understanding of what they experience in day-to-day operations, in addition to communicating their unique value to the organization (Sinar & Wooll, 2021). This study asserts that when this empathetic connection is fostered effectively, it can reduce stress and other negative factors that

contribute to reduced productivity while increasing feelings of connection amongst members of the team and commitment to the organization. The study further stipulates that inclusive leaders also take personal responsibility for facilitating social connections both inside and outside of the workplace, so as to strengthen the connections and relationships between team members. Sinar and Wooll believe that by increasing the connectedness of team members, leaders can increase the willingness of members to collaborate and provide honest feedback in the workplace, leading to increased positive organizational outcomes.

Inclusive leaders actively encourage participation from all members of their team and seek to minimize any barriers (perceived or real) to this participation (Sinar & Wooll, 2021). In doing so, leaders demonstrate that every perspective is valued by their organization and assist in promoting the voicing of divergent opinions and sharing of greater detail with decision makers. Sinar and Wooll suggest that leaders should also ensure that their messaging of the company's values are clear and in alignment with their own, so as to help employees understand the commonalities shared with their own values to encourage a greater sense of belonging within the organization. The same research by BetterUp has indicated that the through sustained practice of these behaviors by management professionals and consistent one-on-one coaching, a ripple effect can be generated, with leaders down the chain of command adopting these behaviors to the benefit of the organization and its personnel.

C.   DESIGN THINKING

Design thinking is a "a human-centered, prototype-driven process for innovation that can be applied to product, service, and business design" (Cohen, 2014). The process of design thinking is constantly mutating as creativity by its users influences its implementation, the "process could have several stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test. Within these steps, problems can be framed, the right questions can be asked, more ideas can be created, and the best answers can be chosen. The steps aren't linear; they can occur simultaneously and can be repeated" (Cohen, 2014).

1.   Background on Design Thinking

Design thinking has its roots in Herbert A. Simon's "research into decision-making and problem solving where he devised three stages in rational decision-making: Intelligence, Design, Choice (IDC)" (Cohen, 2014). Under Simon's model, intelligence was defined as analyzing the environment or situation at hand for parameters that require a decision to be made (Sack, 2022). Design involved inventing an idea for a solution, designing how this idea could be implemented and analyzing the results (Sack, 2022). Finally, an individual would engage in choice and decide on how to proceed in the situation, given the results of the decision you made (Sack, 2022). Simon's work was expanded upon by Robert McKim's work concerning visual thinking and the power that our perception of the world around us has to influence our ideation and decision-making (Cohen, 2014).

Design thinking began to solidify in the 1980s as Rolf Faste codified the concept of Design Thinking as a system to enable innovative problem solving (Cohen, 2014). Today, while "Design Thinking attempts to inspire the essential element of creativity, the ability to take an abstract idea and create something with it," empathy is the driving factor in the process (Cohen, 2014). This empathy is based on the principle that progress can only be achieved if a thorough understanding of the audience is achieved first and is facilitated through "a series of activities" aimed at expanding your point of view to understanding how your solutions will be received (Cohen, 2014).

A detailed design study by Kaiser Permanente, a leading healthcare provider, formed a design thinking team comprised of a diverse set of designers, nurses, technologists, and labor relations experts to reshape how shift changes are performed for nurses (Brown, 2008). Through a meticulous study of the gaps in the needs and abilities of nurses and patients, the team was able to design a system that allowed nurses to build their briefings throughout their shift (Brown, 2008). This change allowed for a more direct, concise, and inclusive turnover, dramatically reducing the prep-time needed for oncoming and outgoing nursing shifts in addition to spawning a project to roll the notations generated in these turnovers into a company-wide record keeping system (Brown, 2008).

Another example of the power of design thinking to address socio-mechanical challenges can be seen in how Shimano, a Japanese bicycle manufacturer, addressed a decrease in the growth of sales in the American market (Brown, 2008). Brown states that through the formation and work of a design team comprised of mechanical designers, marketers, social scientists and engineers, it was determined that nine out of every ten American adults had ridden bikes at one point in their life, remembered these experiences favorability, but still chose to not ride a bike as an adult. This study indicates that this team was further able to identify a myriad of fears a concerns about the process of acquiring, riding, and maintaining bikes possessed by these individuals, and determined that that if these individuals could be reconnected to positive, early memories of biking and provided mitigations to their concerns, that they could open a new pool of customers. Given this information, the team Brown studied designed a prototype that required low maintenance and had simple control interface, while employing a marketing strategy that emphasized an almost Dudeist stance on the importance of relaxing and going with the flow, while identifying the best places to ride in a safe manner. This product was eventually released as the coasting bike, which saw wide support and adoption amongst the targeted older audience (Brown, 2008).

2. Strengths of Design Thinking

Design thinking allows for the rapid exploration of a broad range of ideas and solutions to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as potential alternative applications and approaches (Brown, 2008). Extensive research has been conducted into how educators can employ design thinking to shape learning experiences to the needs of learners, which could prove useful when crafting methods to facilitate challenging conversations (Galvan, 2012). Any educator, within or outside of the fleet would likely agree that "the needs of today's learners are evolving as rapidly as the technologies that compete for their attentions. At the same time, our organizations and systems are stretched to their limits to keep up with the changing demands of the times." (Galvan, 2012). Design thinking is inherently collaborative and "benefits greatly from the views of multiple perspectives, and others' creativity," thereby fulfilling the need for diverse perspectives and input when catering to the needs of a diverse population (Galvan, 2012). Design thinking thrives when

members step out of their comfort zone and consider ideas and perspectives that have been underutilized or marginalized, supporting both innovation and inclusion.

The system also begins from the viewpoint that "we all can create change—no matter how big a problem, how little time or how small a budget," thus pushing back against the desire to remain dedicated to flawed traditions on a systemic level (Galvan, 2012). This is especially crucial in a 'mission first, people always' organization that can often find itself at odds with accomplishing its mission and caring for its people via traditional means. Design thinking also thrives on iteration and experimentation, giving "permission to fail and to learn from your mistakes, because you come up with new ideas, get feedback on them, then iterate" (Galvan, 2012). Iteration is not limited to the official life of a design thinking project. If effective feedback loops are created, continual analysis and adjustments can be implemented to ensure that messaging and products remain in line with the needs of recipients as time moves forward (Galvan, 2012). Design thinking is also highly adaptable and can be applied to a wide range of desired end products including training curriculum, infrastructure in spaces, processes, tools, interfaces, and systems, with the only necessary changes being the personnel interviewed and recruited to participate in ideation and prototyping, with backgrounds shifting to support challenge and desired end-state.

3. Mechanics of Design Thinking

The Stanford model of design thinking consists of five key phases, empathy, define, ideate, prototype and test, though these are by no means the only names for these steps (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). While other literature, such as that produced by the company IDEO prefers the nomenclature discovery, interpretation, ideation, experimentation, and evolution, we will utilize the terminology used by the Stanford model, for the sake of simplicity and due to these terms having been used in the execution of our study (Galvan, 2012). The design thinking process is not limited to the steps laid out here in the order in which they are organized, but rather should be thought of as a set of blocks that can be retooled and rearranged to fit the needs of designers and the individuals they serve (Brown, 2008).

a.   Pre-design

Before attempting to engage with participants in a design thinking study, designers should attempt to create a rough definition of the challenge they are attempting to solve (Galvan, 2012). This definition should be drawn from a list of topics and issues surrounding the core event(s) under study (Galvan, 2012). For example, there were many issues related to the social stressors present in the fleet from March 2020 to March 2021, however, N17 has chosen to focus on how command responses to these social stressors specifically affected feelings of inclusion. Designers should attempt to frame the challenge through methods that might assist in putting it into the proper perspective such as rewording it as a "how might we" question, enabling the mind to inherently focus on direct responses to the challenge (Galvan, 2012). In stating the challenge, designers should remember to attempt to keep problem statements simple and optimistic, so as to enable understanding by those members of the team that are not already steeped in the problem, and encourage creativity amongst team members (Galvan, 2012).

Once a rough definition of the challenge has been established, a project plan including a timeline for the project, end goals, measurements of success, and constraints should be generated (Galvan, 2012). Galvan suggests that designers should lay out a basic timeline for when specific events are to occur. In doing so they should be sure to build in buffer time as the human centered aspect of design thinking may introduce setbacks and needs to reschedule which cannot be directly anticipated. Galvin asserts that the end goals that are identified and codified should be reasonable and deliverable. For example, ending all racism in the fleet may not be a deliverable goal, while drafting a set of best practices to address and reduce racism and racist practices is a deliverable goal.

Measurements of success should include the specific goal you are working towards, such as increased participation or decreased instances of negative feedback regarding a specific field or required exercise (Galvan, 2012). Constraints can include a timeframe in which the challenge needs to be resolved or a set of resources, such as personnel or funding, that cannot be exceeded (Galvan, 2012). Naval personnel should remember that constraints at sea are often much tighter than constraints ashore, due in part to expanded requirements for work hours to be performed in a given week. All of these parameters should then be

codified into a clearly written briefing that can be understood by laypersons as doing so will help the design thinking group to stay focused and not follow a tangent so far that it shifts the entire focus of the end goals (Galvan, 2012).

b. Empathy

Empathy can be considered to be the heart and foundation of the human-centered design process, and the phase where designers must attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the people being challenged in the context of the problem they face (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). This understanding must aim to not only understand the mechanical procedures undertaken by individuals but also their deeper motivations and needs (Galvan, 2012). This understanding requires designers to open themselves to new opportunities and viewpoints as sources of inspiration for new solutions (Galvan, 2012). The problems we are trying to solve can be for people we have little in common with on a conscious or unconscious level, we may have different beliefs and values that can only be discovered through direct, meaningful interaction (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). Therefore, directly engaging with the individuals you are trying to serve is the key to empathy (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). To perform empathy in this context, it is recommended that designers observe subjects in the environment under study (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). These observations should be paired with qualitative interviews as crucial insights can be made by identifying a gap between what an individual says they desire and what actions they perform (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010).

Before you begin, ensure that you have prepared properly by completing the following elements (Galvan, 2012). With the members of the team you have assembled, review all pre-design work to see if any adjustments need to be made to incorporate the thoughts of new members (Galvan, 2012). With initial team members, build a visual representation of what you know and don't know about the challenge, in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in pre-established knowledge (Galvan, 2012). Build a full team where members can get to know each other in a casual environment, define their roles, and lean into their strengths (Galvan, 2012).

Designers should define the audience of their solution in a manner that allows for a broad range of the individuals affected by the issue, both directly and indirectly, to be considered (Galvan, 2012). To this end, Galvan suggests that designers should then create a cursory list of these affected parties, ensuring that individuals from a broad range of backgrounds and viewpoints on the challenge are included in the audience, and translate this list into a visual map of how those involved in the audience relate to the challenge. They also suggest that designers should further ensure that the roadmap for the study is refined to meet time constraints given the needs of any newly added participants. When determining who should be placed under observation, Galvan suggests that designers should make rough estimates of what they wish to learn from whom, how extreme points of view can be covered, and a list of activities to enable this learning. Galvan asserts that designers should further select research participants by describing the people you want to meet and matching specific questions you want answered to the characteristics of individuals that may be able to answer them. Galvan also states that design teams should cast a much wider net than necessary to conduct research in order to ensure personnel goals are met if the rate of response is low and should consider bringing participants back for further feedback or as part of the team to enrich collective knowledge on the challenge.

Recruiters for the study should prepare and practice a generalized pitch for participation in the study and script for initial (professional) contact with potential participants (Galvan, 2012). Galvan states that design teams should plan all interactions and logistics by ensuring that the time, place and materials necessary for research to be conducted are in place for each individual (before the interview time), that this plan is consistent with the needs of the individual, and that the plan has been confirmed with the individual in advance of the day when research will be conducted. Galvan notes that it is also wise to ensure that participants are offered the opportunity to make adjustments to the plan as necessary. When crafting a question guide, Galvan suggests that designers begin by identifying topics to be explored that are linked to gaps to be filled in the knowledge of the challenge and formulate open ended questions to explore these topics and have follow on statements ready to encourage participants to explore their experiences further. Galvan further states that designers should organize questions by topic and to become steadily

broader in focus to allow for a deep exploration of experiences and feelings and create a physical list of questions for reference during interviews. Before starting any interviews, Galvan suggests that designers should craft a set of conversation starters to help break the ice and make participants more comfortable. Galvan also stipulates that interviewers should make a plan, ahead of time, for how they will establish trust with participants through methods such as opening on topics unrelated to the challenge to put the participant at ease.

When conducting observations, designers are encouraged to get participants to physically perform the steps of the process under study, explaining their reasoning as they go (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). Designers are encouraged to be attentive to both conscious and unconscious responses to questions/stimulations and capture what they observe in a plethora of notes and recordings (Galvan, 2012). Methods of observation other than direct interviews or on-site observations, such as examining participants self-documentation may also provide useful information (Galvan, 2012). One such method of gathering information includes instructing participants to write about their thoughts, feelings, decisions and experiences over a given period of time (Galvan, 2012). Detailed instructions on how and why specific activities are to be documented should be given to participants along with regular reviews and de-briefs of what has been documented (Galvan, 2012).

Interviews are the primary method for empathizing, can occur in group or individual settings, and should be conducted in-context (meaning in a setting related to the challenge) when possible as this can help encourage participants to draw on related memories (Galvan, 2012). Assign roles to the team members for every interview, ensuring that these roles play both into their strengths and set the team up to gather the most accurate and expansive set of information possible (Galvan, 2012). Interviews should flow like a conversation, not a question-and-answer session. (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). This will include deviations from the projected path of the interview, which should be encouraged to allow exploration of aspects the interviewer may not have considered. (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). The goal of all interactions with participants is to draw out stories of their own experiences where interviewers actively question the 'why'

in search of meaningful insights (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). To this end, researchers should always ask as many follow-up questions as possible (Galvan, 2012).

When establishing group interviews, Galvan states that the first step is to ensure that the space is set up for good communication between participants, as the space and equipment needed to facilitate these interactions will differ from the standard one-on-one interview set-up (2012). They then suggest that designers should consider how participants will interact with each other and ensure that these interactions will not discourage communication in part by encouraging discussion amongst participants as the conversation flows. Galvan assets that it can sometimes become productive to create subgroups during interviews in order to drive the conversation amongst less assertive or diverse members of the group. Galvan also suggests that designers keep in mind that interview groups can also serve as a strong foundation for forming testing panels if their members can be invited back.

Another useful alternative source of information for empathy can be gained via conducting peer-to-peer interviews and observations (Galvan, 2012). Galvan cites that peers are often able to achieve a level of understanding and rapport with participants that cannot be immediately or easily achieved by a researcher who is perceived to be an outsider by participants. Galvan cautions, however, that designers should ensure that selected peer-researchers are trustworthy and respected amongst their peers in addition to having the drive and interpersonal skills to facilitate research. Galvan further asserts that these peer-researchers should be met with regularly, debriefed (once further evolutions have occurred), provided clear directions and given suggestions about how to proceed with their portion of the research.

c.   Define

Define is the phase where the problem to be solved is clearly laid out, based on the information gathered during the empathy phase, and sorted into key thematic groupings (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). Essentially, the define phase is where stories will be distilled into insightful information (Galvan, 2012). The goal is to search for patterns, via a synthesis of gathered information, that can provide insight into the issue and

assist in putting the issue proper context (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). This context is crucial to focusing the efforts of the design team and future research participants (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). The result of this process should be a well-articulated problem statement upon which action can be taken (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). This should include a defined set of needs, or a single need, that must be fulfilled in order to solve the problem (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010).

The first step of the define process is to deduce strong themes present in the stories gathered during empathizing (Galvan, 2012). Shortly after an interview (or observation), Galvan states that designers should record their thoughts while they are fresh, making sure to highlight both specifics and general themes from the session. While each participant's entire story may be helpful and interesting, Galvan asserts that designers should distill what they have learned in the form of stories from the participant in order to maintain relatability when discussing them with your team. Galvan suggests that theme identification may be aided by laying out multiple stories from multiple participants in a large visual manner (such as on a white board) when analyzing them. Galvan further recommends that designers follow the path below, but reminds that steps can be repeated or their order switched as needed.

1. Group similarities from stories so they can be analyzed for deeper meaning.

2. Name these groups in a manner that relates them to the challenge or pieces of it.

3. Attempt to make an action statement out of these themes. Example: "Sailors want commanders to demonstrate empathy when discussing social stressors that face the command or members of the command."

4. Attempt to find connections between themes.

Designers should also prepare themselves for the strong possibility that not all stories will work into a theme and there will be outliers and experiences that do not fit into the process at all (Galvan, 2012).

Once themes have been grouped, designers should begin to define insights by selecting information linked to the challenge that fills in gaps in knowledge or otherwise seem worthy of pursuit (Galvan, 2012). It is often worthwhile to have these insights given a cursory review by an individual familiar with the challenge, but outside the design team in order to ensure that the connections being made are logical (Galvan, 2012). Designers should attempt to make these insights actionable through methods such as drafting a list of "how might we" questions that get to the heart of insights and assigning them to brainstorming sessions for further dissection (Galvan, 2012).

d.   Ideate

The easiest way to think about the ideation phase is as a method of concentrated brainstorming spurred on as a result of analysis of the problem statement (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). This project stated that the subjects of these brainstorming sessions are usually components of the entire challenge, not the challenge as a whole, which can speak to the various perspectives and parts of it. The goal of ideation, as the project views it, is idea generation that will serve to shift the designer's mindset from problem identification to problem solving and user-center solution generation. Especially in the early phases of design thinking ideation, the project asserts that the objective is to push for a wide range of ideas and solutions for analysis and comparison, even conflicting ideas. To this end, the project asserts that ideas should be put forward and recorded before fully evaluating them.

In preparation for brainstorming, designers should solidify a well-articulated topic for each session that addresses the goal of the session and should keep in mind that it is not necessary that one session completely solves the challenge (Galvan, 2012). Designers should choose a diverse group of individuals to participate in brainstorming to bring new ideas and viewpoints in addition to planning to work for an hour at most to maintain focus and energy within the group (Galvan, 2012). It is also recommended that designers discuss and abide by the following rules of thumb with their team so that they can gently attempt to keep ideation sessions on track and productive (Galvan, 2012);

- Participants should refrain from passing judgement when new ideas are voiced and instead should wait until ideas are discussed more in depth.

- Out-of-the-box and even eccentric ideas should be encouraged as even if they cannot be implemented, they can provide inspiration for other, more achievable ideas.

- The ideas of others should be viewed as jumping off points or foundations for even grander ideas.

- Remain narrowly focused on the topic and the specific aspects of the challenge being tackled in this session.

- Allow time for all ideas to be voiced and discussed before shifting focus.

- Encourage the generation and use of visual aids and rough sketching to assist in breathing some life into ideas.

- Set a goal to create a defined, high number of ideas per session, as the goal in this phase is quantity over quality.

When spearheading ideation sessions, designers should designate a facilitator to lead discussion and keep the group focused, and have this individual briefly explain the topic and rules for the exercise (Galvan, 2012). The facilitator, as Galvan views it, should start with a warm-up exercise to put the team in the right mindset and in a good mood. Galvan notes, however, that this exercise can be especially helpful when trying to acclimate a team of individuals who do not know each other well. One such example can be to have individuals give as many bad solutions to the problem as possible in a short amount of time.

Facilitators should be reminded to address only one topic at a time to maintain focus and detail and keep the mood elevated by providing encouragement or shifting topics when productivity stutters (Galvan, 2012). To ensure that these transitions run smoothly, Galvan suggests that facilitators should try to change topics every 15 to 20 minutes and set a minimum number of ideas to be generated before the transition takes place. Once initial

brainstorming ideations have been completed, Galvan states that facilitators should group similar ideas and ask participants for feedback on each idea, picking favorite concepts and discussing the feedback and recording the results. To flesh out the popular but basic ideas currently on the board, Galvan suggests that facilitators break out the group into smaller teams and have them sketch out one specific idea at a time in more detail. Galvan then directs that these small groups should be directed to expand their sketches to include some simple concepts that could help bridge gaps in making the idea a realized concept, focusing on critical aspects of the idea. Each small team then presents their fleshed-out sketch to the group as a whole to gather feedback (Galvan, 2012).

Designers should then engage in a reality check of these fleshed out and refined ideas by performing the following steps (Galvan, 2012).

1. Examine the true purpose of the idea and ask what value they bring to addressing the challenge.

2. List all relevant constraints and examine how they interact with each other and the proposed ideas.

3. Repeat brainstorming sessions to see if new ideas could help alleviate interactions with constraints.

4. Assimilate these new ideas with the core idea under analysis to mitigate constraints.

5. Record the idea for later analysis and move onto other popular ideas that were generated for the same process of refinement.

Following the reality check, designers should craft a specification sheet that details the following information (Galvan, 2012).

- A title for the idea.

- A one sentence summary of the idea.

- A list of the people involved in building the idea in the real world and those who would be involved in using the finished project.

- Details about the need for and benefits of the idea's implementation, and any tangential opportunities for use in the field.

- A brief list of any lingering questions and potential future challenges.

This sheet can further serve the design team via being made available to the all team members and making adjustments to incorporate new information as the team goes through prototyping and testing (Galvan, 2012).

e. *Prototype*

The goal of prototyping is to create a physical representation of the product that is intended to be delivered (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). This study Prototyping means breathing life into your ideations and building a tangible product from which you can learn and communicate the potential of your vision to other stakeholders (Galvan, 2012). This product is by no means intended to be a polished, fully realized concept, but rather a rough approximation that can be further discussed, tested, and refined (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). This study asserts that this approximation can take many forms depending on the final product to be delivered including, but not limited to, a technological device, a set of parameters for role-play, a mock-up of a new user-interface for a website, or even a set of guidelines for handling challenging conversations. While it can be tempting to create one prototype and become laser-focused on its success, this study posits that the creation of multiple prototypes that can be compared is a good starting point as different variables can be introduced and toggled as desired. A good rule of thumb is to create at least three prototypes so different approaches to the idea can be tested and compared without significant downtime for re-prototyping (Galvan, 2012).

Whatever design you choose for your prototypes, their construction should be informed by the culmination of all the information they have gathered thus far (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). Studies by Kaiser Permanente demonstrated that rudimentary prototypes, sometimes just comprised of a few drawings, were determined to be incredibly helpful in determining a direction for product development for surgeons desiring a new tool (Brown, 2008). The same studies indicated that more polished

prototypes tended to produce a lowered amount of attention being given to the feedback and a decrease in the effectiveness of its implementation (Brown, 2008). When prototyping, it is crucial for designers to remember that their goal is not to create a fully developed product that is ready for implementation, but rather to assess the prototype's strengths and weaknesses before developing refinements or a new direction for subsequent iterations of the prototype (Brown, 2008).

Following analysis and construction of initial prototype(s), designers should plan how they will begin gathering feedback, starting with how they will identify sources (Galvan, 2012). Galvan asserts that designers should select a setting for the prototype that will provide comfort for the tester and context to the problem and decide what specific aspects of the idea are being tested by the prototype, establish a plan for feedback exercises and define what specific data they are looking for from each exercise. When selecting participants to test prototype(s), Galvan states that designers should consider individuals who have previously participated in the design thinking project as they will be more familiar with the concepts or challenges being addressed, and therefor will be able to provide a more intimate response. Individuals who have not participated up to this point should not be discounted, however, as Galvan asserts that they will be able to provide a fresh perspective and may be able to identify aspects that those with prior knowledge of the project may get attached to more easily. Galvan also asserts that designers should be reminded that whatever the solicitation method, response rates for academic studies are typically low and as such, they should send invites to a greater number of potential respondents than are needed to complete the study.

As with preparation for the empathy phase, prototyping involves crafting detailed question guides to direct the collection of feedback (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). Designers should use their original question list(s) from the empathy phase for a starting point when formulating a set open ended questions to use in testing evolutions (Galvan, 2012). The final list of questions should be intended to prompt participants to build and expand upon your ideas, rather than providing binary answers (Galvan, 2012). One possibility for structuring these questions would be to begin with soliciting initial thoughts and impressions about the product, leading into specific feedback about various

aspects of the product, and ending with open-ended conversations where participants can broaden the scope of discussion as they see fit (Galvan, 2012). Designers should always ensure that they have a physical question guide for reference but allow participants to wander from the questions as they see fit (Galvan, 2012). Though prototyping traditionally occurs prior to the initiation of testing, the two phases can often occur in tandem in many respects as determining how a prototype can be tested and considered a success will often impact how it is crafted (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010).

f.   Testing

The testing phase is the proverbial first contact with the users of a designer's solution and is where they can gather feedback on their prototypes and develop an even greater amount of empathy for the intended audience of the prototype (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). As this study outlines, the goal of testing is to refine the prototype(s) in order to build better solutions through gaining a better understanding of the user, and refine the designer's view on the situation as a whole. This study asserts that an ideal testing phase will allow users to figure out the proper application of the product on their own and will test multiple prototypes in order to create distinct experiences that users can compare.

When conducting feedback sessions, designers should actively encourage honest feedback and be transparent about the work-in-progress status of the project (Galvan, 2012). Designers should ask those testing the prototype to use or at the very least envision the product in the environment in which it is meant to be deployed (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010). Participants should be allowed to see multiple prototypes in one session so they can provide comparison feedback (Galvan, 2012). Designers should remain neutral when presenting, receiving feedback and responding to comments by participants and be ready to adapt by implementing ideas from participants during the session (Galvan, 2012).

Designers should plan to record and expand notes immediately following the session, when information is still fresh in your memory (Galvan, 2012). They should also discuss their findings shortly after each feedback session to begin brainstorming how to utilize feedback effectively (Galvan, 2012). Integrating feedback can be approached

similarly to how the define phase approaches information, beginning with grouping similar themes and suggestions gathered from feedback to identify trends (Galvan, 2012). Following a detailed discussion amongst the design team on the relevance and feasibility of feedback, suggestions should be integrated into the prototypes (Galvan, 2012). This process of holding feedback groups and implementing suggestions should be repeated several times to ascertain the effectiveness of the original feedback (Galvan, 2012). When the desired number of testing evolutions have been completed, the final step designers should perform is to create a detailed plan of what will be needed to create a fully functional prototype of your idea for an initial rollout in the field (Galvan, 2012). This plan should include, but is not limited to, any materials, funding, and/or personnel needed to bring the idea to life as well as an estimated production/implementation timeline with a set of 'next steps' necessary to begin production (Galvan, 2012).

g.   *Evolution*

Although not strictly part of the design thinking process, it should be noted that the sufficiently successful rollout of a design thinking product, is not necessarily the definitive end of the project as evolution over time can serve to make a product more perfect and effective (Galvan, 2012). To prepare for successful evolution, Galvan asserts that designers should consider the audience point of view, how they perceive the challenge and implemented solution, then determine how the designers will track the impact of their solution. They further suggest that designers should determine indicators of change and periodically appraise them, meticulously documenting their findings as they do. Galvan suggests that the design team should arrange to meet periodically to discuss their observations and interpretations of the indicators of change as well as any observations of the effectiveness of the solution. This before/after record of the deployment of the design thinking solution will help to identify any failings of your solution and build a timeline to address them (Galvan, 2012). In addition to this timeline, Galvan asserts that designers should make a plan for engaging stakeholders to share the successes, failures and details of how further improvements will be sought out and implemented.

Above all, it should be remembered that iteration both a key part of the application of design thinking and its greatest strength, with the process being able to be restarted at different phases in order to better understand and refine solutions (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2010).

III.   RESEARCH METHODS

This project was reviewed by an Institutional Review Board associated with NPS and determined to not meet the federal government's definition of research as it is not generalizable. My research methodology largely followed the Stanford Model for Design Thinking, beginning with an expanded empathy phase. This phase consisted of reviewing prior research on the subjects under study, and extensive one-on-one interviews with active duty Naval Officers regarding their experiences with social stressors from March 2020 through March 2021. This material was then analyzed for trends related to inclusive behaviors in the workplace, with these trends serving as a starting point for the following ideation phase.

A.   STEP 1 – ANALYSIS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

Prior research considered the role of organizational management and human resources (HR) monitoring of an organization's official and unofficial online communities and forums to ensure inclusivity and proper behavior upon the part of organizational members. This research revealed a larger than expected amount of non-inclusive behaviors on the part of organizational members and leaders which was having an impact on other, more junior members. This research also indicates that an organized and deliberate command effort centered around propagating inclusive actions could increase organizational feelings of inclusion for members that might otherwise be marginalized.

B.   STEP 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The next step was to conduct a thorough literature review relating to the importance of inclusion in organizations, how leaders can foster inclusive practices, how inclusion and its history differ in the military from corporate environments, and the background, components and implementation of the design thinking process. The results of this review can be found in chapter two of this thesis.

C. STEP 3 – FORMULATION OF GOALS AND REQUIREMENTS

The first and most notable limitation of our research was that the participants were limited to Navy personnel and, due to fiscal restraints, further narrowed to those associated with the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), to include those engaging in distance learning while stationed in other geographic locations. While this limitation is not overly substantial due to the wide array of personal and professional backgrounds represented, there was a disproportionate percentage of junior to midgrade officers at NPS when compared to the general make-up of the fleet as a whole. Given this limitation, we decided to execute the remaining phases of the design thinking process as follows:

1. Empathy – expand upon prior research by conducting a series of one-on-one interviews with Navy personnel who were on active duty from March 2020–March 2021.

2. Define – conduct an analysis of trends from interview responses relating to inclusive behaviors and compare them to those present in literature on the subject. Introduce these trends to focus groups and work with them to further refine the definition of the challenge facing inclusion at the unit level.

3. Ideate – work within the aforementioned focus groups to come up with proposed unit responses to both specific types of social stressors (a mass medical event, a local police shooting, etc.).

4. Prototype – work within the same focus groups to create generalized command responses to any social stressor.

5. Testing – present solutions to senior leaders in the Navy and civilian academic human resources field to gather feedback and proposed alterations.

To enable the execution of one-on-one interviews and focus groups, we began by attempting to cast a wide enough recruiting net so as to capture a wide range of racial, gender, ethnic, sexuality, age, and experiential backgrounds. This was done in pursuit of

capturing as representative of a sample of the fleet as possible, while also endeavoring to have voices representing even small minorities within the fleet.

D. STEP 4 – ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

Solicitations for participation in the study were sent to all personnel affiliated with NPS, including staff and distance learning students via email with the flyer shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.   Recruitment Flyer

Respondents were directed to a digital form that collected the following demographic information, a copy of which can be found in Appendix A.

Table 3.   Initial Information Collected from Respondents

Name	Paygrade	Gender
Age	Race	Ethnicity
Preferred Interview Medium	Designator	Contact Information

Responses were collected over several weeks, with the following individuals having both responded to the initial in-take survey and followed through with an interview. The names of individuals have been changed, in line with the researcher's belief that confidentiality would encourage an increased level of candor from participants.

Table 4.   Respondent Demographics

Alias	Paygrade	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Designator
Jacob Cook	O-3E	Male	32	Asian, White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1120
Scotty Alders	O-3	Male	28	Asian	Korean	1200
Margo Powers	O-3E	Female	39	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1460
Blossom Walmsley	O-2	Female	29	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1820
Kelly Fabron	O-3E	Female	27	Black or African American	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	2300
Allison Hillam	O-3	Female	28	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1110
Malcolm Reynolds	O-3	Male	26	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1810
Roland O'Dim	O-4	Male	35	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1120
Hoban Washburne	O-3E	Male	37	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1200
Grayson Richardson	O-3	Male	28	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1110
Simon Tam	O-3	Male	33	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	2300
Gordon Jamison	O-4	Male	33	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1305
Janine Scrivens	O-3	Female	32	Asian, White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1110
Nikolas Brolin	O-3	Male	27	Black or African American	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1200
Matthew Roth	O-3	Male	31	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1207

Respondents were assigned to an interviewer based on their minority/majority status, again, based on the belief that participants being paired with an interviewer that they share minority/majority status with would encourage and increased level of candor when responding to questions. Lieutenant Wesley A. Norton, USN, assumed responsibility for interviewing majority respondents and Captain Annmarie Lindzy, USMC, assuming responsibility for interviewing minority respondents. For this study, majority is defined in the context of those whose basic demographics match a majority of members of the U.S. Navy, in this case being straight white males.

Respondents were scheduled for hour long interviews in private locations and were asked the following structured questions, grouped by the broad event they were related to, but with the instruction that participants were allowed to follow their train of thought to explore the issues.

1. **Interview Questions**

1. Where were you stationed in March 2020-March 2021?
2. COVID-19
   a. If you were to describe your experience during this time period, how would you describe it?
   b. How did your unit respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?
   c. How did COVID-19 have an impact on your daily life outside of work?
   d. What measures did your unit take to assist service members and their families during this time?
   e. Did the pandemic create tension within the unit?
   f. What (if anything) would you have liked to see from your unit/ commander to address the pandemic and its effect on members?
   g. Is there anything else about your experience with the pandemic, or your unit's experience that you want to talk about?
3. BLM
   a. How did you feel upon hearing of the death of George Floyd?
   b. Did your unit have a response to George Floyd's death or the ensuing BLM protests?
   c. Could you sense tension within the unit regarding the subject?
   d. Did you feel the unit did what it could/should respond and support members?
   e. What would you have like to see from your unit?

f. Is there anything else about your experience with the BLM movement, or your unit's experience that you want to talk about?

4. January 6, 2021
   a. What was your reaction to the Capitol events in Jan 2021?
   b. What was your unit's response?
   c. Did your unit conduct DOD Extremism Training?
   d. Tell us about your experience with this training.
   e. Did you find the training effective?
   f. How would you have ideally addressed this issue with your sailors?
   g. How do you think the Navy's response to issues such as these affects individual's sense of inclusion?
   h. Do you think the approach leaves some groups alienated? Or has it made you yourself feel alienated?
   i. Is there anything else about your experience with the January 6, 2021 and the following reactions, or your unit's experience that you want to talk about?

5. Misinformation
   a. Did you observe any instances of misinformation (or incorrect information) regarding the events above being shared in the workplace?
   b. How did leadership respond to this?
   c. How would you like to have seen leadership respond to this?

6. Do you have any additional thoughts that you'd like to share?

The following event definitions were also provided upon request to interviewees in order to help clarify the scope of the study.

- COVID-19 – We are referring to the international COVID-19 pandemic that has significant effects throughout 2020–2021, continuing through present day. The pandemic not only presented health risks, but also resulted in many people working in high-risk environments, suddenly working from home, or being laid off. The pandemic closed schools, which resulted in many families rethinking childcare plans. Travel was also restricted, which kept many people from travelling to see loved ones.

- BLM: "Black Lives Matter is a political and social movement originating among African Americans, emphasizing basic human rights and racial equality for Black people and campaigning against various forms of

racism" (Patel & Javeed, 2021). Following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 there were many protests held across the country, which sparked debate on racism in the United States.

- January 6, 2021: The election related protest occurred in Washington, D.C., which resulted in the breach of the Capitol building, and the subsequent response of military and police forces. In the following year, this led to political debate and investigation regarding the breach of the Capitol.

In order to avoid leading participants, words such as riot, insurrection, terrorism, treason, patriots, and an indication as to the legitimacy of the 2020 election cycle were deliberately avoided.

2. Analysis Coding

Behaviors for coding interview transcripts were drawn from a variety of literature regarding inclusion in the workplace that is outlined in the literature review above. In addition to the following codes, researchers specifically searched for instances of the inverse of these behaviors and coded for them. For example, one of the negative behaviors that was identified as harming feelings of inclusion was indecisiveness on the part of leadership. Given this negative behavior, we were able to code for instances of its positive inverse, decisiveness on the part of leadership. One example of this behavior (decisiveness) came when an interviewed member noted that at the beginning of the pandemic, their command of several hundred sailors was restructured for telework. This included the shrinking of on-site staff to less than 100 with the remainder given a defined telework plan. This member stated the result this restructuring was "consistent throughout that entire time. So, you know, unlike here at NPS, there wasn't the constant back and forth of, oh, we're going back to work, oh, we're going back to virtual. So, in that regard, I think they handled it well because you don't know, so it's better to just keep consistency and allow people to do what they have to do without hindering their everyday schedules, you know, with regards to childcare, things like that." The positive and negative behaviors that were coded for, and a brief definition in each behavior, can be seen in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5.   Coded Positive Behaviors

P1	Interest in others/knowing the team – attempts to understand and engage with those around them without judgment.
P2	Cultural intelligence – understands and adapts to individual and workplace cultures.
P3	Effective collaboration – empowering others to make meaningful impacts, soliciting other viewpoints, focus on psychological safety.
P4	Shares personal weaknesses – the leader openly asks about information they are not aware of. Demonstrates humble, collaborative work. Enables others to speak up when they need assistance.
P5	Humility – to include discussion of capabilities and admitting mistakes.
P6	Demonstrated awareness of bias – directly addresses potential blind spots and works to minimize their negative impact.
P7	Commitment to justice/accountability/policing – challenges status quo and holds others accountable.
P8	Flexibility – able to adapt to changes without an emotional response.
P9	Recognition – acknowledges daily contribution and awards outstanding impact actions.
P10	Empathy – acknowledges and is sensitive to the individual backgrounds and experiences of others.

Table 6.   Coded Negative Behaviors

N1	Overpowering others – cutting off, undercutting or verbally discouraging input from teammates.
N2	Favoritism – when the leader consistently chooses the same top performers for tasks or assignments, this discourages other members and also overworks the favorites.
N3	Discounts alternative views – shuts down or belittles other opinions.
N4	Indecisiveness – failure to commit to a set course of action.

While indecisiveness on the part of a leader was not directly cited in any literature on inclusive leadership behavior, it was seen as a consistent negative theme across a preponderance of interviews.

3. Interview Results

The tallies of observed behaviors from the interviews can be seen in Tables 7, 8 , 9 and 10.

Table 7.   Majority Positive and Inverse Positive Behaviors

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
22	11	14	3	8	10	6	26	0	31
IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP7	IP8	IP9	IP10
8	7	5	0	1	6	2	5	1	3

Table 8.   Majority Negative and Inverse Negative Behaviors

N1	N2	N3	N4
2	0	11	18
IN1	IN2	IN3	IN4
3	1	4	21

Table 9.   Minority Positive and Inverse Positive Behaviors

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
20	10	25	2	8	8	17	8	0	23
IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP7	IP8	IP9	IP10
31	21	16	0	0	5	3	11	0	29

Table 10.   Minority Negative and Inverse Negative Behaviors

N1	N2	N3	N4
2	1	16	31
IN1	IN2	IN3	IN4
0	0	3	3

E.   STEP 5 – FOCUS GROUPS

A total of three focus groups were organized and comprised of majority, minority, and mixed majority/minority members respectively. The groups were then taken through a miniature evolution of the design thinking process with the goal of producing a set of

guidelines for responding to external social stressors for comparison and testing. Participants were solicited from those who had responded to the initial recruitment process, as well as a secondary recruitment process facilitated by word of mouth from participants in the interviews and facilitators. An active effort was made on the part of the facilitators to organize focus groups with a mixture of participants with varied backgrounds in the URL, RL, and Staff Corps as well as those with prior enlisted experience. For the empathize phase for all focus groups, participants were presented with the trends from the individual interviews, namely that the most identified positive behaviors were empathy and interest in others/knowing the team, while the most identified negative behaviors were Indecisiveness and the discounting of alternative views.

1. Majority Focus Group

The following participants (Table 11) were sourced for the majority member focus group.

Table 11.   Majority Focus Group Participants

Alias	Paygrade	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Designator
Hoban Washburne	O-3E	Male	37	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1200
Simon Tam	O-3	Male	33	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	2300
Matthew Roth	O-3	Male	31	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1207
Mark Randall	O-1	Male	22	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1390

a. Empathize

Continuing the empathize phase, participants were asked to discuss what the above trends meant to them. The following were the group's interpretations of what the positive trends meant and how they could be roughly implemented. The group suggested that perceptions of empathy could be improved by leaders up to and including the CO instituting an "Open Door Policy" where any concerns could be discussed without fear of

reprisal or judgement. In doing so, leaders must also communicate a commitment to "No Favorites" which in this context could most aptly apply to not displaying overly sympathetic tendencies toward those who share the leader's viewpoint on an issue. The group also identified continually working towards a psychologically safe environment for the team (unit) as a critical factor for enabling empathetic responses and effective communication in general. In the context of a military unit, psychological safety is best framed in a team context, as opposed to an individual or dyadic situation, and is summarized by Amy Edmondson of Harvard University "as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. For the most part, this belief tends to be tacit—taken for granted and not given direct attention either by individuals or by the team as a whole" (Edmondson, 1999).

When discussing the heavy trend of interviewees responding positively to instances of (or desiring more instances of) leaders displaying an interest in other/knowing the team, the group's interpretation was a practice of leaders to and including the CO conducting "random check-ins and follow-ups" with personnel to try to ascertain if they are well and if they require any clarifications or special assistance regarding issues. The group stated that this practice should be coupled with leaders regularly holding "town halls" where all members of the command can discuss their thoughts and concerns in an open forum. Special attention was paid to how these events should occur during work hours, to demonstrate buy-in from leadership. Negative trends were interpreted by the focus group as leadership not explaining their decisions effectively and relying on a source of information with a tendency to waffle on their decisions.

Solicitations for additional input from the group produced the following suggestions for commanders to improve general relations with their personnel. Commanders should pursue the implementation of an effective feedback loop where senior leaders can be fed information from the deckplates and respond to changes in the status of their personnel. When making changes, commanders should to the greatest extent possible provide transparency about the motivations and reasoning for actions taken by leadership. With this transparency, commanders should amplify information about how and why policies may be reversed or altered quickly after implementation to attempt to head off

social friction that may be created through perceived indecision. Another method that the group suggested for heading off this perception of indecision would be to attempt to leave new policies in place for at least 6 months before any changes are made so as to fully ascertain their effects. Participants did agree that limited exceptions should be made for extenuating circumstances, such as if more freedom could be granted to personnel when the risk of it being quickly rescinded is low.

b. Define

When attempting to define inclusiveness at the unit level, a general definition of inclusiveness as a feeling of belonging within a unit and an understanding that an individual will be permitted and is desired to participate in unit functions in a meaningful way was presented. Following this statement, participants did not have follow-up questions regarding the definition.

c. Ideate

Participants completed ideation exercises by placing post-it notes on a white board for all participants and facilitators to see and then briefing the group on their solutions. To help frame the exercise, participants were sent through a 'how might we' exercise where they were asked to devise solutions to the local shooting of an unarmed individual by police, a local protest with a high risk of turning violent, and a mass medical event such as a pandemic. In order to break the ice and get ideas flowing from participants, the facilitator conducted a brief evolution where participants were encouraged to write down the worst approach they could think of for the scenarios outlined above, as quickly as possible, which would then be read to the group by the facilitator.

As a negative response to a police shooting, two participants suggested ignoring the event entirely, one suggested blindly taking the side of the shooter and demonstrating no empathy for the victim, and another one also suggested coming out in favor of the police, even with the knowledge that the shooting was wrongful. As a negative response to a protest with the propensity for violence, participants suggested embracing violent behavior, endorsing participation in violent behavior, encouraging extremist behavior and/or coming out with a statement of personal opinions which would encourage or empathize with violent

behavior, and showing support for specific details or articles that only strengthen one side of the argument. As a negative response to a mass medical event, two participants suggested completely disregarding or ignoring the event's occurrence, one suggested encouraging self-treatment and letting personnel figure it out for themselves, and the final participant suggested command endorsement of a 'survival of the fittest' mentality. In addition to putting the participants in a more relaxed state of mind, this exercise was useful in demonstrating what members of the focus group viewed as the worst possible approach to better inform guidelines for commanders.

Following this exercise, the whiteboard was then broken into categories with participants being asked to provide an answer to each component of their proposed response. Participants were asked to provide a structure of the response, the leader responsible for addressing the situation, key characteristics of the response, where the response should take place, and when it should take place. The following answers were given as proposed responses to each situation when participants were asked to devise responses individually.

Table 12.   Majority Focus Group Individual Responses to a Police Shooting
of an Unarmed Individual

Issue	Police Shooting			
Participant	Washburne	Tam	Roth	Randall
Structure of response	Mass email -> All hands call	Come out with a statement of understanding of mixed emotions among the sailors and offer services such as therapists or small group discussions	All hands (general info) -> Small group discussion -> Inputs documented -> Await further information about the shooting	All hands email -> Town Hall (optional attendance)
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO	Initial – Top level leader of unit Small group discussions – initiated and organized at chief level or immediate leadership level of those seeking it Therapists – made available by base and unit leadership	CO -> Department Head -> Division Officer/ Chief -> PAO	CO with PAO approval
Key characteristics	How it misaligns with Navy core values and diminishes trust Empathetic	Empathy Trust Confident in direction of leadership Inspiring to maintain productivity and support personal/ mental health	Tone: CO/Dept. Head/ DIVO/Chief – General/Neutral/ Hopeful & Optimistic PAO – Facts with no spin	Tone: Empathetic Take the middle ground Don't deny it happened but also don't accept it.
Where would it take place	At work	At work, in person	At work, in person if possible	On base
When would it take place	During work hours	During work hours	During work hours	After work hours

Table 13.   Majority Focus Group Individual Responses to a Local Violent
Protest

Issue	Violent Protest			
Participant	Washburne	Tam	Roth	Randall
Structure of response	Mass email -> All hands call	All hands call -> Small group discussions (optional)	All hands call -> Small group discussion -> Email	Regular methods to pass word down chain
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO	CO -> Division (shop) leaders	CO -> Department Head/ Division Officer/ Chief -> PAO	CO -> Repeated down the chain
Key characteristics	How it misaligns with Navy core values and diminishes trust Empathetic	Empathy Trust Confident in direction of leadership Inspiring to maintain productivity and support personal/ mental health	Tone: Fact based/ objective/neutral	Tone: Neutral/against violence CO – Command's stance DIVO – Guidelines to personnel
Where would it take place	At work	At work, in person	At work, in person if possible	At work
When would it take place	During work hours	During work hours	During work hours	During working hours

Table 14. Majority Focus Group Individual Responses to a Mass Medical Event

Issue	Mass Medical Event			
Participant	Washburne	Tam	Roth	Randall
Structure of response	Mass email -> All hands call -> Follow up emails	Email -> All hands Q&A	All hands (general info) -> Small group discussion -> Inputs documented -> Await further information about the event	Mass email -> All hands call
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO	CO and medical official to advise responses	CO & Medical Official -> Department Head -> Division Officer/ Chief -> PAO	CO -> Ranking medical official
Key characteristics	Internal/ external impacts Probable timeline	CO should state understanding and empathy toward individual health risk; explain there will be confusion of information from research, but encourage steadfastness and continued drive ahead to the greatest extent possible	Tone: Fact based/objective/ neutral but be transparent that not enough is known yet	Fact based Informative
Where would it take place	No Preference	At work	At work, in person if possible	At work
When would it take place	No Preference	During work hours	During work hours	During work hours

d.   Prototype

Each participant briefed all three of their proposed plans of how they see the "training" taking place, with members of the group briefly offering feedback as they were presented. The feedback provided was not intended to be comprehensive, but rather strong positive or negative feelings meant to spark additional ways of thinking as participants entered the next exercise. Following this evolution, participants were paired and instructed to go through the "how might we" exercise again, but with the understanding that there should be a consensus between partners and the ability to incorporate feedback from the previous evolution. The following solutions were generated.

Table 15.   Majority Focus Group Paired Responses to a Police Shooting of an Unarmed Individual

Issue	Police Shooting	
Participant	Washburne & Roth	Tam & Randall
Structure of response	Mass email -> Small group sessions	Mass email -> Small group sessions
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO -> Department Heads -> Division Officer (recorder)	CO -> Division leadership
Key characteristics	Empathy Trust in the Justice System Alignment/misalignment with core values	Empathetic Neutral Informative
Where would it take place	At work, as soon as possible	At work, in-person
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours

Table 16.   Majority Focus Group Paired Responses to a Local Violent Protest

Issue	Violent Protest	
Participant	Washburne & Roth	Tam & Randall
Structure of response	All hands	Mass email -> Small group sessions
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO	CO -> Division leadership
Key characteristics	Empathy Alignment with core values Adherence to Oath	Empathetic Neutral Informative
Where would it take place	At work	At work, in-person
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours

Table 17.   Majority Focus Group Paired Responses to a Mass Medical Event

Issue	Mass Medical Event	
Participant	Washburne & Roth	Tam & Randall
Structure of response	Email -> All hands	Mass email -> Small group sessions -> Q&A with medical official
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO	CO -> Division leadership -> CO & medical official
Key characteristics	Empathy CDC guidelines Internal/external impacts	Empathetic Neutral Informative
Where would it take place	At work	At work, in-person for as long as possible, video meetings afterwards
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours with periodic updates as necessary

Each team then presented their proposed plans to the rest of the group in the same manner as the first exercise, with members of the other team offering feedback. Following this evolution, participants were instructed to go through the "how might we" exercise again as one unified team, with the understanding that there should be a consensus within the group and the ability to incorporate feedback from the previous evolution. The following solutions were generated.

Table 18.   Majority Focus Group Responses to a Common Social Stressors

Issue	Police Shooting	Violent Protest	Mass Medical Event
Structure of response	Email -> Small group sessions	Short all hands call -> Email -> Small group sessions	All hands -> Email Q&A
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO -> Department Heads	CO -> XO -> Department Head (disagreement was had on if this should be changed based on race of facilitator, meaning should a white DH present a racially charged issue?)	CO -> Local medical official
Key characteristics	Empathetic Promote participation in small groups Neutral/Facts Promote trust in justice system to promote good order and discipline	Empathy for sailors Neutral/informative CO can't pick a side Emphasize the need for trust in each other Special care should be shown for new recruits	Transparent Humble – admit what we don't know Emphasize that we are in this together Honesty
Where would it take place	At work	At work	At work
When would it take place	During business hours, shortly after event	During business hours	During business hours Bi-weekly updates

e.   Testing

After all prototypes were presented, the group discussed what they liked, didn't like, and offered input on things that should be added. Washburne stated that due to their daily proximity to a bulk of the sailors in a command, small groups discussions should be handled exclusively by division officers and division chiefs. Tam stated that he believes

that the CO should only be directly responsible for setting a broad message to the command while the OIC/DH provides more details on the matter and encourages feedback from sailors. Tam followed this up with the statement that ultimately, teams are where the real discussion should be taking place and are where encouraging openness is crucial. Randall largely agreed with Washburne and Tam, stating that the majority of small group work and discussions should happen at the division level, facilitated by the chiefs. Randall stated that this reason for leaning on chiefs for facilitation was due to chiefs "seeing the feelings" of their sailors and being able to more easily provide one on one attention when needed.

Roth was far more willing to expand on his views of the challenge, beginning by stating that all of the issues we discussed and understanding that social stressors link back to the "tone at the top," with the top referring to the SECNAV and CNO. Roth stated that if these individuals do not appear invested in addressing an issue, to include social stressors, that a preponderance of the leaders in the Navy will also adopt this mindset. Assuming that addressing these issues does become a priority, Roth asserts that the CO is directly responsible for encouraging small group participation via a safe space mentality & eliciting open discussions on personal experiences. Roth believes that participation in these small groups should be strictly voluntary, so as to avoid pulling in people who do not wish to contribute and could detract from making progress towards a resolution or generally feel unaffected by the issue at hand. Roth also stated that the group size should be limited to 20–30 people per group so as to avoid the sessions becoming unmanageable by junior leaders. He also stated that he questions whether mass medical issues necessarily warrant this type of addressment as he views them as being less emotionally driven than other social stressors. Roth closed the focus out by making the statement that whatever is done by Navy leadership, "someone is marginalized, one way or another."

2. Minority Focus Group

The following participants were sourced for the minority member focus group.

Table 19.   Minority Focus Group Participants

Alias	Paygrade	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Designator
Scotty Alders	O-3	Male	28	Asian	Korean	1200
Nikolas Brolin	O-3	Male	27	Black or African American	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1200
Jacob Cook	O-3E	Male	32	Asian, White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1120
Ruth Owens	O-3	Female	35	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	3100

a.   *Empathize*

Participants were asked to discuss what the same trends presented to the majority focus group meant to them. The group suggested largely similar interpretations of the trends to those suggested by the majority focus group. When discussing what the trends meant to them, the participants raised the several questions for consideration when completing the exercises. When considering the engagement in, empathy with, and identification of an issue, how does the command know that one or more sailors have been affected by an event? When considering how a CO or command triad address an issue, what level of response is necessary? What is the threshold level for an issue that warrants response? By this, the group means to question what are the characteristics of an issue's public notoriety, effect on the daily operations of the command, effect on the command's sailors personally, etc., that require a response from the command. At what level is it necessary to address the whole command vs. a group/division/shop vs. the individual who is affected by the incident? When considering the resources necessary to respond to a social stressor? Who is the POC for the event type and type of response desired by the command? For example, a pandemic would not necessitate the same POC as local political unrest or

as a social conflict. Does the POC simply need to be someone that should be able to empathize with the command (such as a chaplain)?

b. *Define*

When attempting to define inclusiveness at the unit level, a general definition of inclusiveness as a feeling of belonging within a unit and an understanding that an individual will be permitted and is desired to participated in unit functions in a meaningful way was presented. Following this statement, participants did not have follow-up questions regarding the definition.

c. *Ideate*

Participants facilitated ideation exercises in the same manner as the majority focus groups, by placing post-it notes on a white board for all participants and facilitators to see and then briefing the group on their solutions. To help frame the exercise, participants were sent through a 'how might we' exercise where they were asked to devise a solution to a common social stressor. In order to break the ice and get ideas flowing from participants, the facilitator conducted the same brief evolution where participants were encouraged to write down the worst approach they could think of the same scenarios outlined for the majority focus group, as quickly as possible, which would then be read to the group by the facilitator. This exercise produced similar answers and appeared to have the desired effect of focusing the group. Following questions on the mechanics of what the facilitator was looking for, it was decided that the group would begin by executing an abbreviated 'how might we?' exercise to assist in general understanding of the focus group goals. The group selected a school shooting as their social stressor and deliver the following rudimentary proposed chain of events.

Table 20.   Minority Focus Group Proposed Response to a Local School
Shooting

Issue	Local School Shooting
Step 1	- Gather information about the threat. - Change command force protection posture if needed
Step 2	- Assemble command during work hours - Explain situation (who, what, when, where, why, how), showing empathy to situation - provide a list of command support services (Chaplain, Ombudsman, Wardroom, etc.) - Break command out into divisional/department groups to identify any members who may have children at the location of the incident
Step 3	- Monitor command response - Provide direct support to personnel affected by incident

Following this exercise, the whiteboard was then broken into the same categories as in the majority focus group with participants being asked to provide an answer to each component of their proposed response. The following answers were given as proposed responses to a general social stressor when participants were asked to devise responses individually.

Table 21.   Minority Focus Group Individual Responses to a General Social
Stressor (Participants 1 & 2)

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Alders	Brolin
Structure of response	In person recommended. Address that shows the event is acknowledged by higher ranking officers. Provide opportunity of small group discussion for all sailors	Depends on the event. For more general matters, an all hands call only would suffice. For matter that may invoke greater personal emotions, small group conversations should follow
Leader responsible for addressing it	Triad	CO or highest-ranking person on hand to address in a timely fashion
Key characteristics	Acknowledgement (we know what happened). Empathy (we know it's a tough time for some or all of the sailors). Unity (if one of us is impacted, we all are impacted). Solution (outline the way ahead with a real, tangible, actionable plan).	5 W's. Explain the goal and solution to the situation at hand
Where would it take place	At place of duty, during the workday	At place of duty, during the workday
When would it take place	During workday, within a week of the event happening	During work day to show that it is the priority at the moment, not normal business

Table 22. Minority Focus Group Individual Responses to a General Social Stressor (Participants 3 & 4)

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Cooke	Owens
Structure of response	Tailored to the level of the situation at hand. If a weather incident that is mostly information, email might suffice. If shooting or social issue, in person all hands call is necessary. Followed by small group discussions	Message from CO to the command, followed up by small group discussions. Coordinated with top level leadership to ensure synchronization of efforts and accountability
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO. Should the chaplain be more active in these situations?	CO, senior enlisted, and DIVOs
Key characteristics	Address who is affected, why it matters. Also address what is being done, what isn't being done, and WHY. Command's response should stress empathizing with sailors. Small groups should be relaxed and informal	Empathy, dynamic to adjust to changes, informal/social
Where would it take place	Tailorable to fit the situation. Larger issues should be addressed at place of duty, during the workday	address at place of duty to all hands, small group discussions to take place in the divisions/smaller shops
When would it take place	Tailorable to fit the situation. Larger issues should be addressed at place of duty, during the workday	Second half of the workday, after securing normal business operations. not to extend past the end of the work day because it sends the wrong message to the sailors

d. Prototype

Each participant their proposed plan of how they see the "training" taking place, with members of the group briefly offering feedback as they were presented. The feedback provided was not intended to be comprehensive, but rather strong positive or negative feelings meant to spark additional ways of thinking as participants entered the next

exercise. Following this evolution, participants were paired and instructed to go through the "how might we" exercise again, but with the understanding that there should be a consensus between partners and the ability to incorporate feedback from the previous evolution. The following solutions were generated.

Table 23.   Minority Focus Group Paired Responses to a General Social Stressor

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Alders & Brolin	Cooke & Owens
Structure of response	All hands call, followed by small group discussion. Email used minimally because it already self-selects for the message to be delivered primarily to senior sailors (enlisted and officers)	Scalable depending on the situation, but major issues MUST be addressed in person through an all-hands call. Followed by small group discussions. Not necessary to hold and in person formation for more minor events
Leader responsible for addressing it	Traid puts out initial message, but all Officers and Chiefs are responsible for maintaining response	Triad responsible for initial all-hands address. DIVOs and shop level responsible for follow on small group discussions, and also responsible for providing feedback to the command deck to help them add to or tailor their response to the situation
Key characteristics	Empathy. Explain all of the details of the situation. Must provide resources for assistance	Empathy. Meet the sailors where they are. Officers and Chiefs need to make themselves aware of how junior sailors in the barracks are experiencing this event. It is likely going to be very different from how the more senior members are
Where would it take place	Place of duty	Place of duty
When would it take place	During the workday	During the work day, preferably during the second half of the day so that the sailors are not pressed to return to work after having these sensitive conversations

As with the majority focus group, each team briefed their proposed plan, with members of the other team offering feedback as they are presented. Following this evolution, participants were instructed to go through the "how might we" exercise again as a team, but with the understanding that there must be a consensus within the group and the ability to incorporate feedback from the previous evolution. The following solution were generated.

Table 24.   Minority Focus Group Response to a General Social Stressor

Issue	General Social Stressor
Structure of response	Broken into two parts – proactive and reactive. Reactive response to event will be an all-hands call, then followed by small group discussion (mandatory for all sailors)
Leader responsible for addressing it	Triad responsible accuracy and content of initial message. Then all officers are responsible for maintaining support for their sailors
Key characteristics	Empathy. Accurate information. Hand out (or email) of information regarding support services ready to hand out to all sailors, so as not to make them have to seek out any resources themselves.
Where would it take place	Place of duty
When would it take place	During the work day, preferably at a time that allows sailors to leave workspaces after these conversations

e.   Testing

After all prototypes were presented, a group discussion was held where participants could discuss what they liked, didn't like, and offered topics that should be added. One participant stated they firmly believed that any all-hands calls should occur during the second half of the workday so as to both avoid large disruptions to necessary operations that could be prioritized for the morning, and allow for extended conversation to last after hours, if desired by members of the command. The minority focus group also came to a consensus that specific teams should be formed to directly respond to local needs that might be experienced by sailors. They further believed that commands should not just issue a brief statement about resources that are generally available, but should instead provide

specific POCs for specific need. This removes the need for sailors experiencing an acute problem having to perform an arduous search to get help. When closing out the focus group, a participant offered that determining thresholds for what warrants a response are identified should be of paramount concern as they are extremely subjective and difficult to ascertain, as not every incident that is perceived as a crisis or hot-button issue, by every sailor, can be responded to by commanders.

3.   Mixed Focus Group

The following participants were sourced for the mixed member focus group.

Table 25.   Mixed Focus Group Participants

Alias	Paygrade	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Designator
Joseph Bachman	O-4	Male	34	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1207
Robin Kirkman	O-4	Male	37	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1117
Jacob Cooke	O-3E	Male	32	Asian, White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1120
Jamie Blair	O-3	Female	29	Black or African American	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1200

a.   *Empathize*

Participants were asked to discuss the same trends presented to the prior focus groups. The mixed focus group offered substantially more feedback regarding their interpretations of what the trends meant as well as some rough approximations of how they could be implemented. A minority participant stated that, to them, empathy means demonstrating an acknowledgement of the situation. This acknowledgement includes that the event is happening, and that we don't have all the (or a single) answers yet. This participant stated that they believe a senior minority leader should be involved in the messaging, whenever possible. This participant also stated that they did not see this acknowledgement on a range of issues from their previous commander. A majority participant of the focus group followed up these comments by noting that while COs that

are straight, white men having all hands calls shows empathy, they run into the perception that a straight white male doesn't truly understand the situation.

The other minority member of the focus group emphasized that we (the Navy and its leaders) can't shy away from acknowledgment and that this isn't only important for big issues. This participant stated that resources to combat most of the issues related to social stressors in the fleet are technically available but widely unknown and underutilized. The final majority participant stated that they believed that empathy (being overly so) is a poor quality in a leader while vaguely and lightheartedly referenced Clausewitz as a basis for this statement. This participant further explained his basis for this statement by stating that "social media means everything is local," which complicates setting benchmark for what needs to be discussed/acknowledged since local matters outside the community can dramatically impact sailors. This participant also pointed out that there is a difference between sea and shore commands in regards to "the luxury to detract from the mission to discuss social issues."

When examining the Interest in Others trend, a minority participant of the focus group interpreted the trend as being around and listening to your people so information can flow up and down the chain. Both minority participant stated that leaders need to remember details about their people and higher-ups should check in with their people (i.e., a CO stopping by the admin shop to ask YN3 Bunk how's his little boy Jimmothy doing these days?) with one stating that leaders should actively suggest solutions for strain. A minority participant further stated that leaders should have a truly open door policy and be willing to give out personal phone numbers to facilitate that kind of open communication. To this end, this participant also suggested that leaders need to be willing to "bring the intensity down and joke around every now and then," in order to get buy-in and be someone their personnel want to work for. A majority participant agreed that leaders need to get to know their people and to be willing to ask them personal questions. They also stated that commands should hold events outside of the unit (like Hail & Farewells) in order to stimulate teambuilding. In response to these suggestions, the final majority participant stated that what was needed was stronger responses from chiefs regrading individual issues, due to problems with blurred lines along appropriate rank relationships if senior leaders are

attempting to address junior personnel's personal problems. This majority participant also proposed the question of how do we (leaders) avoid empathy being taken advantage of and reiterated their belief that personal conversations should stay at the division level unless it is absolutely necessary that they be elevated.

When interpreting the negative trend of indecisiveness, a minority participant stated that leaders should not sit idle, but rather they should acknowledge the issues at hand and "be a support system for anyone who feels… insert emotion." The participant stated that for mass medical issues, sailors need a direct guidance plan and that to this end, leaders should not waffle daily, but rather should wait for facts to be set in stone before responding. They also stated that a leader knowing their people well can help mitigate unhappy feelings from the necessary time imposed by waiting for facts to solidify but, ultimately, leaders need to make a decision and recover if necessary. A majority participant responded by restating that leaders should highlight resources available and that mass medical issues such as a pandemic can't be equated to political issues and will require a different response from leadership. This participant stated that consistency in response(s) is important as "deal with it" responses in reaction to waffling decisions. In the past were not received well by the troops but they may have ultimately been necessary because of the changing guidance. They closed their interpretation by iterating that leaders should always move forward swiftly on granting freedoms to sailors in currently restrictive situations.

The remaining majority member of the focus group stated that indecisiveness on political issues is the same as neutrality on the issue and that leaders should avoid commenting on the political nature of issues. This participant stated that, "If you bring up the events, you'll piss someone off," and asked what the difference between being "pissed off" and being unsafely isolated is? This member also ended by stating that ultimately, leaders need to make a decision and be willing to recover if necessary. Following this assessment, the remaining minority participant of the focus group recalled a time where a sailor on deployment spoke to them about being scared by the police and fearing for his family's safety from them while they were underway. This member closed by reiterating that acknowledgement of the issue at hand is needed, and a leader should offer potential solutions when speaking to their personnel.

When interpreting the negative trend of discounting alternative views, a majority participant stated that acknowledgement of alternative views is necessary, as totally discounting them is "clearly a bad action." This participant stated that leaders should reiterate what we (the Navy) stand for when the views sailors or high profile leaders come into conflict with our values. This participant expanded that there is a large difference between tolerance and acceptance, which leaders must highlight, and that leaders should tolerate (and encourage tolerance of) different views but don't necessarily need to accept them. They closed their interpretation by asking if commands should just lean on chaplains to deal with these social issues and to what extent is that even possible? The second majority participant stated that leaders needed to know how to respectfully disagree with someone while treating them the same as everyone else and asked if ignoring an issue the same as taking a stance?

In response, a minority participant stated that at the CO level, leaders should avoid taking sides and focus on equal, respectful treatment, but entirely ignoring a view or issue is a form of discounting it. The final minority participant stated that leaders should have a firm understanding of what extremist views actually are and know that different groups can have different concerns on that same issues while being able to differentiate between legitimate concerns and extremist views. This participant stressed that not addressing an issue can marginalize members of groups that have concerns about the issue and that chaplains are a resource for a command, not a crutch to avoid dealing with sensitive issues head on. This participant closed by stating that leaders should explain their reasoning for a stance or decision and solicit feedback from the troops to help head off friction in the ranks.

b. Define

When attempting to define inclusiveness at the unit level, the mixed focus group chose to build onto the blanket definition of inclusiveness and came up with the following stipulations the definition as it relates to the Navy

1.   We all (sailors) contribute to the mission.

2.   We highlight and celebrate the heritage of our organization and members.

3.   We treat all (sailors) equally and divide resources equally.

4.   We (leaders) should know the answer to the question "What makes you (the sailors under our charge) feel included?"

5.   Having an open-door policy.

c.   *Ideate*

Participants facilitated ideation exercises in the same manner as the majority and minority focus groups, by placing post-it notes on a white board for all participants and facilitators to see and then briefing the group on their solutions. To help frame the exercise, participants were sent through a 'how might we' exercise where they were asked to devise solutions to the local shooting of an unarmed individual by police, a local protest with a high risk of turning violent, and a mass medical event such as a pandemic before pivoting to solutions for a general social stressor. In order to break the ice and get ideas flowing from participants, the facilitators again conducted a brief evolution where participants were encouraged to write down the worst approach they could think of the scenarios outlined above, as quickly as possible, which would then be read to the group by the facilitator.

The following suggestions were put forward for the worst approaches that could be taken. When responding to the shooting of an unarmed individual by the police, majority participants suggested picking a side, commenting on who was "right and wrong" in the situation, and expressing personal opinions on the matter. Minority participants suggested opening up the armory and providing small arms to service members (unrelated to their duty) and offing no response at all, "with the understanding that this is an unwarranted shooting that has gained national attention." When responding to a protest with the potential to turn violent, majority participants suggested ignoring the event entirely, picking a side or making comments on which side is correct. Minority participants suggested condemning the acts of the protestors (specifically) or providing no response, acknowledgement or guidance. In response to a mass medical event, majority participants suggested not acting immediately or taking appropriate measures to safeguard personnel in addition to only discussing command (professional) impact while ignoring the impact on the personal lives of personnel. Minority participants suggested providing no response, no

action plan, no safety plan, and no verification of safety for family members as well as telling the sailors to "figure it out on their own." This exercise was, again, useful in demonstrating what members of the focus group viewed as the worst possible approach to better inform guidelines for commanders and relaxing them for the work ahead.

Following this exercise, the whiteboard was then broken into the same categories as were utilized in the previous focus groups, with participants being asked to provide an answer to each component of their proposed response. The following answers were given as proposed responses to each situation when participants were asked to devise responses individually.

Table 26. Mixed Focus Group Individual Responses to a Police Shooting of an Unarmed Individual

Issue	Police Shooting			
Participant	Bachman	Kirkman	Cooke	Blair
Structure of response	All-hands/ conference call	All-hands	Breaking news ->Mass announcement Several days of media coverage -> All-hands (if feasible) Email only as a last resort	All hands call
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO / Triad	CO	CO	CO
Key characteristics	Do: – Address circumstances – Acknowledge the impact on command members – Reiterate resources available	– Acknowledge it happened – Figure out who was effected by it & to what level – Ask if any sailor were directly	– If politically charged, remain neutral – Acknowledge that there are differing opinions – Acknowledge potential	– State resources are available for support – Keep a neutral tone – Be careful to not take a side on the issue – Tone should be serious due

Issue	Police Shooting			
Participant	Bachman	Kirkman	Cooke	Blair
	Don't: – Express personal opinions – Pick a side on the issue – Downplay the feelings of command members	affected by the event. – Encourage sailors to allow justice systems to respond	impact to groups – Identify resources & points of contact	to the situation, but should not come off as condescending or rude.
Where would it take place	At work, mass meeting, in person if possible	At work – Hanger Bay/ Mess decks	At work	At command in space big enough to accommodate all personnel
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours	During working hours (sailors over mission)	During working hours

Table 27.   Mixed Focus Group Individual Responses to a Local Potentially Violent Protest

Issue	Violent Protest			
Participant	Bachman	Kirkman	Cooke	Blair
Structure of response	All-hands -> Small group discussions	All-hands	All-hands (address topic) -> Small group breakouts (to discuss impact to individuals/groups)	All-hands
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO/Triad -> Department heads	CO	CO -> Group/division leadership (present & active)	CO

Issue	Violent Protest			
Participant	Bachman	Kirkman	Cooke	Blair
Key characteristics	Do: – Address circumstances – Acknowledge the impact on command members – Reiterate resources available – Reiterate military neutrality & Hatch Act – Stress UCMJ and dangerous activities associated with protests Don't: – Express personal opinions – Pick a side on the issue – Downplay feelings of command members	– Acknowledge the event – Remind sailors of Navy policy on protesting in uniform – Encourage a "Swim Buddy" if sailors intend to attend any protests	– Acknowledge the issue – Remain neutral – Express commitment to all sailor, equality, fairness, etc. – Acknowledge potential impact – Identify resources available & points of contact	– Tone should be firm and serious – Provide clear guidance on how (if wanted) sailors can participate in protests – CO should be extremely neutral and careful not to take a side
Where would it take place	At work, in-person Dept/Div space for small groups	At work (in-person) – Hanger Bay/ Mess decks	At work	At command in space big enough to accommodate all personnel
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours	During working hours	During working hours

Table 28.   Mixed Focus Group Individual Responses to a Mass Medical
Event

Issue	Mass Medical Event			
Participant	Bachman	Kirkman	Cooke	Blair
Structure of response	All-hands email -> Lower-level discussions or clarifications	All-hands	All-hands call	All-hands CALL
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO/Triad -> Dept/Div leadership is informed to answer individual questions	CO	CO	CO
Key characteristics	Do: – Provide as much info as possible – Express resources for members and family – Update regularly Don't: – Make no decisions – Be deceptive	– Understand what sailors are affected to what level – Address those needs via NMCRS & Chief's mess	– Address event – Address potential impact – Plan of action for command – Plan for family support & individual support – Solicit for unforeseen impacts – Identify resources available	– Tone should be serious – Should be clear and concise and provide clear guidance and protocol for safety
Where would it take place	Virtual	In-person	In-person	At command in space big enough to accommodate all personnel
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours (at start or end of day)	During working hours	During working hours

An additional response was offered by Blair as to how commands could address a mass weather event, when she was able to finish her courses of action ahead of the other participants.

Table 29.   Mixed Focus Group Participant Individual Responses to a Mass Weather Event

Issue	Weather
Participant	Blair
Structure of response	All hands email -> Shop discussions
Leader responsible for addressing it	CO -> Department Heads
Key characteristics	– Clear guidance on protocol – Tone should be serious – Should be clear and concise and provide clear guidance and protocol for safety
Where would it take place	Virtual
When would it take place	During working hours

d.   Prototype

Each participant their proposed plan of how they see the "training" taking place, with members of the group briefly offering feedback as they were presented. Before work began on solutions to a general social stressor, the following points were suggested and discussed by the group. Participants agreed that leaders must stress internal respect for our shipmates, that small group discussions will elicit more responses from junior personnel than those from all hands calls and that intermediate leadership involvement is crucial. Minority members also asserted that having discussions timed during working hours raises the chance of buy-in from the troops and lends weight to the discussion, which was enthusiastically agreed to by one majority participant. A majority participant asserted that personnel should be directly encouraged to stay away from destructive aspects of involvement in outside events, such as protests. A majority participant also stated that it

must be stressed by leaders to sailors to let the justice system play out and have faith in its ability to come to an appropriate conclusion.

Following this evolution, participants were tasked with coming up with generalize responses to a social stressor and instructed to go through the "how might we" exercise again, but with the understanding that there must be an ability to incorporate feedback from the previous evolution. The following solutions were generated, with the below feedback being offered following the presentation.

Table 30.   Mixed Focus Group Individual Responses to a General Social Stressor (Participants 1 & 2)

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Bachman	Kirkman
Structure of response	– Consult ISIC – Triad instructs leaders to take an anonymous pulse check and report findings to Triad – Triad meeting to discuss plan and formulate talking points and discuss them with other trusted Triads. – All hands call led by CO to give initial status and next steps – Small group discussions to gather and document feedback – Secondary all-hands to deliver remarks, seek and discuss feedback	– Phone tree to determine if everyone is safe and if any command members have been directly affected -> – Wardroom/Chief's Mess meeting to ensure leadership presents a united front-> – All hands call led by the CO to present a clear message about situation and next steps-> – Breakout group sessions based on paygrade, attended by the CO, where they provide the resources available -> – Mandatory submissions to suggestion box (can be blank suggestion) to air comments/ concerns/questions anonymously -> – XO checks in weekly with Chiefs to ascertain if certain sailors or groups need individualized attention
Where would it take place	At work, in person	At work, in person
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Bachman	Kirkman
Any required training	N/A	COs required to meet with local first responders quarterly or after assuming command to gain a better understanding of the local community.
Positive feedback	Cooke – ISIC touchpoint – Ongoing/continuous pulse-check Kirkman – Consult with ISIC JAG – Use other Cos or Triads as sounding ground Blair – Constant communication with ISIC – Leaders taking pulse-check with sailors	Cooke – I like the idea of some driving function for anonymous input – I like the pulse check Blair – Phone tree for recall – Breakout groups Bachman – Establishing relationships with local authorities – CO's suggestion box idea
Negative feedback	Cooke – Who's leading small groups & are they on the same page? – Have small group leaders been trained in mediation/conflict resolution? Kirkman – Writing down talking points could be bad if they get out Blair – No training provided	Cooke – Breakout structure could lead to escalating tensions within the command – Format of breakouts may require command leadership to have some form of mediation training Blair – Suggestion box – First responders training Bachman – I don't think a phone tree / recall is necessary for a social issue – Triad being present for peer to peer discussion will limit honest discussion

Table 31. Mixed Focus Group Individual Responses to a General Social
Stressor (Participants 3 & 4)

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Cooke	Blair

Structure of response	Triad & Supporting Leadership
	  – Data collection
	    – What is the situation?
	  – Empathize & Ideate
	    – What is the impact to our sailors?
	  – Plan
	    – What support can we provide?
	    – What external resources are available?
	    – A.O. for questions, feedback, other.
	  – Announce/Discuss
	    – All hands call to address the issue
	    – Demonstrate acknowledgement of potential impacts
	    – Inform sailors of resources available
	  – Pulse-check
	    – Breakouts or individual discussion as necessary.
		– First, the command needs to determine whether naval wide policy has been issued with regards to the event
		  – If so, the command should follow the policy and distribute it to the command
		  – If naval-wide policy has not been issued, then the command should determine the best method to address the command and do so quickly while the issue remains in its infant stages.
		  – Command should remain neutral
		  – The command should provide available resources so personnel at the command can utilize them and be reassured as more guidance comes out, which will be distributed quickly and accordingly
		  – Constant communication and support should be utilized for all personnel

Where would it take place	At work, in person	At work, in person
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours
Any required training	Prepare a quick reference for resources available in addition to examples of political/social issues & impacts to marginalized groups with associate best-fit resources.	Leaders should be provided training on how to effectively communicate negative social events to their command. How they should provide the information and best practices on how to answer questions.

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Cooke	Blair
Positive feedback	Blair – Empathize/ideate potential impacts – Designating an Action Officer Kirkman – Get ground truth facts first – Explore outside resources Bachman – Discuss & ideate before delivering message – Highlight external resources available	Kirkman – Provide guidance if Big Navy has not issued a policy – Training for CO is good Bachman – Consult naval-wide policy – Observe neutrality/emphasize resources Cooke – Addressing the issue at infant stages – Address adapting response
Negative feedback	Blair – Data collection Kirkman – Waiting too long to get all of the facts can be bad Bachman – Only one Action Officer could be overwhelming – Need a method for feedback collection	Kirkman – Provide caveat when issuing direction without Big Navy that the CO's direction could change at any time, once guidance is received from Big Navy. Bachman – Training is good but may not resonate with all leader personalities – Need Triad involvement Cooke – Does not address feedback from individuals – Does not provide guidance on "best method."

Following this evolution, participants were paired and instructed to go through the "how might we" exercise again, but with the understanding that there must be a consensus between partners and the ability to incorporate feedback from the previous evolution. The following solutions were generated, with the below feedback being offered following the presentation.

Table 32.   Mixed Focus Group Paired Responses to a General Social Stressor

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Bachman & Blair	Cooke & Kirkman
Structure of response	– Remain in constant communication with the ISIC with regards to the event. This will ensure everyone is on the same page. – Ensure the Triad is on the same page and distributing the same information. This is important to ensure the message is well-received. – once the Triad are on the same page, distribute their information to the khakis. Have khakis provide feedback to strengthen impact of distributed information – Have the CO vet feedback with Triad and/or resources outside of the command to ensure accuracy and strength of message – Deliver message to all personnel at command at an in-person all-hands call (if situation warrants) – Follow-up with small group discussions within each division. Senior leadership should not be present. – Notes should be taken so that feedback can be provided to leadership on how personnel received message and ways to improve in the future – Provided the duration of the event, conduct a second all-hands call for updated information and/or further feedback.	– Perform continuous pulse checks and facilitate communication up and down the chain of command – Phone tree to ensure safety of personnel & address emergency needs – Triad – Define/data collection – Facts based situation summary – Empathize/ideate – how might this affect/impact our sailors? – Plan – What internal resources/ support can we provide? What external resources/support is available? – Announce & Address – Discuss situation & potential impact. Discuss command plan. Discuss Navy/DOD/ other resources. – Feedback loop – Breakouts as required. Individual touchpoints with impacted sailors. – Anonymous forcing function?

Issue	General Social Stressor	
Participant	Bachman & Blair	Cooke & Kirkman
Where would it take place	At work	At work
When would it take place	During working hours	During working hours
Any required training	N/A	N/A
Positive feedback	Kirkman – Small group discussions Cooke – ISIC communication – Khakis distribute feedback & resources	Bachman – Fact Based info summary – Delivery during workday – Feedback loop Blair – Phone tree for safety – Empathize and ideate
Negative feedback	Kirkman – Waiting on ISIC can be bad Cooke – Who runs breakouts without senior leadership present?	Bachman – Phone tree/recall not necessary for social issues Blair – Maybe require everyone to submit feedback vice giving them an option?

Following this evolution, participants were instructed to go through the "how might we" exercise again as a team, but with the understanding that there must be a consensus within the group and the ability to incorporate feedback from the previous evolution. The following solution was generated.

Table 33.   Mixed Focus Group Response to a General Social Stressor

Issue	General Social Stressor
Structure of response	– Fact-base situation to ensure accuracy and provide cooling off period before distributing message to entire command – Remaining in constant communication with the ISIC. Notify ISIC of course of action – Meet with Triad to convey CO's intent and get everyone on the same page. Vet message even further with senior leadership and/pr other outside command – Convey message to Khakis before distributing to remaining personnel – Schedule delivery of message and deliver message to all personnel at command via all-hands call in-person (if warranted) – Conduct small group discussions after short cool off period in response to message. Small groups should be with middle-grade leadership and not senior leadership – Ensure feedback collection is done in small groups and anonymously provide to the Tirad to improve delivery of message in the future. – Depending on duration of event, conduct an additional all-hands call to provide updated information on event and feedback received from small groups.
Where would it take place	At work
When would it take place	During working hours
Any required training	N/A

e.   Testing

After all prototypes were presented, a group discussion about what was presented was held where participants could discuss what they liked, didn't like and felt should be added. One majority participant suggested that a program be instituted for one or two diversity and inclusion officer(s) to serve as a sounding board for triad and other sailors for issues related to diversity and inclusion. This participant outlined that these officers should be trained in responding to social issues, assigned this function as a collateral duty, and serve as the primary advocate for inclusion, diversity and equity. Other members of the

focus group appeared to react in a mildly positive manner to this suggestion, but raised the question of how this position would differ from current EO positions and how duties would differ in routine and crisis matters. The final question posited came from a majority participant who asked "how do we respond to transgender issues?" While it initially took a moment for the members of the group to shift their mindsets to the matter of transgender individuals, the topic quickly sparked an extended conversation that spilled over to the participants personal conversations following the conclusion of the focus group session. The participants all appeared to believe that issues associated with the integration of transgendered sailors would follow along the same lines as the aforementioned divisive issues and will require similar command interventions to address.

F.   STEP 6 – TESTING INTERVIEWS

1.   Preparation

While participants in the minority and mixed focus groups prepared responses to a general social stressor, the majority focus group only created responses to specific situations. This resulted in the need for distilling the responses that the majority focus group provided into a single, generalized response. The following was the result of that distillation.

Table 34.   Majority Focus Group Extrapolated Responses to a General Social Stressor

Issue	General Social Stressor
Structure of response	CO sends a primer email to all hands with basic facts about the situation
	CO holds a short all hands call to expand upon email.
	Department Heads break out command into small groups and facilitate discussions of the issue at hand.
	Soon afterwards, the CO facilitates an in person (or virtual if the situation dictates) question and answer session with an appropriate local expert on the issue
	Bi-weekly updates are provided if the situation develops further
	All responses from the command should demonstrate empathy for the feeling of command members, and be as transparent and honest as possible.
	Leaders should always remember to remain neutral and fact based in their approach to providing information while emphasizing trust in our comrades and the institutions of the United States.
	Special care and attention should be paid to new recruits and midshipmen who may still be acclimating to the Navy and unaware of its inner workings.
Where would it take place	At work
When would it take place	During working hours
Any required training	N/A

Participants for testing interviews were solicited from the network of senior officers and professionals known to student researchers, though none of these participants had previously overseen either researcher in an operational capacity. The following participants were interviewed.

Table 35.   Testing Interview Participants

Alias	Paygrade	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Designator
Diana Hartle	O-6	Female	51	Black or African American	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1200
Claire Crusher	O-5	Female	38	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	2900
Nancy Jones	Civilian	Female	49	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	N/A
Vernon Fraga	O-6	Male	58	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1110
Steven Cragen	O-6	Male	48	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1110
Eric Stabler	O-6	Male	50	White	Non-Hispanic or Latinx	1310

2.   Execution

Participants met with both researchers over video conference calls and were shown a presentation that covered the general background of the project, the issues being addressed and the proposed responses to general social stressors from the three focus groups. Participants were not informed which focus group produced a specific response. Following each response, participants were solicited for their feedback, specifically covering what they liked, did not like, any anticipated barriers to implementation of the briefed response, and any additional feedback. The slides that participants were shown can be seen in **APPENDIX B**.

Participants were provided the following information on the background of the study and the issues it covers. Between March 2020 and March 2021, the Navy saw an unprecedented level of external (to the fleet) social stressors that impacted the health of the fleet. These social stressors included, but were not limited to, COVID-19, BLM and associated events, and the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Throughout these events, commanders had no uniform guidance on how to respond to these stressors. This lack of guidance led to a wide variety of responses being implemented by commanders, including no response, which produced an even wider range of experiences for sailors at different units. Recent studies have shown that command responses to these and similar

social stressors can heavily affect an individuals' sense of inclusion within units and the Navy as a whole. Studies have also shown that social stressors can (and often do) have disproportionate effects on different populations or groups. Before the responses were presented, the participants were informed that the proposed responses were generated from a set of diverse interviews and focus groups that we conducted in recent months.

Participants were first presented with the response generated from the majority focus group and were provided with the following information regarding their proposed approach. As soon as possible following the event, the CO should send a primer email to the command with basic facts about the situation. Shortly following this, the CO should hold a short all-hand call to expand upon known facts regarding the situation at hand. Following the all hands, Department Heads should facilitate small group discussions to gather feedback from sailors and discuss their concerns regarding the event. If necessary or desired, based on the feedback provided by the sailors, the CO should facilitate an in-person (or virtual if the situation dictates), town hall style Q&A with the appropriate local expert applicable to this specific event. Examples of a 'local expert' could include a physician in the case of a mass medical event, police in the case of a school shooting or something of that nature, or a community leader in the case of a major social issue. The CO should then disseminate bi-weekly updates if the situation develops further.

All communications should be held at work, during working hours to demonstrate buy-in from unit leadership toward finding a functional solution. This shows the sailors that their concerns and welfare are a top priority, at this time. Responses and communications with members of the command should demonstrate empathy for sailors' feelings and concerns. When providing information, leaders should be as transparent and honest possible while remaining neutral and fact based. COs should take special care to avoid taking a social or political side on an emotionally charged issue, in order to avoid sewing further divides amongst personnel. Leaders should also emphasize the need for trust in each other and institutions, such as the justice and legal system, due to the need to reinforce our status as public servants. When delivering these responses, special care and attention should be paid by lower-level leadership to new recruits and Midshipmen, as they

may not yet have well established support systems or understanding of how the Navy functions and responds to external challenges.

Participants were then presented with the response generated from the minority focus group and were provided with the following information regarding their proposed approach. The focus group recommended a series of proactive and reactive changes for commanders to implement. Proactively, before a social stressor flairs, base commanders should establish a single POC on base for the monitoring of national/local events and sending a regular weekly newsletter to COs on the base. Potential individuals to be tasked with this duty were identified as the PAO, Intelligence Officer, Medical Officer, etc. This POC would be responsible for keeping all COs on the base up to date on ongoing major societal events as they build and occur but would likely be assigned this function as a collateral duty. It was also recommended that base commanders should establish a POC for COs to receive legal feedback for social stressor responses such as the SJA or the unit's legal officer which would work in conjunction with the individual monitoring social events and sending newsletters to provide the best advice possible for COs.

Reactively, once a social stressor has been identified, commands should gather information about the event(s) from the previously established channels to ensure accuracy. The Triad will then confer privately to discuss the information they have received, to ensure that they are all on the same page and have a consistent message to deliver to the command. As part of this discussion, COs should determine if a change to the threat protection level is appropriate. COs should then assemble the command during working hours for an all-hands address, during which the CO will deliver the most up-to-date information, ensuring to convey empathy for the individuals affected by this event. At the closing of the all-hands address, leaders should provide all members of the command with a list of local or Navy-wide support resources applicable to the situation. Here, it was stressed to make the resources as plain and convenient as possible to access, and not require sailors to ask or dig for specific POCs for assistance.

Following the dissemination of this information, commands should allow for small group discussions, which the entire unit will participate in. This will allow sailors to discuss their related experiences, allowing less-effected individuals to recognize and empathize

with the experiences of their fellow sailors. Commands should utilize small unit leaders to identify the individuals most affected by the event(s), and those in need of extra assistance or support during this time. This allows for leaders to provide check-ins with these individuals over the immediate future and ensure they are receiving what they need. COs should then establish an in-unit response team or feedback chain between junior enlisted and leadership, to ensure concerns at all levels are reaching the CO and being addressed by the appropriate individual. Finally, COs should implement a system for reassessing the situation and providing ongoing updates to command as needed.

Finally, participants were presented with the response generated from the mixed focus group and were provided with the following information regarding their proposed approach. The group recommended that once a social stressor event has been identified as having occurred or building to an occurrence in the immediate future, commanders should gather the facts of the situation to ensure accuracy in addressing the command. Before addressing members of the command, COs should decide if there should be an (emotional) cooling-off period between the event and addressing sailors. Once a course of action has been determined, commanders should keep an open line of communication with ISIC, notifying them of their intended COA and provide updates should the COA change. Before holding the all-hands call with the command, COs should meet with the Triad to ensure they are presenting a unified message, and are prepared to vet this message through senior-level leadership before addressing command. The Triad should also address the khaki leadership team before delivering the message to the command in order to ensure that the unity of messaging is held by all leaders.

The CO should then deliver the message to the command via an all-hands call. This messaging and subsequent discussion should be held in person to the greatest extent possible. Shortly after the all-hands call, the command should hold small group discussions to identify where the members stand, allow them to gain a better understanding for how the event is affecting their comrades and identify any unique needs. These small group discussions should not include senior leaderships due to the dampening effect that their presence could have on the free flow of discussion. Junior leaders facilitating the small group discussions should ensure feedback is collected by from members of the command

and delivered to the Triad in an anonymous format, to improve messaging and support for personnel in the future. Depending on duration of event, COs should conduct additional all-hands calls to provide updated information on event and respond to small group feedback.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSE TESTING RESULTS

A. BACKGROUND

Before the presentation of the three responses proposed by the focus groups, participants were given the opportunity to respond to background information on the study. Hartle and Cragen were the only individuals who chose to share their thoughts on the study. Hartle briefly provided her point of view on how the human factors present in each CO as individuals will impact their ability to respond to these events and the potential second order effects of its implementation. Hartle stated that she believes that the amount of genuine empathy that a CO is capable of providing varies heavily from person to person. This is largely due to the implication that being empathetic requires a CO to publicly display vulnerability, which not all leaders are capable of or willing to do. To assist in negating this potential limitation, Hartle stated that COs should consider consulting a communication specialist prior to handling a large-scale social stressor, as they may provide valuable feedback and guidance for the CO. Hartle further stated that one of the most critical impacts that this project could have on the fleet would not be how it alters the practices of current senior commanders, but rather how it influences the development of current mid-grade leaders. This is due to how it will impact both the deck plate level care that these leaders provide, and the nature of how mid-grade leaders will carry these practices into their leadership in the future and the development of junior leaders and sailors in the present.

Cragen chose to reflect on how his perspective of the challenges being discussed is founded and how he believes service members should approach the moral challenges the challenges can pose. Cragen stated that he anchors his perspective on external stressors on the words of the oaths sailors take and the principle that the Navy's core values of honor, courage and commitment should be what guides all of our interactions with one another. When examining the role of leaders, and specifically officers, Cragen asserted that officers should regularly confront what they are doing and ask if their actions are consistent with their oath. Furthermore, Cragen stated that he believes that all servicemembers should be

ready to adapt to the constant changes in civilian leadership and society but should continually ask if these changes are consistent with the oaths they have sworn.

B.   RESPONSE 1

When considering the step of the CO sending a primer email, both Crusher and Fraga stated that when attempting to send an early communication, getting accurate information and correcting disinformation can be challenging for a CO based on the quality and flow of information from higher authorities and from civilian sources. Speaking specifically about the COVID-19 pandemic, Fraga stated that "the challenge there was getting accurate information and getting accurate information out." Further compounding this challenge is the fact that commanders must balance mistrust in higher authorities (both civilian and military) amongst command members with the need to use this information, especially shortly following the onset of a social stressor. Stabler challenged the logic of including this step as he believes that the CO sending out a primer email seems a bit insensitive, depending on how long it has been since the event took place.

Cragen stated that he has often heavily relied on the command Triad during times like the ones outlined in the background section, to ensure that his messaging is effective, before holding an all-hands call. He further stated that he held a genuine belief that all commanders want to address these issues "right" but that self-generating ideas that are "correct" can be very challenging for commanders. He then explained that often this challenge stems from the struggle to balance providing a rapid response and not "gooning it [the messaging] up." Stabler reminded that it must be ensured that holding an all-hands call is not counterproductive, or does not appear to be counterproductive, to the situation imposed by the event. The example given was holding an all-hands call during COVID, where attempting to manage social distancing was a key priority, making an in-person event seem like an unwise decision. Managing the emotional fallout of a suicide within the command would necessitate the opposite response, however, with the most empathetic and effective response likely being one that is delivered in person.

Breaking from the majority of participants in the study, Jones questioned the necessity of an all-hands address and instead suggested passing word via the chain of

command down to the small group level where discussions could take place. Her stated reasoning for this was that such actions would put these conversations in a setting where trust had already been established between individuals.

The holding of small group discussions received universal support from the members of the testing interviews, with the only variation coming in the form of who would participate in these discussions and when they would take place. Hartle stated that she believed that once the initial information is passed by upper leadership in the all-hands call, all discussions should be held at the deckplate level. Crusher stated her belief that peer-level discussions are the most important piece of this response, and while they need to be moderated in some fashion, are where sailors will receive the support they need. Jones endorsed holding small group discussions but stated that leaders should be present in the conversations to reinforce leaderships acknowledgement of the issues and the beliefs of the sailors. She also stated that leaders should take notes on the views and suggestions of the sailors, in order to pass concerns up the chain of command as needed for a response.

Fraga and Stabler, while supporting the execution of small group discussions, raised a number of questions about the mechanisms used to prepare for them as well as the current capabilities of Navy leaders to execute them. Fraga identified the challenge that short notice changes to the proposed discussion plan can derail their positive effects. To support this, he cited the extremism standdown training which was updated so close to the mandatory standdown that it became impossible to properly train facilitators. He further asserted that while the theory of why to hold this discussion was correct, the execution was haphazard enough to seriously hamper its effectiveness. Stabler asserted the crucial point that this solution (in addition to every other solution posited) operates under the assumption that department heads, and other junior leaders by extension, have the "tools and abilities" needed to facilitate these sensitive discussions with their subordinates. He further stated that not all leaders are created equal in any context and will enter the fleet with different levels of capability to handle challenging social interactions with no clearcut correct approach or answer.

Furthermore, Stabler asserted that while some leaders will be in lockstep with the command message and capable of delivering it in an effective, personable manner. Some

leaders will disagree with the message, which runs the risk of degrading how it is delivered. Some leaders will want to help but largely lack interpersonal skills, resulting in an inability to effectively deliver the message, possibly resulting in further damage to trust, the command climate, and the mental health of the individuals in the command. Stabler asserted that any breakdown in lower links of the chain of command can produce a cascading effect which prevents the message from effectively reaching the deckplates. Compounding this issue, as Stabler views it, is the idea that providing fake empathy is often worse than providing no empathy due to the damage it does to trust sailors have in the leader delivering the fake empathy and their superiors.

Responses to the idea of holding a CO facilitated town hall with a local expert were largely negative, with a variety of reasonings cited. Hartle rejected the idea of having some local experts at the command following an event given the second order effects that their presence and input could have on members. In support of this position, Hartle gave the example that having a police official around after a police shooting of an unarmed individual could be traumatic for any persons of color or other members of other marginalized communities who are already feeling unsafe. Hartle further stated that if the conversation with a local expert is to occur, the COs presence could dampen the desire of sailors to speak up. While Jones endorsed the idea of having a conversation with a relevant expert, she raised the same question of if the COs presence during this interaction could have a dampening effect on the conversation that sailors are willing to engage in.

Stabler warned that anytime external leadership, especially non-DOD leadership, is brought into a command, it poses a risk as the guidance they provide could run counter to the guidance issued by the DON/DOD. In providing this contrary guidance, the event can create another point of friction with leadership and erode trust in the command's leaders. COVID guidance was cited as the best example of this where state/counties would often provide guidance that was more (or less) restrictive than the guidance issued by the DOD. Even within the DOD, separate services had different rules that resulted in more or less freedom being granted to personnel, resulting in mistrust in leaders. Cragen, while not outright endorsing the notion of holding a command-wide event with a local SME, did

appear to respond positively to the idea of bringing in a local SME to advise the CO at the very least, in order to improve the care the CO provides and directs for the command.

When considering the implementation of regular updates, Fraga reported that he received positive feedback from his command regarding the conduct of regularly scheduled town halls that covered updates from the DOD and current status of the pandemic. Although, this feedback was not present across the board, as civilian employees did not respond nearly as positively to these measures. Stabler warned that subsequent emails could be viewed as coming too frequently and thus be disregarded by individuals who lose interest in the event, especially if the information provided in them is repetitive and without any new details. Competing with these updates will be the infusion of peer-to-peer information sharing and the presence of outside information sources that provide information contrary to, or more detailed than, what the command is providing. Stabler identified this competition as a critical point of social friction within the command as leaders attempt to provide necessary information.

While there was tacit support from some participants for holding all relevant communications at work during working hours, two individuals (Cragen and Crusher) did raise significant concerns, with Crusher rejecting the idea. Cragen asserted that facilitating all communications at work, during working hours would pose a significant challenge to commands with an exceptionally high operational tempo. For these commands, there will inherently be a challenge for COs to balance these requirements with mission requirements. Crusher stated that the time investment necessary to stand this solution up in a medical setting is far too costly. She expanded on this view by explaining that clinical settings (as well as any other setting in the fleet) that operate on a 24/7/365 basis will not be able to pause operations across the whole command to hold either an all-hands call or the subsequent small group discussions, thus requiring personnel to participate during off-duty hours.

In response to the suggested attributes of the response as a whole, several points were raised by participants. Regarding suggestion that communications be transparent and honest, Hartle stated there needs to be expanded guidance for COs regarding how transparency works and how transparent they should be about decision-making at higher

levels of leadership as not all communications and reasoning will be received positively. Jones gave an enthusiastic endorsement of a fact-based communication strategy, citing that it simplifies conversation points. In response to the suggested emphasis on trust in our institutions and comrades, Fraga endorsed focusing on the Navy's core values as a basis for addressing civil social stressor such as January 6, 2021, with an emphasis on non-partisan service to the nation, believing that it could help anchor the viewpoints of individuals attempting to process the event(s). Cragen, however, closed his comments by raising a mild concern that even with this method, responses may not be delivered quickly enough.

C.   RESPONSE 2

Crusher endorsed the proactive change to provide weekly updates to COs about issues that are developing and believes having local POCs in the community to support this would be valuable. She further stated that a single, national office could handle non-local research and distribution of updates. Hartle indicated support for a weekly newsletter for COs but noted that it is ultimately the job of the CO to be aware of the current climate, and that this responsibility cannot be delegated to a subordinate. She further stated that COs should already be receiving weekly updates on local and national events of notice but are not acting on them. Fraga pushed back slightly against the suggested proactive changes, stating that similar procedures are already standard practice, with COs having the ability to access reports on local events and consult individuals both in and out of the command for legal guidance. Stabler largely echoed Fraga's statement, asserting that the Navy does send out some news updates to COs related to events of note but, also stated that it could be improved by being contributed to by local POCs and farmed to COs located around the world. Stabler noted a concern that if not properly refined, this publication would run the risk of being regarded as spam by COs. Stabler suggested that the CMEO manager would also be a good source of information and early POC for the CO when developing a response to a social stressor. In a similar manner, Jones strongly endorsed the implementation of a weekly newsletter of potential social stressors for the CO to be aware of. She further suggested that members of specific groups related to the potential social stressors may be able to contribute to the letter regularly or advise POC generating the letter.

When considering the implementation of a POC for legal guidance, Hartle expressed concerns that a legal POC could take a similar role to that of corporate legal or a SJA, namely, that they exist to protect the organization, not the personnel who comprise it. Jones largely corroborated this position, citing the issue of the legal POC serving to represent the organization, not the individuals who make it up which can cause a conflict in serving the needs of individual sailors. While not rejecting the idea of implementing a legal POC, Stable warned that SJAs are often spread very thin and not stationed locally to a CO(s) that they serve, which could result in an inability to effectively respond to the needs of the command in a timely manner when addressing these issues.

Cragen noted a connection between the proactive piece of this solution and building mental and emotional resiliency within members of the command. When discussing challenges to resiliency in the fleet, Cragen stated his belief that 'the single most consistent stressor on sailors in the United States Navy is scheduling and inconsistency in our inability to predict the future.' He further cited that building a command that is resilient to changes such as adjustments in schedule, you can build a command that is resilient to changes in society in a similar manner. When questioned about how to build resiliency in a command, Cragen cited early and consistent messaging as a good strategy and likened it to being a fireman in that your day can range from quietly doing maintenance to being in Manhattan on 9–11. Stabler asserted that leaders should communicate early and often that being a sailor is not shiftwork, but rather involves a high amount of variability that is based on the duty we are called to perform.

When considering the step of gathering facts about a specific social stressor prior to addressing the command, Cragen heavily endorsed the idea of having a single POC for professional information and guidance. In support of this position, he stated that that having multiple chains of command to report to during the pandemic muddled COVID-19 related messaging and guidance. This resulted in roughly an hour a day being spent with the other members of Cragen's Triad working out what their directive was. He explained that this inconsistency was definitely perceived on the deckplates, but largely without the context of the multiple chains of command. To mitigate this friction, Cragen stated that having a single chain of command for addressing an event would help with rapid response and

consistency of messaging, due to the increased clarity of a CO's superior's position on the matter. Fraga largely corroborated Stabler's position, stating that having multiple national chains of command, points of contact for guidance and having to take the local climate into account did confound the implementation of COVID-19 procedures. This was further confounded by the presence of different required responses for civilian employees and military personnel.

Identifying a component that would go on to be presented in response three, Fraga stated that there needs to be some kind of mechanism to ensure that all khaki leaders are all on the same page, not just the Triad, prior to delivering messaging. Stabler, however, asserted that getting the Triad on the same page presents the same problem as having the department heads facilitate the small groups, namely to what extent do they believe in the validity of the social stressor, and do they have the skills needed to facilitate these kinds of conversations? The assumption that they will hold the same stances on any issue as the CO or those in need of an empathetic response is a large and potentially hazardous one.

When considering the all-hands call itself and the information distributed during its conduct, Fraga stated that he believes social stressors of a medical nature, such as COVID-19, require a different style of response than social stressors of a civil nature such as the BLM movement, echoing the position of many members of both the interview and focus group phases. Both Jones and Hartle provided strong endorsement for emphasizing available resources, with Hartle noting that leadership needs to ensure the trustworthiness and current availability of said resources. For example, commands should not give out a list of mental health professionals or resources that are unavailable or not taking new clients, as doing so would be counterproductive to addressing the needs of sailors and possibly damaging to the trust that sailors may have in their leadership.

When discussing the execution of small group discussions, Hartel stated that the conversations occurring at the deckplate level with individuals that the sailors know/work with and are comfortable with are wise as they may elicit more honest feedback. She continued that this does require the assumption that trust has been established within a shop and that no negative leadership at the junior level is suppressing honest feedback. Fraga endorsed the implementation of small group and one-on-one discussions, stating that these

discussions will be where individuals in need of assistance will be identified. He further stipulated that there needs to be a clear path laid out from identification of an individual in need of assistance to assistance being delivered. In keeping with her aforementioned stance on holding relevant communications during working hours, Crusher asserted that small group discussions should be optional due to the time requirement necessary to hold them, which would necessitate sailors participating during their time off duty for commands with exceptionally high operational tempos. In making this assertion, she also acknowledged that this would likely result in individuals with limited awareness of or connection to the social stressor not participating in discussions.

When considering the establishment of a feedback chain between junior enlisted and leadership, Jones endorsed the flow of the conversation from the Triad down to the deckplates and back up but, identified that any breakdowns in trust along this chain could derail the process and dampen conversations and feedback. She further stated that while anonymity could contribute to solving this problem, it may not be a perfect fix at all levels and could water down the ability of leaders to address concerns that are brought forward if they are subdued or lack detail. Stabler suggested that tapping into informal organizations outside the chain of command could be useful in gathering feedback, a notion that he explored in greater depth at the end of his interview. This could also help identify the underlying dynamics of the command and what/who holds influence that could be leveraged to bolster the moral and feelings of inclusion within the command. Stabler reiterated this statement in reminding COs that they should take the time to learn who and where the information nodes in the command are, remembering that they may not be formal leaders. To assist in this learning and to assist in enabling the provision of updates to the command, Stabler endorsed leaders up to and including the CO conducting random check-ins with personnel and engaging in behaviors such as stopping by the smoke pit to get a feel for how sailors are responding to the social stressor and the command's response.

D.   RESPONSE 3

The implementation of a cooling-off period before addressing the command received feedback ranging from tentatively neutral to outright rejection. Hartle and Jones

did not believe that a cooling-off period would be productive and could even be harmful, stating that rapidly acknowledging an event at the earliest opportunity is the best approach, as it shows awareness and commitment to helping the sailors, even if the CO does not have all the answers, or information, they need for a final solution yet. Stabler stated that the cooling-off period was a concern due, in part, to the number of ways it could be interpreted or manifested but that it ultimately was up to the COs discretion if one would be implemented. Cragen was hesitant to endorse the implementation of cooling-off periods, stating that sometimes what a command needs is the opposite of a cooling off period as these can allow emotions to heighten even further and rumors to run rampant. He clarified that this is not always the case, as if there is not an operational requirement coming to distract sailors, it may be a good idea to allow people to sit and soak in/reflect on the problem with their support systems before addressing it. Cragen closed his thoughts on the matter by stating that he believes that the implementation of a cooling off period should be left to the CO's judgement. Crusher mirrored this stance, believing that whether a cooling-off period is implemented should be left solely to the discretion of the CO.

Stabler endorsed running the intended COA by the ISIC as well as any intended deviations as they develop. He expanded upon this statement by pointing out that it could cause other complications, however, such as how the patchwork of local, state and federal regulations, combined with the multiple chains of command that COs reported to caused confusion and complicated decision-making during the COVID-19. Cragen voiced similar support for this step and stated that a desire to be on the same page with immediate superiors may slow down a COs response. As such, Cragen suggested that a mechanism for the quick screening of messaging by an immediate superior would be invaluable to COs

When discussing holding meetings with the Triad and Khaki leaders prior to the all-hands call, responses were mixed. Jones responded positively to the early step of ensuring that the triad is on the same page. Crusher pushed back against holding a khaki call, stating that addressing the khaki leaders first is unnecessary as it creates the perception that information is being withheld from junior personnel, unless the all-hands call occurs on the same day as the khaki call. Fraga, however, voiced support for holding a kind of small group discussion prior to the all-hands call in the form of the address to the khaki

leaders, which will enable the CO to get a feel for the kind of questions they will be fielding. Cragen endorsed the khaki call due to the need to ensure that leaders responsible for executing subsequent evolutions (small groups, recording feedback, etc.) are ready to do so and understand commanders intent as well as the kinds of questions that will arise.

Before conducting small group discussions, Stabler suggested that leaders should be given the opportunity to decline leading a discussion. Stabler's reasoned that failure to do so could result in leaders being inauthentic and failing to deliver meaningful empathy due to their own personal barriers. When conducting these discussions, he recommended stratifying the small group discussions and stated the cutoff should be E-5 and below, with no one with supervisory authority leading a group with their sailors and a similar design for each rank/mess band up, in order to break down barriers to honesty and transparency.

Feedback from the participants regarding collecting anonymous feedback from small groups to be fed to the Triad was almost universally negative. Fraga stated that in his experience, when given the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback regarding the social stressors outlined in the background slide, many individuals took the opportunity to assert believe in pieces of disinformation such as the over inflation of CDC death tolls. He further stated that when his command was given the opportunity to provide live anonymous feedback that was publicly visible during the extremism in the ranks standdown, this anonymity gave rise to a high amount of trolling. This trolling proved to be distracting from the conversation and was counterproductive to addressing the needs of the command. Hartle also pushed back against collecting feedback anonymously, stating that it can be a mixed bag as you may only hear from the most empowered and least empowered (or the happiest and unhappiest) sailors. This filtering leaves out the individuals in the middle of the spectrum, who are affected but may not believe their less extreme comments will be perceived as warranting a response.

Cragen stated that anonymous feedback can be a mixed bag as while it can provide useful information from the deckplates, it can also provide a lot of concerning notes with not enough information to act on or even direct attention. Expanding on this stance, he stated that reliance on anonymous feedback can bring the frustration of a restricted SAPR report from the SARC to other issues, in that it can provide knowledge that critical issues

are forming or have formed while providing no actionable insight. Cragen stated that in his view, COs can't hold an all hands call every time they receive a concerning note as it could negatively impact the person reporting by identifying them to other individuals with knowledge of the event as having reported it to the CO. Throughout his commentary, Cragen demonstrated a strong desire for all feedback he was receiving to be actionable, and expressed frustration with receiving notes with statements to the effect of, "I hate it here," with no other information.

Fraga also stated concern that anonymity in feedback could result in a problem being stated that leaders are powerless to address without more information, including who is bringing the problem forward. Fraga gave the example of a sailor submitting anonymous feedback about having suicidal ideations and raised further concerns that only those with extreme views will submit feedback, resulting in a skewed view of the command climate.

Stabler warned that anonymous feedback can be a double-edged sword of sorts. If calibrated correctly, it can be an effective sensing tool for COs looking to understand the feelings of their command. Commentary can help provide insight into what is causing friction in the command and the perceptions of its members. One example of this could be how accusations about racism or bias can help turn a CO onto blind spots in a command that need more explaining. These perceptions may help direct the efforts of leaders if they are based in assumptions that can be disproven, such as liking NASCAR or Lynyrd Skynyrd being evidenced that a person is a racist. Or, as Stabler phrased it, "Perception is reality, right? So you know if if the command thinks the CMC's racist, then CMC's racist until he's proven otherwise right. Doesn't matter if he or she is not."

Stabler also stated that truth is not always what will go into anonymous commentary and that it can serve as an avenue for sailors to "grind an ax," even if such comments are off topic and unproductive. Stabler suggested that COs also need to be able to censor what is submitted before it is shared with the command, as not all submissions will be appropriate and may contain unfounded vitriol and accusations. However, he also stipulated that deleting commentary before it is address with the command should not be a response unless absolutely necessary. Accusations of UCMJ violations would be even more serious as they would necessitate an investigation.

Breaking from the stances of the other participants, Crusher endorsed the idea of anonymous feedback as a catalyst for the CO making specific changes, believing that it could encourage sailors to voice opinions they are not confident would be support otherwise. Jones again suggested that anonymous feedback could be a workaround for collecting feedback when trust has not been established with a superior. However, she also posited that it may also entice only those on either end of the spectrum of reactions to respond, thereby missing the feelings of those closer to the middle of the spectrum and creating a skewed view of the status of the command.

When considering conducting additional all-hands calls to provide updates and respond to feedback, responses were largely muted with the exception of two individuals. Jones endorsed the holding of additional all-hands calls to address feedback and updates. However, Fraga identified the challenge that sailors sometimes want certainty in situations where it cannot be provided due to shifting conditions on the ground, resulting in the need for COs to change conditions with little notice.

E.   CLOSING COMMENTS

Once the participants had finished providing feedback on the third focus group response, they were offered the opportunity provide any other input they wished to regarding the study, its goals or any other thoughts regarding the management of social stressors in the Navy. When asked for closing comments, Fraga, while voicing support for the aims of the study, questioned if it is the place of N17 to dictate or advise how a CO addresses these social stressors with their command. Stabler assessed that using feelings of inclusion as a measure of effectiveness requires a solid measure of these feelings of inclusion before an incident or before a response is implemented. Following this, he posed a series of relevant questions for consideration including how do a variety of factors including self-valuation of work, motivation, connectedness, autonomy, satisfaction in work, and competency interact to affect inclusion? How does the variance of the amount that individuals feel these factors affect their sense of inclusion when individuals inherently value each factor differently? Stabler also assessed that while many individuals want to feel a strong sense of inclusion, some specific individuals may not want a strong sense of

inclusion if they prefer solitude, confounding how to account for the effects of increased feelings of inclusion. Stabler suggested several steps that leaders can take before an a social stressor arises to help mitigate its effects including attempting to gain a better understanding of what brings people together. This understanding, in addition to the conscious effort to boost morale, can help leaders enter addressing a social stressor with an idea of how to foster positive feelings of community while they devise a long term care plan. Stabler also suggested that monitoring social media may be able to provide similar insights into the current status of the command's moral.

Throughout Stabler's interview, he touched on how a number of informal networks of junior personnel, such as the Lance Corporal Underground, JOPA, E-4 Mafia, etc., can hold a large amount of influence close to the deckplates that can drive peer views on an event. When considering these networks, Stabler stated his favorite characterization of JOPA is "pack mentality fueled by rage." In other words, like minded individuals or individuals with strong common characteristics "raging" against the next layer of leadership above them. These networks and their influence beg the question of if inclusion is based purely on demographics ascribed by statuses external to the navy (such as race or age), internal to it (such as rank or rate/designator), or through some combination?

Stabler posed a number of questions that warrant investigations of their own as we attempt to better understand these situations and prepare leaders preemptively identify and address them. The first crucial question being what constitutes a social stressor or significant emotional event for individuals? How do affinity groups factor into that question? Stabler asserted that the shooting death of a member of the command will likely constitute a significant emotional event for a preponderance of the command, but that is not necessarily the same for an individual like George Floyd, which may not directly or indirectly impact a majority of individuals in the command. How does an actual DOD policy such as the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell or the scaling back of transgender exclusion policies figure into this model when many members will fall in the middle of an emotional response spectrum on the matter(s)? How do you as a leader make these events meaningful to those individuals in the middle of the spectrum?

When considering the product that is delivered to commanders, Jones suggested that rather than provide one recommended path for a CO to follow, multiple solutions be presented to COs for them to mix-and-match from in order to best serve their specific personnel's needs, as no one solution is necessarily a perfect solution, but rather has strong elements that could be desired in specific situations. Stabler suggested that when pitching these evolutions to COs, it should be communicated that support during social stressors should be treated as an opportunity to come together and support our comrades, not just another DEI compliance measure, and this message should be reinforced, especially to leaders within the command. He warned that a failure to reinforce this message could be detrimental to the study's ultimate goals as if the product is seen as a simple cookbook or checklist for leaders to auto-pilot their way through, then the messaging they deliver could lack critical empathy. Stabler further observed that different commands will need different structures and timing for their responses and that these variances in solutions will be based on the environment that the command is operating in. Stabler asserted that in some cases, attempting to stick to the daily schedule can be considerate as it can provide a limited sense of normalcy to individuals struggling to process their external stressors. To what extent this is used is based on the nature of both the organization (including the sub-cultures and microclimates in the command) and the event itself.

Jones posited that when implementing these solutions in the fleet, encouraging leaders to authentically practice them will be an early hurdle as the higher ranked a person is, the higher the perceived cost of opening up and being vulnerable may be to them. This authenticity is critical as there was a strong consensus amongst participants that the method that is implemented cannot be another generic training or GMT PowerPoint, or it runs the risk of being disregarded as many GMTs are, the second they are finished. Instead, it should be understood that the goal is to further the internal development of a human being, meaning that the purpose of this training should be linked to leading people, rather than managing manpower.

Assuming that the introduction of these measures to address social stressors into the fleet is authorized, there remain a number of questions and concerns about the ability of the fleet to execute them effectively, as outlined by Stabler and Jones. When discussing

the future of social care in the Navy, Stabler asked how do we build the behaviors and muscle memory to ensure they can be implemented during a crisis? How do we teach empathy? How do we teach effective and compassionate social engagement to individuals who don't naturally do well in social environments? Without these steps, Stabler warns that the implementation of these measures runs a high risk of becoming an inauthentic compliance measure.

Beyond instructing the leaders who are currently serving, how does this model of authentic engagement become ingrained in Navy culture or, as Stabler queried, become "a mindset and a way to approach and still behaviors in the organization that endure?" How do we measure aptitude in soft science areas and interpersonal skills that shift as time passes How do we pull individuals, who did not learn empathy in childhood, out of their current model of interaction so they can learn a new, more empathetic and personal, model of caring for individuals? Can this be accomplished prior to them assuming leadership rolls, or at all? Perhaps most critically, Stabler posed the question of how do we define the execution of empathy for leaders? Stabler reiterated that many naval leaders are not naturally wired to provide empathetic responses and it is not part of any standard Navy training for leaders, especially in operational commands/communities tasked with accomplishing combat objectives. Given this gap, what type of knowledge regarding empathetic engagement do leaders need to have at the various levels of leadership?

Jones reinforced the need for genuine conversations, but identified a clear lack of understanding about what that means and how to facilitate it amongst the ranks. She further raised the question of how leaders can be enabled to be vulnerable when so much of military service does not teach these skills. How do we teach soft communication skills to these leaders and have them practice it? How do we teach leaders to communicate that these issues have impacted them and that the feelings of conflict present in sailors are valid? Echoing comments made by Hartle, early in her interview, Jones suggested that these solutions may do more to influence the development of midgrade and junior leadership than it will to change the current behavior of senior leadership. Stabler asserted that these gaps in the extent a person is able to feel empathy are a "wicked problem" that necessitates that the solution cannot be a simple checklist or set of guidelines for leaders. To answer

these questions, Jones stressed that what the Navy needs is to engage in continual iterations of testing these solutions, looking at what worked and didn't work, and incorporating that feedback into refined solutions.

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V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

A. ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

When soliciting for research participants for one-on-one interviews, straight white males were by far the most hesitant to participate, with a response rate that was 50% lower than that of minority participants. This stands in stark contrast to their overrepresentation in fleet when compared to the American population and the U.S. population itself. This is troubling when considering the need for buy-in from fleet stakeholders ranging from the admiralty to deckplate leaders and reflects a need to find alternative approaches to gain buy-in from these individuals.

This resistance to participate also extended to the interview phase, with a preponderance of straight, white, male members requiring multiple assurances that their comments would not be attributed to them by name, and that their identity would not be known beyond the immediate research team. This trend was present even amongst individuals whose statements would not be considered controversial by contemporary standards but, was not reflected in the interviews of minority participants, who appeared more willing to engage in honest discussions quickly and without reassurance of anonymity. While it took time to break down this hesitancy, all but one participant was willing to open up and discuss their feelings in a manner that appeared unreserved, authentic and detailed, suggesting that it is possible to gain the desired buy-in from majority members once rapport has been established and they feel safe from being associated with negative interpretations of their statements. While this anonymity cannot be guaranteed when engaging with their subordinates, it's inclusion in any preparatory training to engage in the suggested evolutions to respond to social stressors could be invaluable in breaking down majority resistance to participate.

When these authentic discussions took place, participants often highlighted that while they wanted to connect with their sailors regarding these issues, they were often unsure how to approach these conversations for fear of saying the "wrong things" and doing more damage. These members often resorted to responses that lacked nuance, and

as such failed to elicit meaningful responses from junior sailors. This critical failure to elicit buy-in was especially noticeable in responses to the events of 06 JAN 2021, with participants almost universally reporting that leaders seemed uninterested, confused, or outright hostile to the stated intent of the training, resulting in similar feelings being encouraged throughout the ranks. This response indicates that there are strong barriers to empathizing with and understanding of the feelings and experiences of other sailors who possess different traits by leaders. Following on from this disconnect, many participants, especially in the majority group, expressed a lack of firm understanding about what events would qualify as warranting a response. This indicates that more research into the common characteristics of these events is warranted, resulting in the implementation of some kind of training should be implemented for leaders regarding common characteristics of social stressors. Additionally, even amongst leaders that understood the feelings of their subordinate, there was an indication that they were unsure as to how they could facilitate a meaningful discussion about these feelings.

There were also seemingly instinctive reactions by several straight, white, male participants that discussions in the workplace were largely unnecessary or unproductive when considering some of the civil social stressors discussed. These members stated their belief that members of the military understood that we should treat each other equally and that bringing up these issues is the actual cause of divisions in the workplace. This belief was by no means homogenous, with a preponderance of both majority and minority participants prioritizing public acknowledgement of a social stressor above any uncomfortable feelings such acknowledgement and discussion might cause. This stance does, however, reinforce the notion that some leaders are not equipped to identify and understand the ramifications of such events to the wellbeing of their subordinates, but rather are fixating on their personal views on the relevance of these issues and their perceived effects in society.

Table 36 shows the breakdown of cited behaviors from the interview participants, adjusted for the 50% differential in participation by majority, minority status, as well as the absolute value of the delta of minority and adjusted majority observations. This adjustment is not meant to provide a true statistical analysis of the views of a representative

sample, but rather to help even out the raw number of responses received to comparable figures. Differences in the majority/minority responses highlighted, with low to negligible differences in identification (defined as a less than 5 difference) highlighted in green, moderate differences in identification (defined as a 5 to 10 difference) highlighted in yellow and high differences in identification (defined as a difference of more than 10) highlighted in red. While participants displayed roughly the same adjusted rates of identification for 17 of the coded behaviors, 11 behaviors displayed notable differences, with 7 being categorized as high. Three pairs of behaviors, interest in others/knowing the team, cultural intelligence and empathy, displayed inverse rates of identification between majority and minority participants.

Table 36.   Coding Table 1 – Majority/Minority Identification Differences

Code	Behavior	Majority	Majority Adjusted	Minority	Adjusted Difference
P1	Interest in others/knowing the team	22	33	20	13
IP1	Lack of interest in others/ knowing the team	8	12	31	19
P2	Cultural intelligence	11	16.5	10	6.5
IP2	Lack of cultural intelligence	7	10.5	21	10.5
P3	Effective collaboration	14	21	25	4
IP3	Ineffective collaboration	5	7.5	16	8.5
P4	Shares personal weaknesses	3	4.5	2	2.5
IP4	Inability to admit personal weaknesses	0	0	0	0
P5	Humility	8	12	8	4
IP5	Lack of humility	1	1.5	0	1.5
P6	Demonstrated awareness of bias	10	15	8	7
IP6	Unawareness of bias	6	9	5	4
P7	Commitment to justice/ accountability/policing	6	9	17	8
IP7	No commitment to justice/ accountability/policing	2	3	3	0
P8	Flexibility	26	39	8	31
IP8	Inflexibility	5	7.5	11	3.5
P9	Recognition	0	0	0	0

Code	Behavior	Majority	Majority Adjusted	Minority	Adjusted Difference
IP9	Lack of recognition	1	1.5	0	1.5
P10	Empathy	31	46.5	23	23.5
IP10	Lack of empathy/ disconnectedness	3	4.5	29	24.5
N1	Overpowering others	2	3	2	1
IN1	Allows others to share views	3	4.5	0	4.5
N2	Favoritism	0	0	1	1
IN2	Impartiality	1	1.5	0	1.5
N3	Discounts alternative views	11	16.5	16	0.5
IN3	Validates and encourages alternative views	4	6	3	3
N4	Indecisiveness	18	27	31	4
IN4	Decisiveness	21	31.5	3	28.5

Table 37 shows the unadjusted number of identifications of behaviors present in interviews with behaviors who's number of identified instances was negligible (1 or no) occurrences highlighted in green, low (2 to 9) occurrences highlighted in yellow, moderate (10 to 19) occurrences, and high (20 or more) occurrences highlighted in red.

Table 37.   Coding Table 2 – Behavior Occurrences

Code	Behavior	Majority	Minority	Total Occurrences
P1	Interest in others/knowing the team	22	20	42
IP1	Lack of interest in others/knowing the team	8	31	39
P2	Cultural intelligence	11	10	21
IP2	Lack of cultural intelligence	7	21	28
P3	Effective collaboration	14	25	39
IP3	Ineffective collaboration	5	16	21
P4	Shares personal weaknesses	3	2	5
IP4	Inability to admit personal weaknesses	0	0	0
P5	Humility	8	8	16
IP5	Lack of humility	1	0	1
P6	Demonstrated awareness of bias	10	8	18

Code	Behavior	Majority	Minority	Total Occurrences
IP6	Unawareness of bias	6	5	11
P7	Commitment to justice/accountability/ policing	6	17	23
IP7	No commitment to justice/ accountability/policing	2	3	5
P8	Flexibility	26	8	34
IP8	Inflexibility	5	11	16
P9	Recognition	0	0	0
IP9	Lack of recognition	1	0	1
P10	Empathy	31	23	54
IP10	Lack of empathy/ disconnectedness	3	29	32
N1	Overpowering others	2	2	4
IN1	Allows others to share views	3	0	3
N2	Favoritism	0	1	1
IN2	Impartiality	1	0	1
N3	Discounts alternative views	11	16	27
IN3	Validates and encourages alternative views	4	3	7
N4	Indecisiveness	18	31	49
IN4	Decisiveness	21	3	24

1.   Trends in Responses

While recognizing achievements and contributions (and an inability to do so), and favoritism (and impartiality) were identified in the literature as import leadership components creating an inclusive work environment, these behaviors and their inverses were either not identified or only identified to a negligible extent. This does not indicate that these behaviors are not important principles to be practiced by leaders, but rather that they may not have a direct correlation with the kinds of challenges to inclusion created by social stressors.

While not a commonly identified practice, a low number of participants did speak positively about instances of leaders identifying and speaking about their personal weaknesses. This indicates that while not one of the most pressing components to

mitigating social stressor's effects, leaders who are able to speak openly about their inability to solve specific challenges or provide specific care may be able to bring their teams together and set more realistic expectations amongst subordinates. The inability to share personal weaknesses was not identified by any participants as having been practiced by their leaders. This perhaps indicates that this behavior may not be one that is actively considered by military leaders who are, by the nature of their careers, encouraged to minimize their shortcomings through active attempts to negate them and as such, is not commonly practiced or sought out in times of stress.

Identification of instances of leaders overpowering others were low and roughly even between majority and minority participants. Instances of leaders allowing or encouraging others to discuss their view were equally limited, and only identified by majority participants. This may indicate that when discussing social stressors, leaders were hesitant to participate, or participated in conversations on a level closer to that of a peer, though the former was seen far more frequently in interviews. This hesitance to participate in conversations is likely tied to participants stating their limited understanding of and confidence in how to facilitate these conversations, in addition to the limited comments that these conversations should not be held in the workplace that were provided by some majority participants.

Instances of leaders showing humility were identified equally by minority and majority participants at a moderate rate. These instances were often tied to leaders speaking openly about their inability to effect meaningful changes at the unit level during the COVID-19 pandemic and sharing their frustrations in these matters, though limited examples of these behaviors being exhibited during discussions of civil social stressors. While these situations did not directly alleviate the impacts of social stressors, particularly those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, they did display a tendency to validate the grievances and concerns of participants and were identified as behaviors that participants wished to see continued. Lack of humility by leaders was identified to a negligible extent, thought this may be a result of there not being ample opportunities to display this behavior in conjunction with the social stressors under study, rather than an indication of an absence of its practice by leaders in the fleet.

Majority participants were moderately more likely to identify instances where leaders demonstrated awareness of their biases than their minority counterparts. While this may be due to some implicit bias, or desire to see these traits in leaders that are not exhibiting them to the extent desired by minority members, it is not highly likely due to the relatively equal rate of identification for a marked unawareness of biases. It is also worth noting that current Navy training for leaders contains little if any training on how leaders should identify and mitigate their own biases, beyond boilerplate equal opportunity training. This creates a situation where leaders must rely on skills acquired outside of the Navy's formalized training to provide this component of inclusion.

Both majority and minority participants identified instances of leaders displaying interest in, and making efforts to get to know their teams, as positive behaviors that was practiced at a high rate. However, majority participants were much more willing to identify these behaviors in their CO's current practices, with an adjusted difference of 13 more identifications. Minority participants, however, were much more likely to identify a lack of these behaviors as the status quo in their units, with an adjusted difference of 19 more identifications of a lack of interest in others. This presents an interesting dichotomy in that while participants could agree that providing empathetic leadership was of value in managing workplaces plagued by social stressors, they did not wholly agree on if current practices were successful. Furthermore, it raises the possibility that leaders may be under the impression that their efforts at displaying empathy are successful in meeting the needs of their commands due to these efforts having satisfied a preponderance of subordinates. This misunderstanding of the needs of minority subordinates was especially present in the handling of civil social stressors, which saw some leaders simply hand off the addressment of these issues to a minority servicemember. These actions, while ensuring an addressment would occur, were often interpreted as lacking empathy and genuine interest from leaders, thus damaging inclusive feelings within the command. These responses indicate that while leaders should utilize a diverse set of perspectives and individuals when addressing these challenges, they should not recuse themselves from the process due to the negative impressions this recusal can create.

Cultural intelligence was also identified strongly as a positive behavior for COs to exhibit, with both minority and majority members endorsing it's continued use and instances of its current implementation. Majority members identified its current practice at a slightly higher rate, with an adjusted difference of 6.5 more identifications. Conversely, minority participants displayed a higher tendency to identify a lack of cultural awareness on the part of leaders, with an adjusted difference of 10.5 more identifications of a lack of cultural awareness. Again, this may demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of what servicemembers need from leaders, with leaders believing their actions to be sufficient, when they are in fact falling short of what is needed by minority servicemembers. This misunderstanding is also hampered by the lack of official training offered by the Navy on how leaders can gain and practice a culturally intelligent approach to leadership, resulting in a often well meaning but ultimately patchwork approach with varied results.

Effective collaboration was identified as one of the most practiced and desired behaviors for leaders to exhibit, with both minority and majority participants citing their leadership's attempts to do so at roughly the same rate when adjusted for rates of participation. Minority participants identified instances of ineffective collaboration at a slightly higher rate than their majority peers, even when adjusted for the lower rate of participation, indicating that a misunderstanding of how to collaborate with underrepresented groups may be present within leadership teams.

Participants identified leaders demonstrating no commitment to justice/ accountability/policing to a low extent, indicating that leaders were likely not actively attempting to avoid holding subordinates accountable for actions related to social stressors. Minority participants were moderately more likely to identify instances where leaders actively demonstrated a commitment to justice, accountability and policing negative behaviors by subordinates than majority participants. This disparity may indicate that these instances of commitment to accountability by leaders did not register as significant events to some majority members, but rather as routine actions expected by leaders. If this is the case, it may demonstrate that leadership training in the fleet that focuses on consistent and appropriate application of justice is taking root in junior leaders, resulting in a more emotionally detached stance on these practices among some leaders.

Inflexibility was identified to a moderate extent and often linked to leaders enforcing COVID-19 policies. This is significant in that while unit level leaders often had little influence over pandemic policies, messaging regarding these issues was often flawed, resulting in the perception that leaders were not willing to deviate from established plans in order to care for unique needs as they arose. Even before providing for the adjustment factor, majority participants identified instances of leaders demonstrating flexibility at a much higher rate than minority participants, with an adjusted difference of 31 identifications. While this could have been due to implicit biases in how care is provided by leaders, there was little evidence to suggest that in the interviews. It is equally, if not more, likely that this discrepancy is due to the perceptions of majority members when leaders provided care that was not required by these individuals.

Empathy, the positive trait identified most by participants, was far more likely to be identified as a current attribute of leaders by majority participants, with an adjusted difference of 23.5 more identifications. Minority participants, however, were much more likely to identify a lack of empathy or concern for the experiences of subordinates, with an adjusted difference of 24.5 more identifications of a lack of empathy. This again indicates that while leaders are likely to attempting, and in some cases succeeding, to provide empathetic responses, their lack of training in this matter is resulting in their efforts falling short of providing the responses needed by minority communities. The trend of leaders validating and encouraging alternative views was only identified to a low extent while the discounting of alternative views was identified to a high extent by both minority and majority participants. While these instances were sometimes tied to discussions of disagreement with COVID-19 polices and official stances on the events leading up to and culminating in the events of 06 JAN 2021, it is also likely that they are tied to failings to effectively collaborate as outlined above.

Instances of indecisiveness were cited at similarly high rates among majority and minority participants. These instances were almost exclusively linked to the shifting of information and policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic, though there were some instances relating to the haphazard and short notice changes relating to the extremism in the ranks standdown held in 2021. While unit level leaders may have had little impact on

the crafting of pandemic policies, this perception of indecisiveness on the part of the Navy highlights a critical failure in messaging regarding the reasons for shifting COVID-19 policies. Future leaders may be able to mitigate these effects by ensuring a transparent messaging strategy that relies on relevant experts to explain the decision-making choices of relevant authorities, rather than the standard practice of mass emailing or verballing announcing policy changes with little to not discussion of reasoning. Even before providing for the adjustment factor, majority participants identified instances of leaders demonstrating decisiveness at a much higher rate than their minority counterparts, with an adjusted difference of 28.5 identifications. This again indicates that while leaders are likely to attempting, and in some cases succeeding, to provide decisive actions, their lack of understating of the challenges faced by some individuals in underrepresented communities resulted in their efforts falling short of providing the responses and consistency needed by minority communities.

B.   FOCUS GROUPS AND TESTING INTERVIEWS

The majority focus group's interpretation of implementing empathy as leaders instituting an "open door policy," communicating their commitment to not playing favorites, and striving to create a psychologically safe environment communicated a deeply seated desire to be empowered to communicate feely. This response also indicates that some service members may feel that they are not free of unofficial reprisal in the form of favoritism and being ostracized from teams, should they share viewpoints that are not in line with views they believe peers and leaders desire them to hold. The group's interpretation of leaders displaying an interest in other/knowing the team as performing random check-ins and holding all-hands calls/town hall discussions during working hours demonstrated a strong desire to see leaders willing to make sacrifices to demonstrate their buy-in to the validity of an issue. When these discussions and check-ins require detracting from the accomplishment of a mission, members seemed to interpret these actions as a profound act of prioritizing their well-being in an environment where the mission is regularly put ahead of all other concerns, a sentiment that was echoed by the other two focus groups and several of the testing interviewees.

Interpretations of negative trends as ineffective communication regarding the reasoning behind decision-making, and the frequent changing of decisions related to policies and procedures is consistent with the behaviors linked to the statements of individuals in one-on-one interviews. These interpretations indicate that flawed messaging and a lack of transparency by leaders at the unit level and higher exacerbated the implementation of a range of policies related to social stressors across widely varied commands. They also indicated that the lack of consistency in policies required a greater deal of care in implementation than was provided, suggesting that when leaders choose, or are forced, to change a policy, that they should ensure that the implications of this change are fully explored and solutions are ready to be communicated and implemented to mitigate the change's negative impacts. Discussions of the worst possible responses to social stressors indicated that participants believe that leaders should acknowledge social stressors as they arise, avoid disparagement of victims and the endorsement of violent behavior, and attempt to address the needs of individuals in their commands, based on their suggestions of the inverses as behaviors to avoid. Indeed, these proposed worst responses shared strong common themes of a lack of disconnectedness, partisan activity, a lack of offered support for subordinates and violent words and actions, potentially indicating a strong baseline of understanding how not to handle these events is present across the majority-minority divide, which could serve as a strong starting point for building a common solution to future social stressors.

Majority focus group participants were more likely to endorse support for, and joint messaging with formal governmental institutions such as police departments and local health departments, potentially indicating that differential levels of trust in public institutions from those of minority servicemembers could influence their decision-making. This misalignment in the base levels of trust placed in outside institutions could result in a failure to effectively communicate and foster the desired feelings of inclusion with all members of command if they are utilized. Majority participants, especially the majority focus group, were much more likely to push the onus of conducting response evolutions to the lower levels of leadership, with no majority focus group participants suggesting continued contact or vetting with leaders above the unit level. One majority focus group

participant closed the focus group out by making the statement that whatever is done by Navy leadership, "someone is marginalized, one way or another." This sentiment was echoed by a majority member in the mixed focus group and indicates a somewhat defeatist attitude may be present in leaders, which could lead to these individuals taking the path of least resistance in order to minimize this marginalization amongst a preponderance of the individuals under their charge. Minority focus group members raised far more questions about the mechanisms by which a social stressor would be identified and a detailed response crafted, including who would be called on to support these efforts. In an inverse of their majority counterparts, minority focus group participants offered more detailed responses, overall, and displayed a tendency to implement check-ins with senior leadership as well as taking proactive steps to develop a framework for identifying these events and supporting COs attempting to respond to them. This dichotomy could indicate a deviation in how different commanders have responded to social stressors in the past and warrants further investigation.

When discussing how these socials stressors should be thought of by leaders, multiple participants in both focus groups and testing interviews stated that we should encourage leaders to view challenges through the lens of the Navy's core values and non-partisan service to the nation. This approach, in addition to providing a definition of inclusion that roots the concept in the Naval service, such as the one provided by the mixed focus group, could further assist in anchoring the practice in a manner that is more tangible to sailors, thus resulting in a more focused approach to attempting to manage social stressors and foster feelings of inclusion. Leaders should be taught that social stressors and these recommended courses of action are an opportunity to come together and build a stronger, more inclusive command, not just a checklist to accomplish as a DEI compliance measure.

When considering the capacity of the Navy to respond to social stressors in the manner suggested by the focus groups, Hartle questioned the capacity of every individual leader to be empathetic and raised the possibility of bringing in an outside communications expert to assist in mitigating this. This could help with providing empathy through written communications, should an all hands email be used. This concern was echoed by a majority

participant in the mixed focus group who cited the struggles of majority leaders to understand the experiences of those who are different than them when crafting responses. Indeed, among majority participants in the one-on-one interview and testing phases, there was a strong consensus that what holds back COs during the early phases of a social stressor is a desire to get communications right on the first try, but a lack of clarity on how to get this messaging right. However, this hesitancy works against meeting the needs of the command, with focus group participants stating their desire for leadership to "make a decision and be willing to recover if needed." Multiple participants brought up the current limitations of leaders at all to facilitate these discussions based on the nature of Navy training not including courses aimed at instilling the skills desired and required for these discussions, such as handling challenging social interactions without clear answers and providing empathy during stressful times. These questions and concerns indicate that even with a set of guidelines for leaders to follow when addressing social stressors, it is unlikely that all or even a preponderance of leaders will be capable of executing them given these limitations in the interpersonal skillsets that the Navy currently instills.

When considering the technical and structural capacity of the Navy to respond to social stressors in the manner recommended by the focus groups, suggestions that a legal POC be established to advise COs were unpopular amongst members of the testing phase, with a myriad of questions as to how the workload would be handled in addition to how the role would be tailored to meet the needs of sailors instead of their leadership or senior DON/DOD personnel. These questions indicate both a critical manning issue that could prevent the delivery of necessary advisement but also the presence of a perception that advisors will not prioritize the needs of sailors, adding yet another layer of mistrust for leaders to manage when attempting to create an inclusive environment. Multiple participants stated that getting accurate information early in an event will be challenging for COs, though this may indicate a necessity for leaders to "make a decision and recover, if necessary," as was stated to be desired by both focus group members and one-on-one interviewees.

As asserted by participants of both the focus groups and testing phase, operational and commands with 24/7 operations will be strained to complete operations and evolutions

suggested, creating further tension amongst command members that should be explored further with a set of participants from purely operational and medical backgrounds. While there was some support for making participation in all evolutions voluntary by members of commands with high operational tempos, these suggestions were accompanied by the stipulation that such an action would limit the reach of these evolutions. This limitation holds the potential to negate most if not all of the positive impacts of the implementation of these discussions. Participants largely pushed back against the implementation of anonymous feedback for reasons that warrant further study. The duality of this assessment with the reliance on an unlikely perfect flow of information from the deckplates to the CO will likely lead to a dampening of feedback that makes its way to the top. This may indicate that a hybrid solution for providing feedback is needed, with members who feel unsafe providing their commentary openly able to do so in a protected forum. This commentary should be taken seriously and addressed in an empathetic manner so as to encourage continued participation in the feedback cycle.

Having multiple POCs for addressing a social stressor was one of the single largest causes of stress within commands throughout all levels of leadership, causing both increased perceptions of waffling decisions and an inability of leadership to obtain a clear sense of what information should be shared and how to share it. It is likely that if the Navy were to designate a single POC for a CO to report to and/or consult when addressing a social stressor, these negative responses could be mitigated to some extent.

Throughout all phases of the study, acknowledgement of a social stressor by senior leaders was prioritized by participants, with this likely reflecting the desire for the concerns of sailors to be validated by their leadership in a meaningful and empathetic manner. As such, while some participants suggested leaving the implementation of a cooling-off period up to the COs discretion, this practice should likely be discouraged due to it clashing with the stated desires for quick acknowledgement present in two of the focus groups as well as a preponderance of the one-on-one interviews. Though holding all communications during working hours was often cited as a means to communicate buy-in by leadership to the deckplates, it could also assist in gaining buy-in and attention from subordinates who may not otherwise devote much thought to the issues if it does not affect a subgroup to which

they belong. Throughout all evolutions of this study, individuals also stated their belief that mass medical events, such as a pandemic, will require a different approach than civil social stressors. This stance, while likely true based on the far-reaching health implications of a pandemic, will be confounded by the presence of hyper-partisan forces in the media and government which will present similar distorting effects to a medical event as they do to civil social stressors, thus necessitating the need for leaders to apply similar techniques to those employed against the negative effects of civil social stressors.

Though the practice was suggested, COs should refrain from utilizing the monitoring of social media to try to gain a deeper understanding of how subordinates feel about any given issue. Young individuals, including sailors, do not often use social media as a public diary, but rather as a haphazard bulletin board to share content that interests them. Assuming that a significant number of sailors' social media profile are set to a public setting that allows leaders to view them, COs attempting to decrypt the myriad of memes, event pages, pictures, family communications and advertising present in these pages. Further compounding these issues would be the presence of shitposting, a form of memeing that often relies on parody, irony, hyperbolic assessments, and generally shocking forms of comedy. Many military centric pages including Terminal Lance, Shit My LPO Says, SWOES, and Duffle Blog produce such content that is shared regularly by sailors, which could confound and slow the efforts of COs to understand the social media pages of subordinates and their connections to actual feelings of inclusion.

When soliciting closing comments from the participants in the testing phase, one participant raised the question of if it is the place of N17 to influence the manner in which a CO addresses their command regarding social stressors. While not directly stated, there was an implication that this comment was in part informed by the differences between support and operational commands in their operational tempos and the general nature of their work. While the assessment that N17 is trying to dictate how operational leaders manage their commands is a mischaracterization of what is occurring, it does raise an interesting question about the perception of some line officers who will instinctively push back against what could be perceived as encroachment on their authority from individuals outside of the warfighting community. Indeed, one majority participant in the mixed focus

group with an operational background raised the question of how leaders could avoid having any empathy that was offered being taken advantage of. This line of thought presents a somewhat disturbing parallel to the questioning of outside influences on an operational leader's authority in these matters that is present in more junior officers. Managing and mitigating this perception will likely require buy-in from senior warfighters such as the combatant commanders.

VI.   PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR COMMANDING OFFICERS

The following is the proposed guidance that should be delivered to COs in order to better help them prepare for and respond to social stressors, based on the research outlined in chapters two through five.

A.   GENERAL GUIDANCE

These steps should be altered to meet the unique needs of the command and its members, remembering that sometimes a sense of normalcy can be helpful in processing complicated emotions. COs should remind leaders that special care and attention should be paid to new recruits and midshipmen who may still be acclimating to the Navy and thus be unaware of its inner workings and the mechanisms for decision-making. All communications from leaders in the command, especially members of the Triad, should demonstrate empathy for the feelings and experiences of subordinates. These communications regarding the social stressor should occur at work, during the working day, to demonstrate buy-in and lend weight to the discussion. Communications should be as transparent and honest as possible, both in regard to the information that is available and the reasoning that has driven a decision to be made. Commanders should allow communications and decision-making to be fact-based and try to remain neutral when delivering information on politically charged social stressors.

Leaders should remember that in the early stages of the onset of a social stressor, there may be limited information to draw upon when initially addressing their command. Commanders should be able to answer the basic who, what, when and where of a situation when addressing their command. The lack of a why should not be the driving factor for delaying the addressment of a command, but rather should be a fact that is shared with the command during the initial addressment, understanding that more information will be shared as it becomes available. Research has shown that in these situations, acknowledging an event quickly will do more to serve the emotional needs of the command than delaying a response to wait for more information or to allow individuals to "cool off." While some leaders may be inclined to have an outside expert in the situation, such as a local medical

expert, community leader or police official, speak to the command, they should remember that doing so places them at risk of having guidance given that contradicts official Navy guidance, and/or further degrades feelings of inclusion and safety for some members of the command.

B.   STEPS FOR COMMANDING OFFICERS TO TAKE

1.   Prior to the Onset of a Social Stressor

Instillation COs should establish an office or POC on base to monitor local and national events with the potential to develop into social stressors, compile detailed reports on these matters and send weekly news letters to tenant COs. Instillation COs should compile a list of available resources to manage the effects of social stressors such as local mental and physical health professionals in the community, support groups including but not limited to AA, NA (or their local equivalents) abuse support, anonymous tip and support lines for crisis such as suicidal ideations and sexual assault response, basic tips about how to stay safe during protests, and local government support lines. These resources should be verified as current and available on a monthly basis with updates being made as needed. Instillation and tenant commands should begin training sailors on how to facilitate empathetic communication focused small group discussions with the goal of having several qualified individuals in stratified rank bands. These bands should be roughly structured as follows,

- Non-supervisory E-5 and below

- Supervisory E-5 to E-6

- E-7 to E-9

- Midshipmen (if applicable)

- Warrant Officers

- O-1 to non-department head O-3

- O-3 department head to O-4

- O-5 and higher

Enough personnel should be trained to facilitate the execution of small groups that contain no more than twenty individuals.

2. After the Identification of a Social Stressor

COs should consult the published information on the event to gather as firm of a basic set of facts about the situation as possible. COs should then meet with the Tirad to ensure that they are all up to speed on the information regarding the event as it stands and have discussed the best approach to care for the command. The CO should notify their ISIC of their intended course of action. The Triad should meet with the khaki leadership team, in addition to those enlisted personnel who are trained to facilitate small groups, to discuss the situation and inform the individuals with the prerequisite training that small group discussions will be conducted soon. These individuals should be offered the opportunity to decline leading a small group discussion, should they feel uncomfortable doing so. These individuals should be enabled to state their decision not to lead small group discussions to a member of the Triad privately, to avoid extra pressure being applied to them.

COs should execute a short all-hands call where they relay and expand upon the facts of the situation as they stand at that time. COs should facilitate this call personally, not delegate it to a subordinate. At the end of this all-hands call, COs should distribute the prepared list of resources available to personnel via a physical printout and email.

Commands should then break out into small groups to discuss the events and their desired responses from the command, unique needs, personal experiences and feelings related to them, with a trained individual facilitating each small group discussion. COs should stress the importance of these conversations during the all-hands call to encourage authenticity in their execution. While some individuals may desire participation to be discretionary, COs should enforce participation by all hands in order to ensure that all individuals are able to hear the experiences of their peers and benefit from such discussion. Following the discussion, facilitators and participants should submit feedback to the Triad on their thoughts and desired actions. To accommodate those who wish to remain anonymous, an anonymous collection tool should be implemented as an alternative, though

leaders should endorse honest communication via non-anonymous feedback as the most effective method for pursuing their desired outcomes.

Feedback should be analyzed by the Triad to ascertain the emotional and mental status of their command and search for places to take action, if possible. The Triad should respond to feedback either via another all-hands call or email communication, explaining their decisions for actions taken or not taken in as great detail as possible. Leaders up to and including the CO should perform informal check-ins (i.e., stopping by the smoke pit) with their personnel to ascertain the effectiveness of the implementation of responses to the social stressor, with feedback being fed up to the Triad so changes can be made as necessary. Depending on the duration of the event, COs should send out biweekly updates and strongly consider holding additional all-hands calls for updates of large importance with subsequent small group discussions.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A.   SUMMARY

The United States, and therefore the Navy, is likely to face prolonged periods of social upheaval in the future, which present stark implications for the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the fleet. Reactions by members of the military to social stressors from March of 2020 to March of 2021 have demonstrated that the wide variety of self-generated responses by commands produced widely varied results which often failed to meet the needs of service members and degraded readiness. Furthermore, the disproportionate number of servicemembers and veterans who participated in criminal activities during this period, such as the riot at the Capital on January 6th, 2021, demonstrate that the military is by no means immune to the worst kinds of behaviors that social stressors can induce.

Upon discovery that feelings of inclusion could help mitigate these negative impacts, this study set out to provide commanders with a set of guidelines and recommendations that could increase perceptions of inclusion within the fleet. To produce these guidelines, I began by attempting to explore three questions.

1.   What practices by Navy leadership during socially stressful events (such as a the COVID-19, the BLM protests, the 2020 election, and the subsequent Capital riots) have been observed to succeed in fostering inclusion?

2.   What practices have failed to foster inclusion and what practices would sailors like to see in attempts to foster inclusion?

3.   What set of best practices could be employed by Navy leadership to foster inclusion and diversity during socially stressful events?

This exploration was facilitated by conducting a human centered design project including a series of qualitative interviews to ascertain what practices were successful and unsuccessful in managing social stressors from March 2020 to March 2021, design-

thinking focus groups to ideate novel responses, and testing sessions with senior leaders to refine these responses into an actionable set of guidelines.

When examining what practices by Navy leadership during socially stressful events were observed to succeed in fostering inclusion, several strong trends presented themselves. While each sailor's experiences were unique, empathetic acknowledgement of the issue by leaders was an almost universal desire and was positively amongst sailors who felt effected by a social stressor. Sailors who were given flexibility to address the impacts of a social stressor on themselves and their families and the opportunity to discuss these issues with their shipmates responded positively to these practices, while a lack of their implementation was much more likely to be perceived negatively.

When examining the practices that failed to foster inclusion and that sailors would like to see in attempts to foster inclusion, sailors were much more likely to demonstrate similar experiences even across cultural divides. Leaders that were perceived as being indecisive, dismissive of the thoughts and feelings of their subordinates, and lacking an interest in knowing their team were viewed negatively, with these perceptions often spilling over into how the sailor viewed the larger Navy's leadership and culture. When addressing an issue, sailors desired decisive, personal responses from commands that demonstrated empathy for the struggles of individuals and cultural intelligence regarding the situation and groups involved.

A robust set of policy suggestions were crafted when examining the set of best practices could be employed by Navy leadership to foster inclusion and diversity during socially stressful events. These suggestions implemented both proactive responses to assist leaders in gathering information on social stressors and preparing leaders to address them before their onset, and suggested evolutions for commands to go through to help sailors process these stressful events in a healthy and supportive environment. Perhaps more importantly, this study identified that, despite consistent good intentions on the part of leaders, a number of shortfalls in the training offered to leaders in the Navy that create significant barriers to leaders implementing these desired behaviors and responses in a consistent manner.

B.   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The proactive alterations recommended by focus group participants and in the final guidelines for commanders present an opportunity to pay dividends for relatively low costs. In exchange for the personnel costs of assigning sailors to monitor events, produce and verify informative materials, and receive training on different forms of communication, leaders can be prepared to effectively serve the needs of their sailors, and by extension the country, before they are called upon to do so. These evolutions will enable leaders to address social stressors with the confidence to know their actions will not only serve their sailors, but also bring their command together in a way that can prevent extended losses in productivity and focus.

Beyond the necessity of changing our practices to enable the addressment of social stressors that arise within the next several years, these policies would have a profound impact on the individual who will be charged with leading the fleet in the years and decades to come. We need to rebuild how we teach and develop sailors, especially those who will assume the responsibility of caring for others, how to understand and acknowledge the experiences of their peers. This critical mission must be accomplished so that these leaders can empathetically engage and draw their fellow sailors into an inclusive work environment that has the potential to meet and exceed the challenges of next decisive decade, in both times of peace and crisis.

C.   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Two of the largest questions left looming at the conclusion this study were how do we enable leaders at all levels to be able to have these conversations in a productive manner, and how to we teach that this care is consistent with the Navy values and engrain its practice in our culture? As such, the first and largest area warranting further study is the dramatic gap between the types of communication and understanding needed by our sailors, and the capabilities of our current leaders, as identified by a litany of participants in this study. One possible starting point for such a study would be to expand the experts interviewed to include communications experts who could help explain and expand skills needed to facilitate conversations about social stressors. Another area of interest would be

how informal networks, such as the E-4 mafia or JOPA play a role in how junior members of a command perceive and respond to inclusionary efforts by senior leaders, based in part on the opinions of informal, unofficial leaders and centers of influence.

Future researchers might also consider repeating this study with an expanded and more representative sample of the fleet, to include enlisted personnel, junior officers with less than 4 years of service, and the admiralty. A longitudinal study that tracks participants over an extended period of time as social stressors occur via self-documentation to ascertain how their feelings of inclusion fluctuated and were impacted by various command approaches would assist in the refinement of the responses suggested in this study. Such a study could also be helpful in identifying a baseline of feelings of inclusion in the fleet, from which we can determine the effectiveness of a given approach to addressing social stressors.

Another crucial field of interest is the identification of social stressors themselves and a determination about how the variety of factors that contribute to their formation could impact how leaders in the Navy would be compelled to respond to them. One example of this could be how medical social stressors differ in their needs from civil social stressors, as suggested by several participants in this study. A related field of interest in this area is how should COs handle the political apparatuses that oversee the DOD implementing policies that hurt individuals in the fleet? For example, the question of the future of transgender exclusionary polices came up several times when interviewing individuals and conducting focus groups. How does an actual DOD policy such as the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell or the scaling back of transgender exclusion policies figure into this model of empathetic care, when many members will fall in the middle of an emotional response spectrum on the matter(s)? As the Navy and the nation move into the future and face calls for the expansion of civil rights from growing segments of the population, challenges like these will be on the forefront of civil-military relations and should be investigated in detail if we wish to maintain and expand a diverse and effective Navy.

APPENDIX A: INTAKE SURVEY
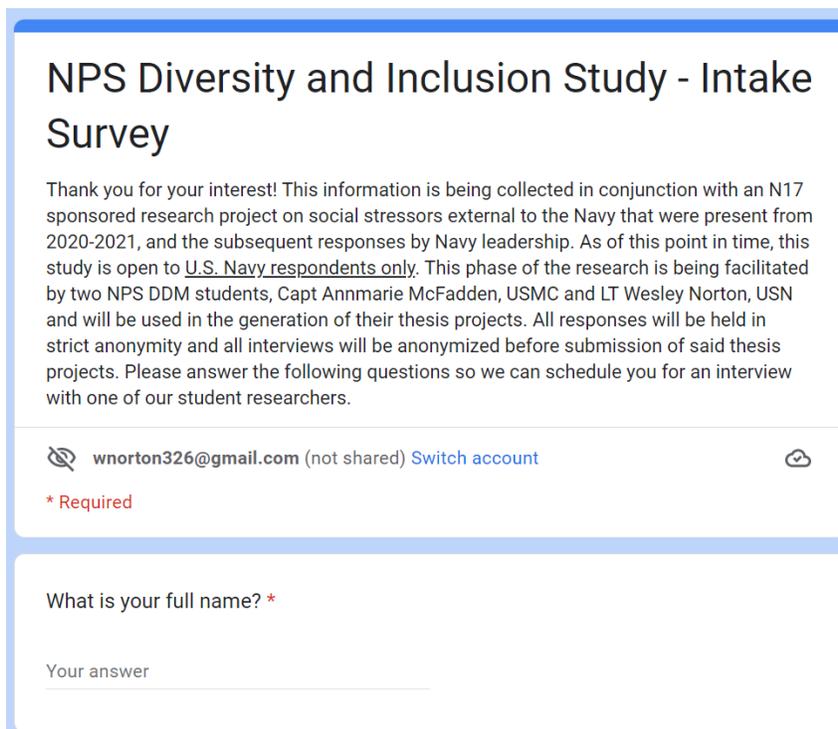
NPS Diversity and Inclusion Study - Intake Survey

Thank you for your interest! This information is being collected in conjunction with an N17 sponsored research project on social stressors external to the Navy that were present from 2020-2021, and the subsequent responses by Navy leadership. As of this point in time, this study is open to U.S. Navy respondents only. This phase of the research is being facilitated by two NPS DDM students, Capt Annmarie McFadden, USMC and LT Wesley Norton, USN and will be used in the generation of their thesis projects. All responses will be held in strict anonymity and all interviews will be anonymized before submission of said thesis projects. Please answer the following questions so we can schedule you for an interview with one of our student researchers.

wnorton326@gmail.com (not shared) Switch account

* Required

What is your full name? *

Your answer

Figure 2.   Intake Survey Image 1
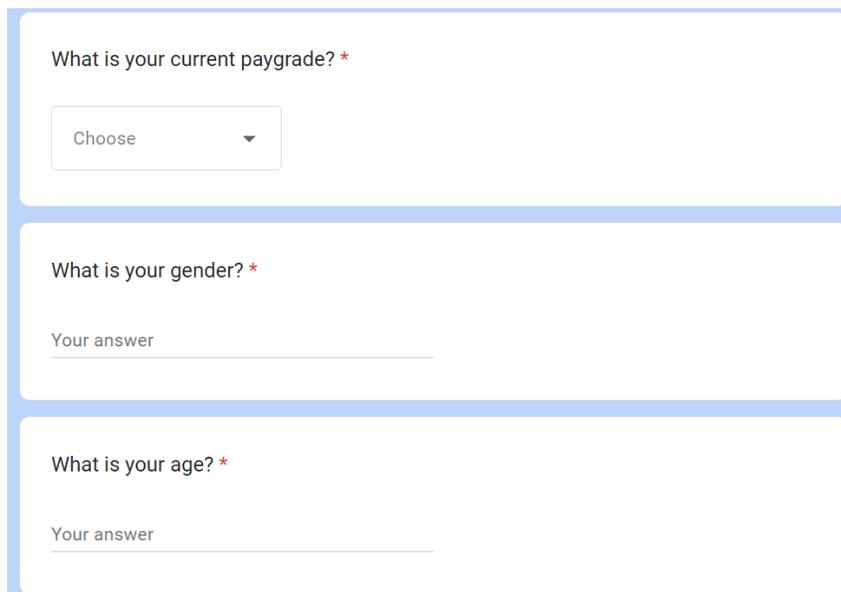
What is your current paygrade? *

Choose ▾

What is your gender? *

Your answer

What is your age? *

Your answer

Figure 3.   Intake Survey Image 2

What is your race? *

☐ Native American or Alaska Native.

☐ Asian

☐ Black or African American

☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

☐ White

☐ Other: _____

What is your ethnicity? *

◯ Hispanic or Latinx

◯ Non-Hispanic or Latinx

◯ Other: _____

Figure 4.   Intake Survey Image 3

What is your designator or rating? (ex. 1200, 1110, etc.) *

Your answer

What is your phone number? *

Your answer

Figure 5.   Intake Survey Image 1

What is your email address? *

Your answer

How do your prefer to be contacted? *

○ Phone Call

○ Text Message

○ Email

○ No preference

Would you prefer to participate in the interview or focus group process?

○ Interview

○ Focus Group

○ Both

Figure 6.   Intake Survey Image 5

If you are participating in an interview, how do you prefer your interview be conducted?   *

○ Virtual (zoom, teams, etc.)

○ In-person

○ No preference

○ N/A

Submit   Clear form

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Google Forms

Figure 7.   Intake Survey Image 6

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APPENDIX B: TESTING INTERVIEW SLIDES
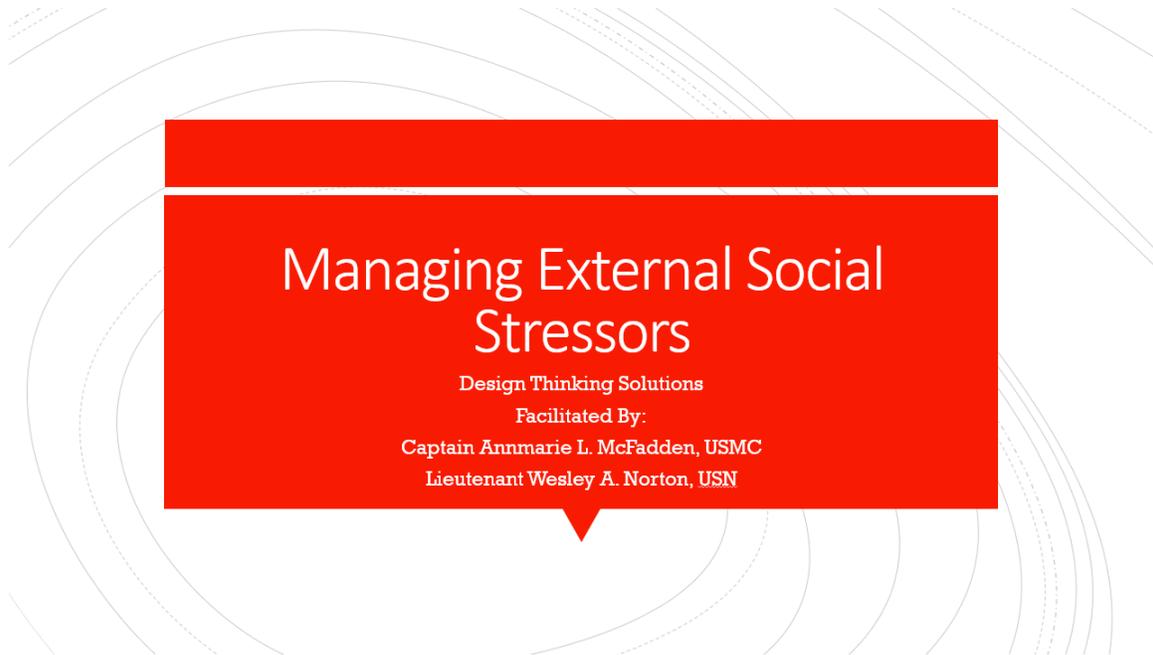
Figure 8.   Testing Interview Title Slide
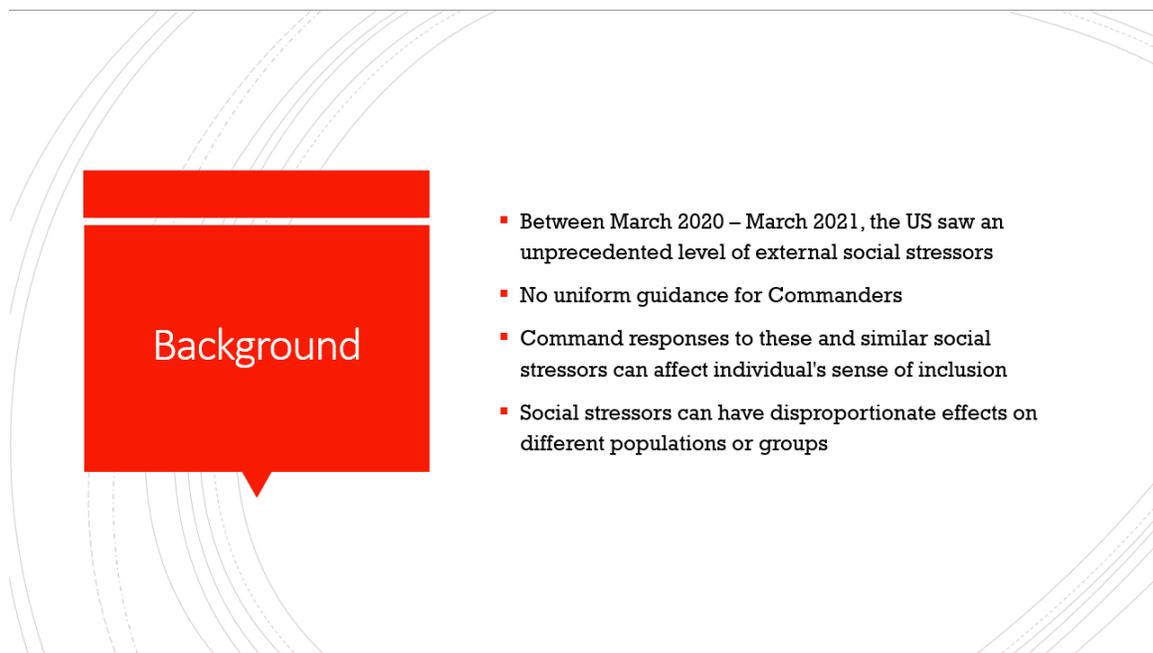
Figure 9.   Testing Interview Background Slide

Solution 1:

1. CO sends primer email with basic facts
2. CO holds short all hands call
3. Department Heads facilitate small groups discussions
4. CO facilitates in-person or virtual Q&A with appropriate local expert
5. Bi-weekly updates if situation develops
6. All communications at work, during working hours
7. Responses should
   1. Demonstrate empathy
   2. Be transparent and honest
   3. Remain neutral and fact based
   4. Emphasize trust in each other and institutions
   5. Special care and attention should be paid to new recruits and Midshipmen

Figure 10.   Testing Interview Solution 1 Slide

Solution 2:

Proactive Changes to Implement

1. Single POC on base for national/local events sends weekly newsletter to COs
2. POC for COs to receive legal guidance for event responses

Reactive Response to Specific Event

1. Gather facts about event
2. Ensure Triad has consistent message
3. Change threat protection level (if applicable)
4. All-hands call
5. Provide a list of support resources applicable to the situation
6. Facilitate small group discussions
7. Identify individuals most-affected, in need of extra assistance or support
8. Establish feedback chain between junior enlisted and leadership
9. Provide ongoing updates to command as needed

Figure 11.   Testing Interview Solution 2 Slide
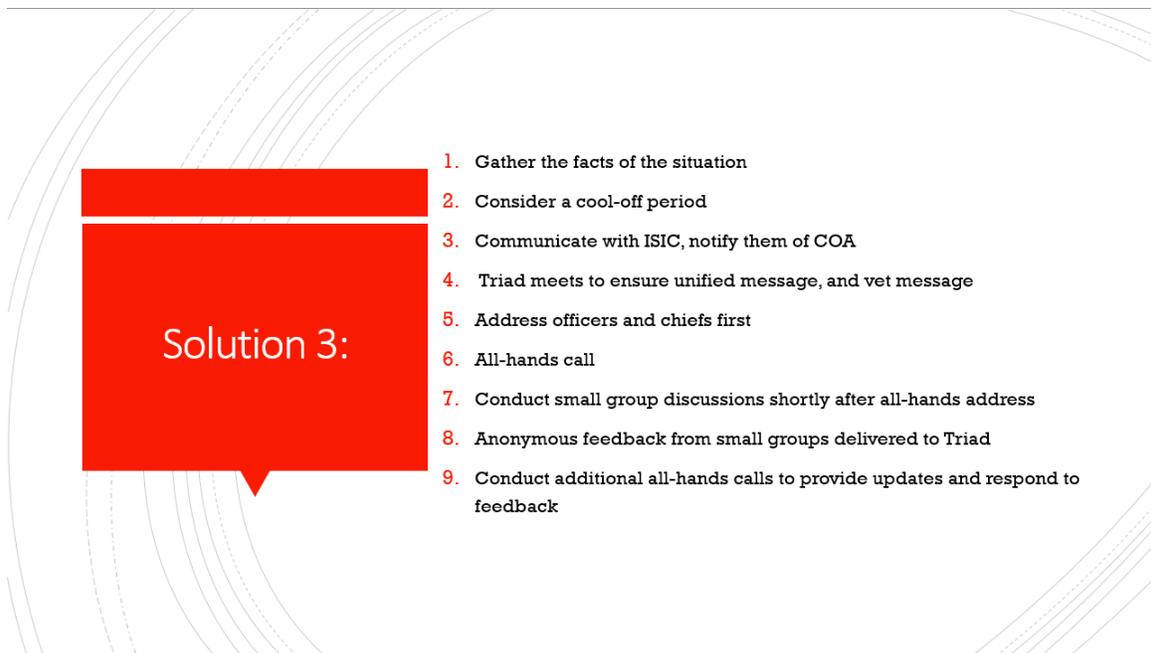
Figure 12.   Testing Interview Solution 3 Slide
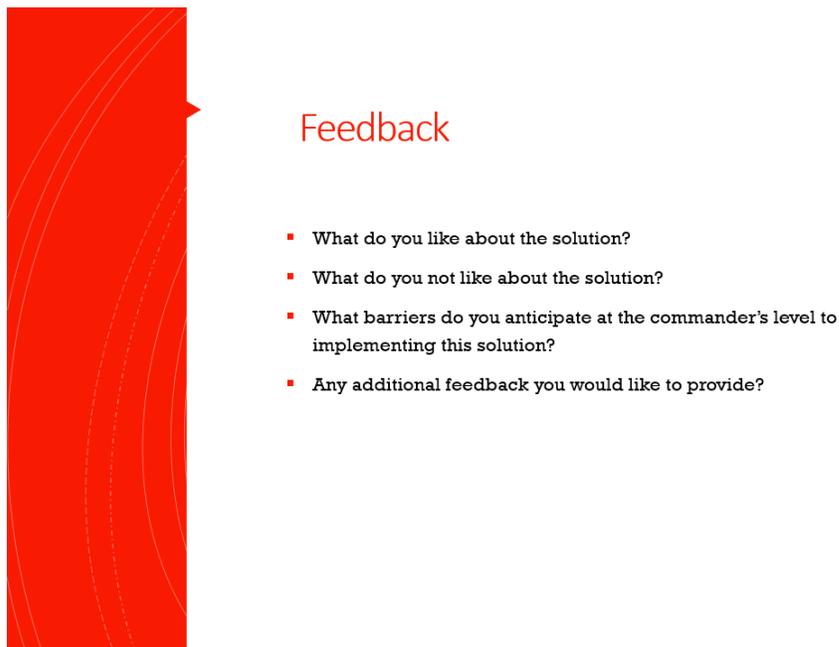
Figure 13.   Testing Interview Feedback Solicitation Slide

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