



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

**SAILOR PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
COMMUNICATION ABOUT DIVISIVE EVENTS AND
INCLUSION WITHIN THE FLEET**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study describes Sailors' perceptions of drivers and outcomes of sensitive conversations. It identifies four needed individual and organizational capacities to support successful conversations about sensitive subjects: metacognition, emotional regulation, cultural curiosity, and communication competence. Participants' responses and related literature highlight two key conclusions. First, Sailors disagree on how the Navy should manage sensitive conversations: majority and minority groups' perceptions differ on what topics require conversation and fail to recognize that the inability to engage effectively in sensitive conversations is a military vulnerability. Second, Navy communication often demonstrates an inadequate capacity for managing these conversations: leaders lack self-awareness, emotional regulation is challenging, cultural curiosity is not developed, and the tensions generated by communication hierarchies limit communication effectiveness. These capability gaps constrain Sailors' positive perceptions of sensitive conversations, which contribute to continued divisive conversations, reduced perceptions of inclusion, and increased risk from information warfare.

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SUMMARY

Recent events, such as the death of George Floyd and the resulting Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, the post-elections attack on the U.S. Capitol, and the COVID-19 pandemic, have brought to light the challenges leaders in both private and public/governmental organizations face when communicating with employees about sensitive events. At both the national and global levels, these issues are often tied to deep and long-held societal divisions. The U.S. Navy has frequently taken a progressive stance in supporting diversity and inclusion, and the Navy's recent steps to encourage inclusion and engage in necessary conversations are consistent with these actions. However, recent events and efforts to converse about these events have highlighted the challenges inherent in such communication.

This study builds upon previous research focused on the tensions between participation and organizational control in online workplace communities (Aten & Salem, 2020). This research explored Sailors' experiences of sensitive conversations on various topics and of necessary conversations directed by Navy leadership following the attacks on the U.S. Capitol.

This current research describes Sailors' perceptions of drivers and outcomes of sensitive conversations. It identifies four needed individual and organizational capacities to support successful conversations about sensitive subjects: metacognition, emotional regulation, cultural curiosity, and communication competence. Participants' responses and related literature highlight two key conclusions. First, Sailors disagree on how the Navy should manage sensitive conversations: majority and minority groups' perceptions differ on what topics require conversation, and fail to recognize that the inability to engage effectively in sensitive conversations is a military vulnerability. Second, Navy communication often demonstrates an inadequate capacity for managing these conversations: leaders lack self-awareness, emotional regulation is challenging, cultural curiosity is not developed, and the tensions generated by communication hierarchies limit communication effectiveness. These capability gaps constrain Sailors' positive perceptions of sensitive conversations, which contribute to continued divisive conversations, reduced perceptions of inclusion, and increased risk from information warfare.

OBJECTIVE

Events both at national and global levels such as the death of George Floyd and the ensuing Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest, the post-elections attack on the U.S. Capitol, and the COVID-19 pandemic, have illuminated the challenges leaders in both private and public/governmental organizations face when communicating about such issues with their employees. Research by NPS faculty uncovered benefits and dangers of online communities and recommended ongoing reinforcement of Navy organizational values, active engagement with unhealthy behaviors, and transparent management of conflict (Aten & Salem, 2020).

The Navy has often been progressive in addressing sensitive issues and advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workforce. Navy policy highlights the importance of inclusion, which it defines as “a set of behaviors (culture) that encourages Service members and civilian employees to feel valued for unique qualities and to experience a sense of belonging” (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020).). In July 2020, CNO Admiral Michael Gilday stood up Task Force One Navy (TF1N) “to analyze and evaluate issues in our society and military that detract from Navy readiness, such as racism, sexism and other structural and interpersonal biases, to attain significant, sustainable I&D-related reform” (Task Force One Navy, 2021, p. 4).

These efforts are in line with the current focus of DEI research. Early research explored problems such as discrimination and tokenism (Shore et al., 2009). Then, it shifted to focus on the potential positive effects of diversity, including how diversity can enhance organizational performance (Shore et al., 2011). Most recently, researchers and leaders of organizations have sought to fully integrate employees with diverse experiences and backgrounds into organizations by creating a sense of inclusion (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011). Congruent with this trend, Navy leaders recognize that a diverse workforce and inclusive organizational culture is necessary to support warfighting excellence. Sailors represent considerable diversity based on geographical upbringing, occupational specialty, gender, sexual preference, commissioning source, race, ethnicity, and other characteristics. This diversity presents a rich potential resource if Navy culture can be inclusive of all Sailors. To take full advantage of the potential presented by its diverse workforce, the Navy requires a deeper understanding of Sailors’ perceptions of inclusion and exclusion (Covarrubias, forthcoming, 2022).

APPROACH

This qualitative, inductive study explored Sailors’ perceptions of conversations about sensitive events to identify tensions and strategies for advancing successful and necessary conversations.

Data Collection

A research team of faculty and students conducted interviews with Sailors from majority and underrepresented groups. Researchers asked participants to report their identification with underrepresented groups with the prompt, “What majority or minority groups do you identify with?” Participants’ responses often highlighted the individual classifications as well as the intersectionality of identification, for example, as in this response:

“Obviously, (I’m in) the Black minority, the homosexual minority. Outside of that, even in my own community, the more flamboyant and colorful individual minority. Being not so masculine in my community is typically looked down on.”

The research team conducted a thematic analysis of transcribed interviews. Representative themes are shown in Figure 1 (size represents the frequency of the code and can be either negative or positive). The team also identified and categorized vignettes. Participants self-selected for interviews, and it is possible that those who were dissatisfied with DEI or sensitive conversations were more likely to participate, and this may have influenced the results (see Appendix A: Research Approach for a full explanation of the approach).

Research Questions

The study investigated the questions:

- What are the perceptions, experiences, and challenges identified by supervisors when responding to critical events that occurred from March 2020 through March 2021?
- What are the perceptions, experiences, and challenges of team members on their supervisor’s response to events that occurred from March 2020 through March 2021?
- What training objectives and strategies could equip supervisors to address negative experiences/perceptions, bias/stereotypes, and barriers to retention?



Figure 1: Interview themes

ORGANIZATION COMMUNICATION AND SENSITIVE EVENTS¹

Crises are a social phenomenon, and organizations' different audiences may define different events as crises (Svensson, 2019). During times of crisis, "communication is often reduced to one-way information distribution" (Dolamore et al., 2021, p. 9). This one-way communication is inconsistent with organizational communication rooted in empathy and supporting mutual understanding. During a crisis, the objective of organizational communication should be to manage information flow and motivate and support human resources (Zito et al., 2021). However, crisis byproducts are not always negative. Crises can provide a means to engage stakeholders in mutual sensemaking and open and honest exchange of information (Ulmer, 2012). Successful communication during and about crises requires preparation and practice provided by techniques such as continuous training, simulations, and case studies (Ulmer, 2012).

Literature exploring the implications of DEI in organizations complements research on crisis communication. Ratcliff and Key-Roberts (2018) note that "[a] climate for inclusion is one-way organizations can manage and leverage their diversity" (p. 1). Similarly, within the Navy, TF1N claims that "ensuring inclusion and connectedness among every Sailor, family member, and Navy civilian promotes organizational trust and transparency throughout their Navy journey" (2020, p. 12). Effective communication in a diverse organization results in better performance (Okoro & Washington, 2012). Successful communication about sensitive issues requires communication that incorporates active listening, empathy, and participation (Jackson-Seales & Caballero, 2021; Zito et al., 2021). While scholars contend that participating in difficult arguments and debates in the workplace can be accomplished, such conversations often prove challenging (Caliendo, 2020; Cowan & Maitles, 2012).

¹ This section paraphrases an NPS thesis by Ivan Covarrubias (forthcoming, 2022).

ANALYSIS

Sensitive conversations are complex events.

Participants' experiences of sensitive communication illuminated several layers of complexity including drivers of necessary conversations, needs for awareness, and variable outcomes. Humor emerged as a consistent theme in participants' responses. Participants described humor as a driver of complaints. Participants' examples of inappropriate humor overlapped with other themes. Participants gave examples of inappropriate humor that drove subsequent sensitive conversations (driver), triggered self-awareness (metacognition), and resulted in positive interventions (outcomes), suggesting a need for greater awareness of how Sailors use and communicate humor. As one participant explained:

"I know that, especially in the Navy, humor is used as a coping mechanism. ... A lot of people have like a dark sense of humor, and that definitely comes across as offensive, depending on ... the context of the joke [and] you had to be like 'Whoa, let's think about what you just said. Did it really come across as you intended it? Like is there a better way that you could have said that?'"

Drivers of sensitive conversations come from many directions.

Participants' experiences of sensitive conversations suggested that such conversations were initiated organizationally, locally, and through peers. Drivers included complaints about behavior at a local level, divisive internal or external events, specific policy or directives, and general information volatility.

Complaints were usually generated within working groups and were both formal and informal. One participant explained: *"We had four instances where someone brought up that there's sexual jokes or racist jokes in the work center."* **Policy** sometimes drove conversations. Participants noted that sensitive conversations were initiated through policies such as the all-hands stand-down that took place at the beginning of 2022.

External and internal events drove sensitive conversations. Events drove both formal conversations through the organizational hierarchy and through informal conversations between peers. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement drove some leaders to engage in workplace conversations and generated conversations among peers. As one participant explained:

"So, back then in COVID, all these events were happening. ... You talk about it at home with your spouse, you come to work and it's like, 'Oh, did you see what happened? Then you wonder,

‘Do you guys have control of this?’ That was the most upsetting about it.”

Internal events that might generate conversations included poor use of humor, and events escalating up to disturbing incidents such as one that several participants described, in which a noose was found onboard a ship.

Information volatility is derived from misinformation and conflicting accounts of events in the media and on social media. Participants recognized that information volatility drove formal and informal conversations. Some perceived that misinformation also exacerbated divisions and divisive behavior. For example, one participant explained:

“Seeing these events bubble up in the media and mainstream America over the course of 2020–2021, it was a sort of unmasking ... suppressed behaviors. ... [We had worked] as a nation, as a people, and as a service ... to help each other understand that these were not good. But then it became acceptable on a national scale [and] more acceptable in subcultures of the Navy.”

Sensitive conversations require awareness.

Integrating participants’ responses with the literature suggested four needs for awareness to support successful sensitive conversations: metacognition, emotional regulation, cultural curiosity, and communication hierarchy as shown in Figure 2.

Metacognition includes self-awareness of one’s biases and limitations, awareness of differences between subcultures and groups, and reflection and awareness of one’s emotions. Metacognition was exhibited when Sailors described individuals being aware of what’s going on with themselves, how they

might react to events, and what kind of emotional responses might trigger them.

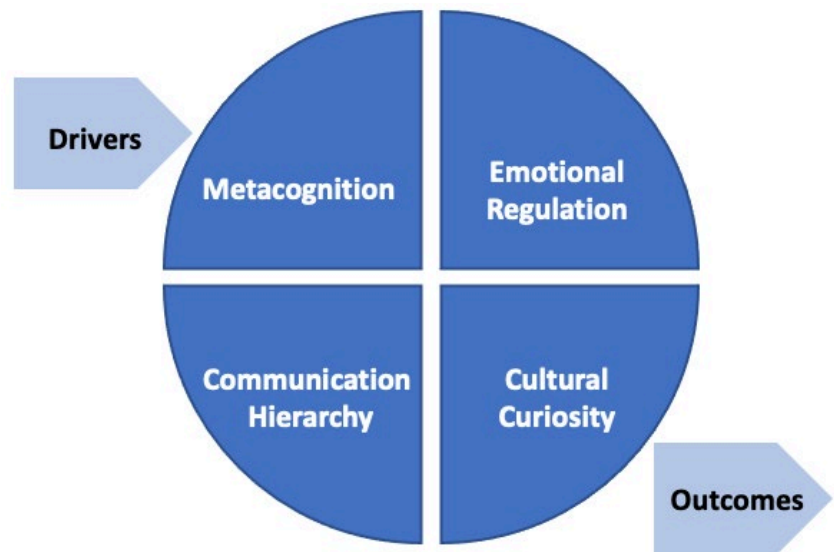


Figure 2: Needed Awareness

Participants related both positive and negative examples. For instance, one participant described how others relied on him when they knew that they would not be able to regulate their emotions. He explained that they were aware they had bias and knew that they needed to exit the conversation. The participant related:

“The Chiefs ... oftentimes, even though I was a lower rank they would actually come to me and be like, ‘Hey, [XXX], you know, I want you, if you could, talk to this individual Sailor about some of the traits or some of the things that they’re doing, because I don’t want them to get in trouble. [But] I feel like if I try to talk to them, I may get angry and respond in a manner that’s going to push them away instead of drawing them.”

In a negative illustration, a participant related an incident involving a Sailor’s admission of suicidal thoughts. The participant related:

“When I was on my first ship, I had a Chief. Like I had made a joke and he proceeded to pull out a knife and hand me a knife and tell me to kill myself. As someone who has dealt with like suicidal ideations, I said that that doesn’t sit well with me. And he got a slap on the wrist.”

Another participant related his own growing awareness of the potential effects of his communication, which he intended to be humorous, on others:

“One of my Sailors loves for me to mess with him. Like just, you know, he’ll say, ‘Good morning, [xxx],’ and I’m like, ‘Shut up.’ ... He knows I’m joking. And then somebody ... [asked] him, ‘Why do you always mess with [xxx]? You know he’s going to mess with you.’ And he’s like, ‘I like it.’ And I said, ‘Yeah, he’s got battered wife syndrome,’ because that was a thing we used to say that if you liked being beat up on. And literally as the words came out of my mouth and I realized I had two Sailors, female Sailors, going through that, I felt like this big ... It was eye-opening ... It was a total, innocent, humor thing for me because I definitely wasn’t thinking about [the female Sailors] and had I not had Sailors that were going through that at that moment, I don’t know that I would have grasped [it].”

Emotional regulation surfaced in the study as the ability to be non-defensive, show empathy, and recognize one’s own vulnerability. Participant’s examples, which we have grouped as emotional regulation, focused on what one does with awareness,

whether one reacts emotionally or turns metacognition and awareness of emotion into a non-reactionary, non-defensive response. Examples of emotional regulation also included being empathetic and open to others' experiences and feelings. Participants' examples suggest that emotional regulation requires vulnerability and admitting that one might be naïve or wrong and that this can be difficult in a hierarchical organization.

Participants' responses illustrated some positive examples of emotional regulation, and participants spoke favorably about these examples. However, most responses were negative examples, and many participants were unable to provide a positive example. Emotional regulation allowed Sailors to listen and not judge. Although, ideally, emotional regulation occurred during a sensitive conversation, it could also occur later. One participant shared an example of a leader who was not empathetic during a conversation but re-engaged and apologized for the lack of empathy later:

“First, he told me that I was not committed to the Navy, but then he like genuinely sat down and apologized and said that, ‘Hindsight is 20/20, and we wish that we could do things better.’ ... And that just gave me like this shining light of, okay, there are good people here. He was also one of those people where I could genuinely just sit down with him and have real conversations.”

This interaction resulted in the Sailor's increased trust in his leader.

Cultural curiosity embodies cultural humility, exploration, openness, perspective-taking, adaptation, and frame-shifting. The research focus on cultural curiosity differs from past recommendations that individuals should learn about and know different cultures (Nardon & Steers, 2007). Cultural curiosity, on the other hand, acknowledges that cultural experiences are individual and interactions occur situationally. This more recent focus suggests that to successfully engage in sensitive conversations, leaders require cultural humility and a sense of curiosity and exploration rather than confidence in their knowledge of others' experiences. Cultural curiosity is exhibited when a leader takes on an attitude of cultural humility. Cultural humility is in juxtaposition with cultural competence. Cultural competence assumes that one can attain a deep understanding of different cultures. Cultural humility recognizes that although cultural understanding is a worthwhile goal, expecting leaders to achieve that goal is unrealistic.

Participants' responses suggest that they perceived conversations more positively when the conversant approached the conversation with openness and a desire to explore and learn, which they demonstrated by asking questions. In these instances, the conversant sought insights about the situation, did not assume they understood, and were open to hearing others' perspectives. Positive examples related that the conversant understood how their view of the world was different and was able to frame shift and change their mind by listening to other people.

One participant related a positive example of cultural humility in which the leader, when faced with what to do about COVID, reached out to others to understand how best to implement COVID restrictions. The participant explained:

“I like leadership styles where a CO says, ‘Okay, I’m not 100% sure what kind of policy to make here. You all have been here longer than me. ... I’m open to thinking about how to go with COVID stuff. ... What are your interpretations of how best to go about this on a small-boat ship like this?’”

Conversely, another participant related:

“I’ve been in 12 years, and I’ve never had someone say, ‘This is what’s going on in the world right now. Can we openly talk about this? Let’s do that so we can understand the dynamic.’”

Communication hierarchy refers both to organizational levels and the direction of communication. Participants’ responses highlighted tensions between the needs of Navy command and control culture and the needs of collaborative problem-solving. Related literature shows active listening and collaborative problem-solving are vital to successfully engaging in sensitive conversations. Participants’ responses highlight the challenge of open communication in a hierarchical institution where the culture asks leaders to be directive. One participant, sharing his frustration with his peers’ struggles, explained:

“[I said] ‘If you’re not comfortable with it, and you don’t know what to say, then you need to refer that person.’ And then they were like, ‘No, but we’re Chiefs. How are you not going to be right?’ And I was like, ‘Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit. If you think that everybody in this room knows how to talk down a suicidal person, you all are full of shit. Your Chief, our Chief, rank doesn’t mean shit when it comes to that.’”

Many participants described lateral communication as a common communication mode. Sensitive discussions about race, politics, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual discrimination, both positive and negative, often occurred between peers. However, participants shared few examples of top-down communication exhibiting active listening or collaborative sensemaking. Participants described official top-down communication as generally “reading off a piece of paper.” In one instance, however, a command utilized a diversity gathering where people from different races, backgrounds, and political views shared their own opinions, resulting in better understanding and better relations.

Outcomes are inconsistent.

Participants' responses related to outcomes included their perceptions of outcomes of communication about divisive or inappropriate communication and behavior, and also their perceptions of the outcomes of sensitive conversations. Participants related outcomes of divisive and inappropriate communication ranging from no response to procedural accountability, including court martial, captain's mast, and chastisements.

Some participants noted that leader responses to inappropriate behavior seemed inequitable. For example, describing what he perceived as a very inequitable response to infractions by an African American and a Caucasian Sailor:

“It was a White man who hung this noose. And the only punishment that he got was 15 days restriction. But then I have another friend who went UA for a day and got 45 days restriction and 45 days half pay because of his mental state. Even though he told his division, ‘Hey, I’m not doing too well. I need a mental day.’”

Another Sailor described these events and their effects:

“He’s Black. He was struggling with mental issues, ... needed a breather, and you give him 45 days and take his rank. But then you have this White guy who puts a noose in his work center, goes to mast, uses the excuse of suicide, and he just gets 15 days. We were upset. I have a lot of Black friends, and at this point it’s like none of us are safe.”²

Participants also related accountability through lateral communication, often in the form of bystander intervention wherein peers spoke up in support of others, calling out inappropriate communication or behavior. Participants also shared examples of one-to-one communication to deal with issues. Many of participants' examples of inappropriate communication between peers centered on the inappropriate use of humor.

Another participant explained his response to a supervisor repeating something he had heard:

“So, a supervisor said, ‘I know how we can stop all these phone calls about warranties. ... Just blow up India.’ And we actually have a female of Indian descent in ... the department. And so, she didn’t say anything ... because everybody laughed.”

² Task Force One Navy's deliverable 5.4: "Counter Hate Speech," resulted in the issuance of a page 13 template to hold personnel accountable (<https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/26/2002570959/-1/-1/1/TASK%20FORCE%20ONE%20NAVY%20FINAL%20REPORT.PDF>).

The participant continued:

“We pulled the department together and said, ‘Listen. If you hear a joke that you think is offensive or you think offends somebody else, you can speak up and say, ‘I don’t think that’s right.’”

However, participants noted that relying on one-to-one accountability can place considerable pressure on those in underrepresented groups. Some participants noted that relying on those in underrepresented groups to intervene in response to their own discrimination adds to the already heavy burden of belonging to an underrepresented group.

For example, one participant explained:

“You know, once you’ve been in for as long as I’ve been in ... we have our days when you’re like, ‘Oh, my God. It’s [hard].’ But then, you know [starts crying] sorry for crying—it’s like a Sailor would either come around the corner and say something, or you do the Sailors Creed, you do Colors, or you see like a Navy [video] and you be like, ‘That’s why I joined. That’s why I stayed in.’ And it’s going to be challenges, whether you’re going to be in the military, civilian side. So, do you give up? And I keep saying no.”

CONCLUSIONS³

Our analysis of participants' responses to interview questions revealed four key implications. We found that participants do not perceive a strong connection between recent Navy-instigated sensitive conversations and the warfighting mission, there is a lack of agreement on what issues require Navy-wide conversation, leaders are not equipped in terms of skills or personal characteristics to engage in sensitive conversations on all topics at all times, and the organization is not fully equipped to get the most from these conversations. These implications suggest two key conclusions.

1) The inability to engage effectively in sensitive conversations is a military vulnerability. A recent NATO report emphasizes the threat posed to democracies by institutions' inability to address divisiveness and misinformation. NATO concludes that our enemies are directly targeting our divisions. Democracies' enemies are using disinformation to amplify societal polarization and extremism, divisive political topics, distrust in government and elections, perceptions of social inequities, and distrust of minority groups and to weaken the rule of law and civil discourse and international and military relations (NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence, 2021).

Participants' examples indicate a lack of agreement on what requires conversations. While many in underrepresented groups related that they could not fully focus on their work if they were concerned about external, divisive events, such as the BLM protests and extremism threats, others perceived these issues as political and having no place in the workplace (See Appendix B: Representative Quotes).

2) The Navy and its leaders) often engage in communication without adequate preparation. As shown in Figure 3, preparation includes awareness (metacognition, emotional regulation, cultural curiosity, and addressing communication hierarchy). Participants' responses suggest that a lack of preparation hinders the effectiveness of sensitive conversations. Participants' negative examples suggest that individually and organizationally, Navy leadership often bypasses reflection before informal and formal communication. In contrast, their positive examples illustrate the benefits of sensitivity to metacognition, emotional regulation, cultural curiosity, and communication hierarchy.

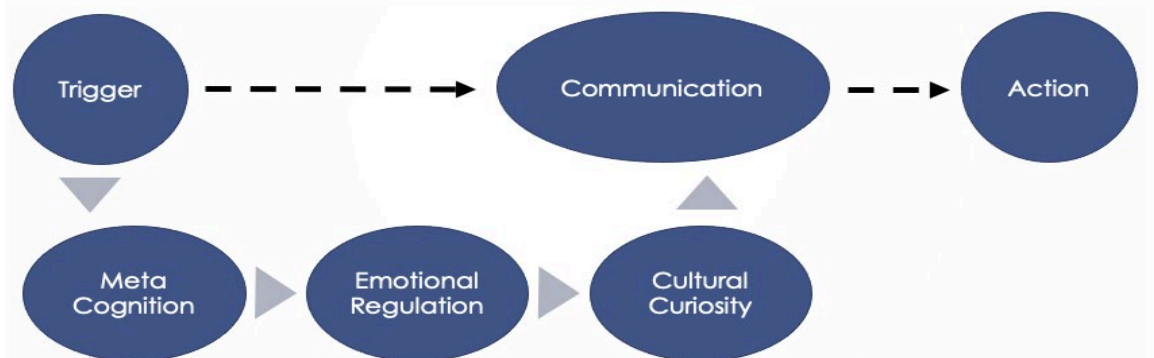


Figure 3: Preparation for Sensitive Communication

³ Recommendations and quotations integrate student-collected data and conclusions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We make 4 recommendations to address challenges. These are summarized in Figure 4.

1) Approach divisive communication as a military threat. Our analysis indicates that sensitive conversations are not uniformly viewed as mission-critical. We recommend that leadership explicitly frame DEI and conversations about sensitive issues as a required response to a military threat. As noted in Task Force One Navy Final Report (2020), “[this is] not about race, gender, or sexual orientation, it’s about readiness. ‘If I’m thinking more about how I will get home safely, what am I forgetting about when I am conducting maintenance?’” (quoting RADM Holsey, p. 98).

Broadly, we recommend that communication about sensitive issues tie to the disinformation threat from near-peer powers and highlight risks to the legitimacy of our military, emphasize the importance of cohesion to military strength, and task everyone with defending democracy by engaging in inclusion communication and metacognition, emotional regulation, and cultural curiosity.

Research suggests the value of issue framing and the experience of the U.S. Marine Corps conforms with this research (Dew et al., 2017). The U.S. Marine Corps has consistently framed the need for reducing consumption and reliance on fossil fuels as effective energy use vital to the Marine Corps’ operational effectiveness. Marine leaders reframe what others term energy efficiency as energy effectiveness that will enable Marines to go farther and stay out longer, a key aspect of the Marine Corps’ expeditionary roots and core mission. Current assessments suggest that divisiveness around race, gender identity, gender roles, and politics, exacerbated by a lack of inclusion, threatens military strength. We recommend that Navy strategic communication and information warfare experts be included in discussions and strategizing about DEI and sensitive conversations.

2) Define necessary conversations in terms of the impact on the warfighting mission. Our analysis indicates a lack of agreement on what is a necessary conversation. As one participant explained, “*The challenge is knowing ... what constitutes a major social or emotional event for individuals?*”

We recommend Navy leadership assess what issues require conversation through the lens of military threat and the warfighting mission. Weaknesses identified as targets of democracies’ enemies can be identified *a priori* as requiring institutionally generated conversation. Leaders should identify local-level events as requiring conversation based on the event’s salience to Sailors in specific locations. When Sailors pay great attention to an event, the event and conversation about it present a possible vulnerability. An anonymous feedback app could allow Navy leadership to track attention quickly and would be a valuable tool in assessing the need for conversation.

3) Equip leadership with the necessary tools for conversations. Our analysis indicates that Navy leaders need to be equipped to conduct sensitive conversations effectively. As one participant noted, *“We’re making the assumption that all leaders have the tools and ability to facilitate these discussions.”*

We recommend providing short-term and long-term support to sharpen preparation. As one participant noted, *“The real concern here is not changing current senior leaders but developing these skills in current mid-level leaders who will one day implement them as commanders.”*

In the short term, situation-focused job aids and practicing communication by drawing on vignettes and leveraging existing resources such as chaplains, the human factors board, and information warfare officers can provide immediate assistance for leaders who are not prepared to engage in sensitive conversations. SECDEF Austin suggested this immediate approach in a 2020 memo (June 19, 2020; see Covarrubias, forthcoming, 2022 for a collection of vignettes). In the long term, it is essential to grow cultural curiosity, emotional regulation, meta-awareness, and diverse leadership. Many current Navy programs are taking action to achieve these goals.

4) Take big bites for culture change. Additionally, our analysis indicates that Navy organizational structure and culture may not be ideally suited to maximizing the success of sensitive conversations. The hierarchical structure and command and control culture, which may be a necessary element of military organization, are in tension with an environment that encourages an open and vulnerable conversation. As one participant explained, *“...there’s a Navy way and there’s a human way. When it comes to important issues, I feel like there should be human communication first versus Navy communication.”*

This poses the question: How can we hold sensitive conversations in a hierarchical structure and command and control culture? There is no easy answer to this question. Participants’ responses, however, recognized a need for cultural change. One participant expressed frustration with the objections to calls for culture change:

“So many people are saying, [with disdain] ‘Oh, it’s the kinder, gentler Navy.’ No, no. It’s what’s right. Yes, we have a little bit softer rules on things, but in those moments where we have to be conscious and cognizant of people’s feelings and all of the different cultures and looking at what we used to say as being okay, like that’s not kinder, gentler. That’s actually being perceptive of what was right and what was wrong.”

To facilitate change, we recommend drawing from successful programs, such as bystander intervention and “see something, say something,” to encourage responses to insensitive or exclusionary communication framed as a military threat.

Challenge	Recommended Action
Sensitive conversations are not uniformly viewed as mission critical	Frame the problem as a security threat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize cohesion • Tie to disinformation threat • Highlight risk to external legitimacy • Task everyone as a democracy defender
Sailors lack agreement on what conversations are necessary	Define necessary by mission priority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track emergent risks – internal feedback app, external scanning • Institutionalize defined risks – prompt, structured response
Leaders not equally equipped to engage in sensitive conversations (skills, personal characteristics)	Focus on thinking, feeling, curiosity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide situation-focused job aids (e.g. vignettes) • Leverage existing experts (Chaplain, Human Factors Board, Information Warfare Officers) • Long term – grow cultural curiosity, emotional regulation, meta-awareness, and diverse leadership
Organization is well not equipped to get the most from conversations (command control, feedback mechanisms, hierarchy)	Take 'big bites' for culture change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bystander intervention at national security level — 'see something, say something' • Explore how to hold sensitive conversations in a hierarchical structure

Figure 4: Challenges and Recommended Actions

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH APPROACH

This qualitative, inductive study explored Sailors’ perceptions of conversations about sensitive events to identify tensions and strategies for advancing successful and necessary conversations. The Research team included six faculty and six students who worked in four teams on capstone projects. The student teams will each prepare a written report to meet their degree requirements. The faculty team collected and analyzed interview data and, where noted in this report, incorporated students’ conclusions. The figures below characterize participants.

Participants and Data

The faculty team conducted interviews on two ships undergoing maintenance. Sailors volunteered to participate in interviews. The researchers asked participants to list any minority groups with which they identified.

The team conducted 44 interviews lasting from 45 to 60 minutes each. The interview questions asked participants to give examples of communication they perceived as positive and negative, from coworkers and leaders.

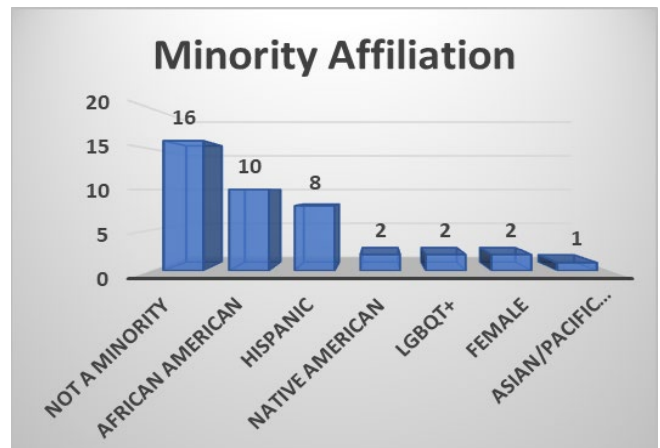
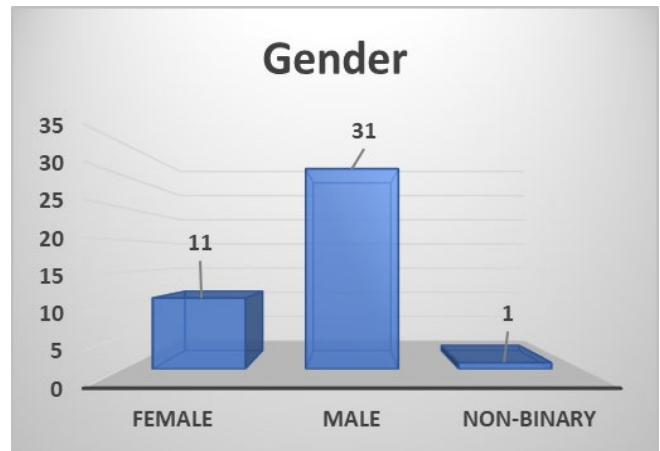
For example:

Please give an example of a time in the past few years that a coworker demonstrated a positive way of handling communication about divisive external events/issues.

And:

Please give an example of a time in the past few years that a leader demonstrated negative behaviors related to these divisive external events/issues in their communication and/or actions.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed.



Data Analysis Approach

The research team conducted a thematic analysis of transcribed interviews. The research team analyzed the data using Qualitative Data Analysis software. The researchers created initial codes from the literature and then added codes as they emerged in the data. The researchers identified and labeled 555 segments of text, of several lines to several paragraphs long, with 59 codes. Excerpts were labeled with all appropriate codes such that some excerpts were given multiple codes. In all, codes were applied 2,126 times. Two researchers read through all of the texts and discussed the emerging codes and themes as they progressed, resolving any differences. The entire team engaged in discussions of the emerging findings, sharing their impressions. The team worked in this manner until the themes fully explained the data. The research team then discussed implications, iterating between their developing conclusions, the literature, and the data. Figure 5 illustrates links between the final themes and implications.

The team also identified and categorized 50 vignettes, or examples of interactions. The team grouped the vignettes into 16 categories by relationship (peer, similar, supervisory), setting (one-on-one, small group, public), and topic (Covid, extremism, favoritism, gender identity, job, politics, race, religion, sex discrimination, and sexual assault.)



Figure 5: Codes and Implications

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APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE QUOTES

What events require conversation?
Like there's conversations that every leadership should have about certain things. Like if that thing was going on, the protests were going on here in San Diego, I definitely, even before I was a CCS, would be saying, "Hey, you all don't be going out there. Don't be involved in these protests that turn into riots. As the Navy, you're putting yourself in a situation." But I don't know how in-depth I would want to get.
I think my biggest challenge is these things are not ever discussed openly. African American Sailors are not asked how they feel: "Are you okay?" We're kind of left to discuss that privately, so I don't think that's good. [...] since 2020, witnessing the COVID issues, the racial issues, and every other issue that we've had since 2020, I don't think Sailors -- there are no public discussions. Sailors are not asked "are you okay?" [...] I don't think certain people are comfortable with discussing this type of stuff, but when you don't, it's like it's a common in our American culture in general.
They do kind of right by putting something out at quarters or letting the division know, hey, not to do this. But this is why I say that it's not effective, because you're highlighting something but you're not keeping informed of what happened. So when you hear something at quarters, you're like, "Well, what happened? Was it somebody in our division? Was it someone on the ship?" Blasé-blah. You're not being direct, and then you're not offering any training or offering a conversation to discuss what really happened and how you should handle it. [But to say] someone felt some type of way, they got touched or whatever. "Don't touch anybody." This is the next day. "Please don't put your hands on anyone if they don't..." Okay, so what happened? Like that's not effective at all. [Laughs] So I would say it gets handled, but how it gets handled or the manner it's treated in is not so much as being effective.
Like political stuff and like current event stuff happening outside in the world, like I don't [really] get into that stuff because it causes like energy levels to go up, and it's like you don't end up on the right side of the conversation
And I mean [...] suicide's just constantly there. And I would imagine like if you're adding more pressure to a person that's [...] [not] the quote/unquote normal way, sometimes those [...] people just reach out to you [...] just because they're looking for an outlet. So I think, You know, like maybe make it to where it's not so -- it doesn't have to get bad. You know what I mean? Like it can be, "Hey, this is something that's just affecting me." But I don't really see that much -- I don't see the conversation happening, but I don't know if that's helping. But definitely knowing what the outlets are. I don't know those. It would be nice if that was kind of pushed out, you know.
It was talked about and everybody -- I mean he openly apologized to the chain of command and the Sailors that were there. And that's where I was going to go. A lot of his coworkers are of African American descent, and he never meant to offend them, and he was pretty sincere, I guess you could say, because he apologized to them and they accepted his apology there in that open forum that the command had created. So it was talked about. It was -- the CO, when it first happened, she said, "It's not going to be tolerated, and I'm not going to deal with it. You will be held accountable," and that was it. Of course, he requested open captain's mast, where he got his punishment. He served it, and he was apologetic to his friends and his peers and everybody else. So I think they handled -- the chain of command handled it pretty well and talked about it.
I think if you are that straight boss and you have a gay employee, you should ask them questions to better educate yourself.
I think that it's best that things stay outside of work so that it doesn't create any arguments or any tension. But if the Sailor, or anybody, really -- khaki included -- is visibly upset, I feel like a conversation should be started, even if it's one-on-one, if they have somebody that they're close to that they can feel like they can talk to about it. And just having that conversation and letting them kind of explain why they're upset and talking about that.
Navy's always very reactionary when they do something, and so you feel like now we're doing it because we have to do it. There's never anyone that prods and looks into something beforehand, never really get in the front of it. I've grown up around the issue a lot, especially where I come from, but I don't think nobody feels like the upper chain of command really takes something like this really seriously. It's they sit, they talk about it. Recruits are trained about it that first week in boot camp. But if they do something, right, when recruits were at RTC and they did something racist towards another recruit, they got sent back a week. That's it. And then I've seen people also swipe it under the rug.

Nobody in the Navy has enough time for lip service. So I feel like the most important thing for at a command level, from a junior Sailor's point of view to the command level, is it needs to be clear and concise and not supercilious. Is that the right word? It needs to be necessary. There is nobody at any command that wants to gather up and be -- just have their ego stroked. They want the information and direction, if there is any direction, so they can move forward.

But I think we're just people, as a person-wise. Not everybody is the same. But I've noticed here there's not that many people that have really took the time to just like, "How are you? How are you doing? What does your day look like? How are you getting along? Do you need me to help you with this?" I feel like here they're just, like I said, desensitized, where it's kind of, "Oh you're going to get used to it." I feel like that was like a sad part to me, since I shouldn't need to get used to that. It shouldn't be a thing. And it sucks that people have been through so much and all that stuff, where it's not a issue to them anymore.

Like thinking about the election, I was able to avoid that conversation because that conversation didn't really affect our professional relationship or it didn't really -- us not talking about the election and who we're voting for did not affect us there. You know, I can still be friends with some people and not know who they voted for. So I think, in that case, it was definitely all right to avoid that and to just save that argument.

I think, say, if we were talking about stances on like sexual assault or things like that, I think those are things that you can't really ignore. And [it's not to say] which I've had this happen to me, but if there was an instance or an example in our division that somebody was sexually assaulted or something like that, and people wanted to say, well, I believe this person is faking it, or I believe this person actually did it and everything -- I think conversation like that, there's no way that you cannot. If I had a coworker that was so big about, you know, "that's wrong, this is wrong" or "they didn't do it" and wants to go [unintelligible], I don't think I could work with a person like that, because I feel like that is a livelihood thing. You know, that's like a trust thing. If you're believing so hard about this, where that could affect me, that could affect like, okay, do I want to say, if I had kids, do I want them around you, or do I want to -- you know? So I think certain cases like that, or even in, personally, like if they hated gay people and they had a issue about that. I think that's a case that we definitely would have to talk about it.

Earlier on, when I first joined, I felt like a lot of superiors were insensitive to a lot of topics and a lot of Sailors' feelings about things. It was one of those things where in the Navy you're just told, "Hey, man, just get over it. You'll be okay. When I was junior Sailor, I had to..." You know, it's all that normal stuff of that. It was always toxic, but we just -- it was the way it was, right? I can't think of anything specific that like sticks out. I just know that it was like -- I won't say a regular occurrence -- but it happened enough where leadership definitely has probably said things they shouldn't have said about things going on in the world.

So, like when they be addressing the diversity issue about the attack on the 6th of January, basically they said, "We know what's going on in the news. We see what's happening. We just need to understand that we're not in a position to commit those acts. You can't just go to the Capitol and do this and do that. But this is a place of inclusion. If you feel like you're not included, open-door policy. Feel free to talk to your chain of command, feel free to talk to any of us." I'm talking about the triad. Also, they just -- they're pretty transparent, I would say, transparent and blunt. And that feels like good. You just get the information versus like, "Ah, we know what happened on this day." [Kind of like talk around you. They just like attack it with what it is, and you shouldn't be doing it. You have a oath. You have Sailor's Creed you're supposed to stick to. If you're not doing that, I mean you're wrong.

For example, you know, you have a division full of males and females, right? And maybe males are kind of joking in however males joke, right? So it's like, if you're going to do that, I'm not telling you not to, but just be aware of your surroundings. Right? At the end of the day, this is a professional setting, so watch what you say pretty much.

[If there were riots nearby] I mean, just like anything, any other information we get, put it out at quarters. You know, have your division and then discuss the topic, discuss the dos and don'ts, and right there it's pretty much set in stone, and then now Sailors know what they can and can't do.

[what not to do] Tell people, hey, don't talk about it at work, shut it down, give inauthentic training, give rushed training. You know, we have all these -- what do you call those things? We have all these like, you know, like Latin American Heritage, Pacific Islander, and I appreciate them, but they just never feel right. I feel like they turn people off more than people are like, "I think my culture is being represented here." It's like, ah, I appreciate you're doing something, so I have to appreciate it, but more could have been done, right? Were people of that culture involved? Because I think I'm very inclusive of all cultures and all that, but if you get me and four other Black guys to do a Pacific Islander Heritage Month, like can we do it? Yes. Could we do it better if we had people from that culture saying, "That's offensive. You should add this. That's great." I think that's the way you do it. And I understand you can't always do that or people don't always want to be involved, but it'd be nice to see more effort put forth.

Skills and role related to engaging in conversations (who should engage, who's prepared)
<p>It was brought up during a 1st-class leadership training, which I wasn't there, about the transgender Sailors and how the males that are transitioning go to the female berthing. They had a lot of questions. Junior Sailors are uncomfortable about it. So now I'm building a training to give to the 1st class about it, because there's so much - even for me, the policy is pretty gray. It's an interim policy, for one. So I'm going to build a PowerPoint. I literally have it in my notes, and I didn't bring my notebook. Literally, I'm going to try to build it this week. [...] Do I feel I'm the right person to do it? [...] Well, I'm not going to do it myself, so I'm going to build the PowerPoint, vet it through my CCSs. I'm going to use a CRT, and them going to vet it to leadership, and then give that training. So, do I feel as though I'm the right person for it? As far as policy, yeah. Like as far as really getting into it? Probably not. Because even me reading the policy, it's hard. Like they really left -- they really didn't get in detail. It's literally one page, right? And it's an interim policy. So am I right to really get into depth? No. But to state the facts.</p>
<p>When you join, right, you're afraid to -- some people, I was -- afraid to speak out when people are wrong, because you're like, "Well, what can I say? I'm just a E-2." As I've gotten older, I've realized it doesn't really matter. Wrong is wrong. Right is right. You can speak out. You may catch some flak from it, but I'd rather catch flak from speaking out than just live with "I wish I would have said something." And I think, overall, the Navy at least appears to care more about, hey, if this guy isn't right mentally, or if he's not right outside the Navy, he's not going to be successful here. So they kind of go hand in hand. Like it used to be -- and it never made any sense to me when I used to hear it -- it used to be like ship, shipmate, self. And it was like I get what you're trying to convey, but if I put myself last, then the other things are going to -- they're not going to do well. And I think the Navy recently changed.</p>
<p>I've recognized with a lot of junior Sailors, or Sailors who've been in a little bit longer and haven't maybe reached a certain, they do feel like "I can't talk to my Chief. I don't trust Chiefs anymore," or "I don't trust my 1st class petty officers anymore," or "I don't trust my [...] junior officers. I don't trust my [unintelligible]." So there seems like sometimes like there might be a lack of trust that might be keeping some of them [...]. But in general, I've found it's very difficult to express, let's say, you've heard someone called you a racist or a sexist or homophobic [...]. There's this reservation to talk about it. And I don't know if it's that they're young. [...] I would hope that either a junior Sailor or an officer or anybody would feel confident one-on-one with their management. Like a Chief is kind of like a management, right? Where they could close the door and have those conversations. That a person who is in leadership would be open to criticism or open to kind of, look, this is whatever you say here will not affect your career. It will not affect my opinion of you. It won't affect any of these things. I'm here to give you good advice about how to do your job better. Please tell me your concerns, or please has there been any be it racist, homophobic. Do you feel a part of this team that we're working at?</p>
<p>At the time, the people that I worked for, none of them looked like me, so it was kind of hard to get my point across without sounding angry or anything, so I kind of just let it go.</p>
<p>The challenge is mandatory trainings are an additional stress to put on the command officer, of course. They care about material readiness, and in particular in the Navy, that's probably more important than personnel, realistically, based on my experience as a chaplain. So we are the ones who usually push and advocate for taking care of the people and making sure they're ready. So I could just see that being like the extremist training, like a check in the box. So that's a heavy question: Who should do it? Of course, realistically, it should be people who believe in it and care about it. You know, how do we find those people? I don't know. Of course, if it was placed on me, I would do it with a passion because I care about it. [Laughs] If the CO has to do it, but secretly he's a bigot, then he checked the box, but...</p>
<p>Feel like topics that I've personally been through, like race-wise, I could talk on. But anything else, I wouldn't want to talk on it because I feel like I don't understand both sides fully. I can understand both sides fully and where they come from, but I guess I feel like it would be best if I pointed them to like another person who could give them more information better than I could.</p>
<p>Need to know that it's safe to tell someone else, like, "Hey, I don't feel comfortable with this" or, you know, "This person said this. How do I go about it?" But a lot of that times you can't really teach that because that just comes with the rapport that the chain of command has with their Sailors. If the sailors don't trust their chain of command, they're not going to tell them shit.</p>
<p>I think it is a little more hush-hush in the Navy, how it's structured and how you -- I mean you kind of just shut your mouth and do your job, at least the junior sailors feel that way. Many of them do. And we say, hey, you should speak out. You should talk. You should. But at the same time, it's kind of a very obedient structure, and you need order and discipline. And I think when you're a young sailor and maybe worried about your career. [...] I have to convince them, many of them, that this really is a confidential conversation. One reason chaplains exist is so you can have a sounding board, because probably there have been issues like this in the past, and they're just shutting their mouth in their job.</p>

<p>And then next thing you know, they're really pissed off, they're not showing up to work, or they're angry, or they're just dealing with it by themselves. But I would also say I've never seen more funding in a -- so you have a chaplain that they pay for. You got the Military & Family Life counselors you pay for. There are opportunities to keep most things private and not go to maybe their own Chiefs or their department heads or things like that. So I try to convince them on that. Like, look, we got a lot of help, a lot of confidential help. And if you don't feel comfortable, here are some ideas for you to maybe approach a 1st class petty officer, go up the chain of command.</p>
<p>They want us to talk to that person first and tell them how it make us feel. And if that person just like throw it to the side, then you go to your 2nd classes. And then if the 2nd classes can't do nothing or the 2nd classes refer you 1st class, then you talk to them. And if it's a problem, you sit down with the LPO, the LCPO and your division officer, and then you all talk about it. And then, if the problem isn't solved, I guess take it up higher.</p>
<p>I had a Sailor that had a spouse that was abusing her physically. And she was afraid to call the cops because he was African-American, and she was Hispanic. I mean these Sailors are almost like your kids. And so I'm like frustrated because she's physically abused, but she doesn't want to call the cops. I was like, "Bu what about your daughter? She's having to see her mom --?" And she's like, "Oh, are you calling me a bad mom?" And I was like, "All done." And so I immediately felt that, ooh, I am not qualified to have this conversation with you. Please go see -- can we set you up with a family counselor? And so it really made me like, ooh, that was -- I was like, "How do I approach it?" I was very cognizant. I mean it was in the thralls of the George Floyd thing, and so, of course, I could understand and I was trying to be as careful to not say that her concern wasn't valid, but I was like, hmm, you have to think about your daughter. And she's like, "Are you calling me a bad mom?" And it was like, ooh, no. Okay, you know what? Can you get some counseling by somebody that is qualified? And so it's those moments where you're like you think you're trying to do the right thing and be like, okay, let's look at this in another manner, and it still backfired on me even though I was thinking, okay, I know we're in the middle of a very sensitive situation. You have a biracial daughter. You have an African American husband. You're afraid for his life, but he's beating on you. How do I, as a leader, advise -- and, again, White male - how do I advise you? And then it came across as -- you know, she took it as I was calling her a bad mom for not wanting to put the daughter's life ahead of her. So it was just like, ooh, how do I go from there? Like what do I do? [...] I just asked her to please go get counseling.</p>
<p>I think compassion is a really big thing [...] A lot of them are not very understanding of, hey, this person -- just in my case -- like this person has never been to a ship before. This person's never experienced this before, so it's probably going to take him a second to get to the same speed as us. [...] Definitely, my chain of command has been great here, specifically. They've been very much having open conversations with me about what I'm comfortable with and what I'm not. But I think more on the peers' level, but my same rank, I think they're not as understanding or not as willing to put in the time to [unintelligible] to get me up to there.</p>
<p>Because the leaders, they are leaders, so they do have to be separate. You know, they have to have that little -- like they can't be friends with the Sailors. But we have to have an understanding that if there's any topic that you want to talk about, that you're concerned about, we have an open-door policy;</p>
<p>I know some people that'd be like, "Oh, well, I don't trust khaki. I don't think I could go to them and talk about it. They don't understand what I'm going through."</p>
<p>I have a supervisor. He's also in a same-sex like relationship. So he's like my direct supervisor, so it's easy for me to talk to him, not necessarily like other supervisors that are in the same rank as him. But for me it's been a positive experience on board the ship that I'm able to talk to somebody who's kind of going through the same thing that I'm going through. That's something positive about it.</p>
<p>She's in the Air Department, and she has a Chief in the Air Department, who for some reason would belittle her, berate her, and kind of pick on her, and then kind of make sexual remarks at her at the same time. So it was kind of very back and forth, back and forth. And then, eventually, over time it -- for some reason, he ended up slapping her in front of everyone. [...] And she was devastated. She went to a whole bunch of different people, and she was trying to see what she could do to get this Chief in trouble. And the answer that she got: "That's the Navy for you." [...] Absolutely [nothing happened]. Absolutely not. And I wholeheartedly believe that it is because she is a Black woman and he is a White Chief. She has always -- for some reason, she's gotten the stigma of the angry Black woman. And she's sweet, sweet as hell. [...] Nobody had the courage to say anything. So it was kind of just me alone with a sea of people behind me not doing anything. [...] it's unacceptable that someone who she's supposed to look up to as a role model in her department is putting their hands on her. And it is unacceptable that his peers and her peers are doing nothing about it, that it's just letting it fall to the wayside.</p>

Participant recommendations

<p>So if you want people to bring up uncomfortable subjects, throw yourself out there and be vulnerable. You show them that you are no -- that you're not above or below them. You're right there with them. You make bad decisions just like they do.</p>
<p>Oftentimes I feel like inclusionary training, however it is, actually works in a divisive way. And I don't feel -- and I'll give you an example. I don't feel that it's all that effective, and I do feel like, more often than not, it falls on deaf ears because it comes through ineffective means. If you tell me to get inclusionary training through that, it's a waste of time. [...]Like, "And let me click through this thing because I got five things that are piling up behind me. I got my Chief breathing down my neck." You know what I mean? It's like there's no -- what is the --? Yeah, so I would say that: so, like the way it's delivered, right? And like not everyone can deliver things the way it's intended to be delivered. [...]That's going to fall on deaf ears. So just saying, hey, we've provided this blanket statement of training to everybody and why are we still having these problems, well, that's what happens when you put people under pressure.</p>
<p>Well, I guess the way the Navy's doing it now is that it starts early because -- so people grow up different places and have different views and different religious backgrounds and everything, so then, as you get older, those things are going to stick with you more. So it's really, I think, up to the command to know their leadership and pick the people that they know that know how to stay within that professional thing.</p>
<p>Ready just means, for me, like knowing where I can refer them to if they have more questions than I'd be able to answer. I will answer as much as I can based on the knowledge that I have, but if I'm unable to answer anything, as long as I know where I can send them to find those answers, that means that I'm prepared.</p>
<p>[Makeup of the triad] It was actually very diverse. We had a Caucasian captain. We had a XO who was of Latino descent. The CMC himself was African American. So, to me, I was very proud to see diversity in that regards. One of the things that the triad always told was that "our door is open. Please come and let us know if you feel any way that you've been discriminated against, if any way you feel like somebody said something. Even if it was in a joking manner, please bring it up."</p>
<p>My last command, we had diversity gathering, where people came, you know, told their stories and stuff like that. Which I mean the outcome was pretty good. You know, everyone saw everyone differently, and everything was there's different races, different backgrounds, different political views, and everyone was stating their own opinions. And then, people who didn't like each other at first because of they saw things differently, now they understand where people are coming from.</p>
<p>So, it was kind of like a one-shoe-fits-all situation, and it's why it kind of seemed like, with engineering and weps and repair and all that, it seems like a one-shoe-fits-all. If you can't fit into the shoe, then you're just not really worth the time. You're not going to get really promoted. You're not really going to do this. We're not going to really help you with the [unintelligible]. They kind of get left on their own a lot more.</p>
<p>From 2015 to '18, I worked with the SEALs. And the one thing I noticed about those group of men was they're actually very complimentary of each other. And coming from a DEG Chiefs Mess, and now even being in this Chiefs Mess where I feel loved -- and I did in the last one, too -- but it's very, very different. And here you have these alpha males and whatnot, and they can compliment each other? It's like, to me, it showed like there was a side of their spirit that was really -- I think it really drove them together, and it -- because when they drove them together, they could lift up even more, if that made sense.</p>
<p>If you want to fulfill the Navy's interests, I would argue that you got to work on that individual interest, because they will perform so much better with whatever the Navy wants if you give them good philosophy, good policy, if you admit to them certain things that may not make sense and you're like, "Yeah, this is going to suck. And it sucks for me, too."</p>
<p>I think the biggest issue when it comes to small events is the rumor mill. [...] just dispelling misconceptions, I guess you could say, kind of helps out a bit. And I think that if the Navy spent a bit more time focusing on the misconceptions and explaining why those misconceptions are just that -- misconceptions -- that might help with a lot of the dissenters and, in particular, the people that the dissenters are influencing, because some of the people they're influencing aren't necessarily conspiracy theorist folk, but they might not have strong critical thinking skills, and so they're just going to believe that person because it kind of falls back again to that cult leader mentality. It's a charismatic person expressing these beliefs, and without those contrasting beliefs, they're going to fall for it.</p>
<p>[Sexual harassment] She reported it. She felt uncomfortable, and they made her -- they twisted it around where it was her fault. And now this Sailor feels that she can't report anything because she got blamed for it, because of her stature or because of her rank or whatever she should have known better, and she's gone out of the command now because why be in that environment when she can't trust her leadership to do the right thing, and I lost a Sailor.</p>

<p>[A leader I admire to this day] She was very transparent, very transparent, and aligned everything, tied everything in with the Navy core values and the mission and everything. Painted the picture on why it was so important, why we needed to get this done.</p>
<p>I think that the Navy should take time out and just say, hey, what we're doing for this whole week, we're focusing on diversity. And what we're going to do with these diversity, we're going to have certain classes set up. If you want to know more on this information, you go to that class. If you want to know more about this situation, you go to that class. Now what you're seeing is you're seeing who shows up. Now what you're seeing -- it's sort of like -- and it can be sort of like a seminar to some extent. I mean they had us going to different seminars when we came into the Navy. I recall in boot camp, we sat in a classroom throughout the whole entire time. Nope, that was A School. We had boot camp and A School of just sitting in classes, and we were just having conversations about things that affected us. Why stop when you get into Big Navy? Mission readiness is mission readiness.</p>
<p>It's so difficult because everyone is so different. And I don't think it's like a switch, right? I think it's something that has to start small and gradually change, so it has to start. The conversations, the openness has to start from boot camp or maybe slightly after, so when these Sailors are now the senior guys, they are creating this open environment. Some of us, I think, are too far gone and we're not changing our stance. So I definitely think it has to be something that's earlier. It's, hey, man, you can talk about issues that are bothering you and you're not going to get in trouble. It has to be respectful. It has to be, you know, this kind of way. Maybe lay some ground rules, but it has to start early. So this is the environment that they are in and they foster this environment later on when they're senior. Because a lot of the ways now is they didn't do this back in the day. This is not how it was done back in the day. And they want us now, the younger generation, to let's just keep it that way. You don't talk politics at work. You don't talk money. You don't talk this. You don't talk that. But the younger generation [...] these kids now, they have too much information at their hands. You're not going to tell them what they can and cannot talk about. These kids now are being more empowered from a younger age. You used to see people older than us [...] who would stay in the job for years if they hated it, if it didn't pay them well, that didn't appreciate them. But it was a good-paying job, so you stay there until you retire. The younger generation, they're like, "Hey, my job doesn't appreciate me, I'm out. I'm moving on." And I think the Navy is slow to accommodate to this new breed of Sailors that -- you know the saying "know your worth"? These kids know their worth and they're not sticking around if they don't feel appreciated.</p>
<p>So, the first captain: when I got here, I felt like he was very open-minded for us to actually express ourselves. He would always give -- knowing how much we actually go through every single day, he'll give us breaks, which is really nice. He honestly let diversity committee do whatever they want when it comes to celebrating everybody, which is really nice. And he also did a whole lot for our community.</p>
<p>Like serious stuff like, oh, [a day off], like we wouldn't know about it till that day before or whatever. And we already had like other Sailors telling us like, "Hey, you know this base is [unintelligible] [nine to six]." We're like, "Shit, they haven't told us anything yet. What's going on?" And then, when we would bring it up to them, they're like, "Oh, yeah. So we still got to find out what's going on with that." Stuff like that. It was like, "Are they withholding information from us?"</p>
<p>What do we learn from your experience? What do we all as people, we as Navy, what do we learn? How do we bring this conversation about? Like how do we manage them to stay authentic, that as we learn something, we all get something good from that communication?</p> <p>I think we have to have them. We can't do a, you know, get the whole crew together, force the whole crew to be there, we do a 15-minute presentation on something, and then it doesn't -- and then it's like you don't necessarily put your all into it and it shows. And it shows as inauthentic. It shows as not genuine. The words are kind of hollow. So you're like, one, we're forced to be here. We got work to do. We got other things to do. I think it starts in the offices. It starts with people just having the conversations. We can't pretend. Yeah, because a lot of people will say, hey -- a lot of people shut those conversations down as soon as they start: "We can't have those conversations here." It's like, then no one's even -- everyone's going to stay on their side if we're never allowed to talk about this, or people are scared to talk about it.</p>

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