

RESONATING WITH A MORALITY FRAMEWORK

A New Direction for Training
Equal Opportunity Advisors



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Abstract

The mission of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) is transitioning from one of response and deterrence to one of prevention. A component of this effort is a shift from a focus on organizational climate to a focus on organizational culture. The aim of this report is to provide information that informs consideration of next steps in developing assessment tools for on-site commanders and for developing related training programs. This paper offers a conceptual distinction between organizational climate and organizational culture, discusses two values-based approaches for developing the tools (one approach involves assessing the organization's unique set of values, and the other involves assessing values that are common across societies), provides a list of currently available organizational culture surveys, and provides climate-related items that might be useful to augment the cultural assessments.

Resonating with a Morality Framework:

A New Direction for Training Equal Opportunity Advisors

Often cited in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, is that a primary goal is developing an environment in which fair human resource policies are advocated and socially underrepresented groups are welcomed and integrated (McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2008; Holmes et al., 2008). Mirroring society, the Department of Defense is composed of an array of individuals who come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Naturally, these differences create ripe conditions for division and conflict. As such, it has become increasingly necessary to increase the “level of awareness and knowledge of how culture and other aspects of one’s group identity are crucial to an informed professional understanding of human behavior in and outside of work and the interpersonal skills necessary to effectively work with and manage demographically diverse individuals, groups, and organizations” (Avery & Thomas, 2004, p. 382). Yet, both empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that training efforts in the areas of diversity and inclusion are rarely as impactful as desired (e.g., Pendry et al., 2007).

The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute’s (DEOMI) well-established training programs for Equal Opportunity Advisors (EOA), leaders, and other professionals have suffered from aged curricula and, recently, constraints due to the COVI-19 pandemic. Emerging trends and developments in society (e.g., political/social movements, increased extremism/radicalization, etc.) have created an unprecedented (in-DEOMI’s history) opportunity to revisit the training curricula. With the present paper, we offer a values-based approach to diversity training.

How DEOMI frames the training title, communication regarding the training, and the actual training can have a sizeable impact on the extent to which the training effectively

enhances intergroup and interpersonal relationships—or creates greater divisiveness and resentment toward the initiative (Holladay, Knight, Paige, & Quiñones, 2003). Whereas research in framing is well-established within the literature, few studies have examined the effects of framing on diversity training (see Holladay et al., 2003 for example). To our knowledge, none have examined the impact of framing within the moral values of participants.

Psychological Processes Underlying Individual Moral Values

In reviewing the anthropological literature, Haidt and Graham (2007) noted that there are moral values common across cultures. They explained that these values provide the foundations for individuals as they consider what is right and wrong. Their five-foundations theory of morality organizes morality into a taxonomy of five psychological processes, which they label as the five foundations of morality. These foundations represent both values and virtues. Haidt and Graham (2007) observed that individuals experience strong positive (negative) emotions when circumstances are consistent with the positive (negative) side of these virtues/values.

First is harm/care. Individuals who value harm/care are sensitive to harm toward others. Accordingly, they support actions that relieve or reduce harm and promote the well-being of others.

Second is fairness/reciprocity. Individuals who value fairness/reciprocity are sensitive to issues of equality, equity, and justice—including reciprocity and social justice.

Third is ingroup/loyalty. Individuals who value ingroup/loyalty focus on cooperation, trust, cohesion, and recognition among members within an ingroup—group above the individual. They also tend to have distrust and be cautious toward members of perceived outgroups.

Fourth is authority/respect. Individuals who value authority/respect focus on virtues of both subordinates (e.g., respect for authority and obedience) and authorities (e.g., protection and leadership).

Fifth is purity/sanctity. This moral foundation is based on disgust as an emotional reaction to originally biological contamination (i.e., feces, rot, and disease) and to socially derived contaminants (i.e., the inability to control carnal and base impulses, such as lust and greed). Individuals who value purity/sanctity focus on controlling self-centered desires.

Individuals develop morals over their lifespan and can be seen as an accumulation of social learning and self-learning processes that are judged and affirmed by the self and others through social interactions and society at broad (Sawyer, 2002; Bandura, 2012). Morals are social conventions that provide individuals with a standardized framework on how to evaluate persons, situations, and actions made by the self and others (Haidt, 2012).

Differences in Morality and the Political Divide

Research around the five moral foundations and framing is not new and has been studied within political psychology (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt, 2007; Feinberg & Willer, 2019; Bloemraad et al., 2016). This stream of research has illustrated that liberals and conservatives hold the dissimilar priorities of the five moral foundations. Haidt (2007) has shown that liberals tend to rely on the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations, whereas conservatives tend to rely on the five foundations equally. This is not to say that more liberal individuals do not value the other three foundations; rather, harm/care and fairness/reciprocity are most critical for them in evaluating moral relevance.

While liberals and conservatives may often disagree on what is and what is not morally acceptable, evidence suggests this is in part due to how the message is framed. Policy, such as

immigration and environment, which is focused on the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations tend to be supported by liberals, whereas conservatives may apply the other three foundations to repudiate the policy (Haidt, 2007; Voelkel & Feinberg, 2018). However, when one frames the policy within not only the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundation, but also in the foundations valued by conservatives, they are more likely to endorse these policies (Koleva & Ditto, 2012; Feinberg & Willer, 2019). It should, therefore, be of no surprise that individuals may evaluate training initiatives more positively or negatively based on how well it aligns with their moral reasoning. This may be the case even when the broader goal of the training initiative may align with all members of a social group. Training efforts that resonate primarily among members of one subgroup (e.g., conservatives or progressives) rather than the whole population are likely to experience limited success, if not cause damage.

Framing Diversity Initiatives

Consider a narrative that suggests for a diversity initiative that an in-group systematically wronged an out-group. While this may have appeal to some training attendees, this may alienate those who belong to the in-group, if not create a backlash (Tajfel & Turner, 1967; Holladay et al., 2003). Moreover, members of other out-groups (e.g., women, LGBTQ, etc.) may feel further devalued by the organization and the training initiative, as it precludes their realities as out-group members. Moreover, the members of the out-group that this type of training purports to help are likely to already know that these practices occur and may feel tokenized. As seen, while the intentions of practitioners for this type of training is admirable, they may not move the needle in a positive direction. This is particularly a problem for those in the training whose behavior would benefit the most.

Conversely, we have argued that a training initiative defined broadly and that aligns with broad morals held by the target audience and perhaps more importantly the group of individuals whose behaviors we wish to influence may be more likely to be particularly effective (Maneethai & Witt, 2021). A training initiative that appeals to organizational members broadly would not only apply to a singular in-group and their treatment of an out-group, with a perception among other participants that they are auxiliary. Rather, this training would value all participants—along with their multitude of identities. From an organizational standpoint, this is critical in developing and fostering interpersonal relationships, communication networks, and sharing the multitude of ideas available in a workforce. How can DEOMI accomplish this?

Moral reframing (Feinberg & Willer, 2013; 2019) is not a new idea and has been used in political message framing. In their work, Feinberg and Willer have been able to show that messaging that aligned with individual values influence attitudes toward political messaging—in their case, environmental conservation. Messaging was either in terms of harm/care intended to appeal to progressive values or purity/sanctity intended to appeal to conservative values. In Feinberg and Willer's work, they provided harm/care participants messaging and images that discussed the harm and destruction humans are causing the environment. They showed purity/sanctity participants messaging and images that focused on pollution and dirtiness of the environment, emphasizing the need for humans to purify the land. Both conservative and progressive participants showed higher levels of pro-environmental attitudes and support for policy when shown the purity/sanctity condition.

Diversity training initiatives may be facing a similar issue in moral framing (Maneethai & Witt, 2021). Those who endorse diversity and inclusion in the workplace likely hold strong fairness and harm/care values. While this messaging may have a positive impact on those who

hold these values, this may not invoke the same values in others. While most, if not all, individuals are likely to broadly hold harm/care and fairness/reciprocity virtues, which are important levers in attitude and behavior formation, individuals vary regarding ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity sanctity. Typically, the Department of Defense (DoD) presents diversity and inclusion issues through the lenses of fairness/reciprocity and harm/care values. Hence, while the moral messaging and framing of training initiatives may readily align with harm/care and fairness/reciprocity values, they may miss the mark or create dissonance for those who also value ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and/or purity/sanctity to an equal or higher degree, which may influence thoughts, actions, and affect.

Practical Applications of Moral Reframing

When framed within a moral framework that includes all five of the moral foundations and drawing on the diversity and inclusion, organizational training, and moral psychology literatures, we propose that how we frame issues of diversity and inclusion in training initiatives may be particularly more effective in enhancing mission readiness by promoting fairness, professionalism, and positive interpersonal relationships. In more precise terms, messaging and framing the training initiative in terms of not only the moral dimensions of fairness/reciprocity and harm/care, but also ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity.

As mentioned previously, ingroup/loyalty refers to the value placed on ingroup members and those who sacrifice for the ingroup while disliking or despising those who betray or harm the ingroup (Haidt & Graham, 2007). At a superficial level, this may appear at odds with diversity and inclusion, which suggests that members should celebrate and include out-groups and share resources with others outside of the group. However, by reframing diversity and inclusion and appealing to ingroup/loyalty, the training initiative may have greater success. Tajfel and Turner's

(1979) theory on social identity may be particularly useful in understanding the psychological processes of social belongingness and how the DoD can frame training initiatives to underscore the ingroup/loyalty values personnel may hold (see also Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). Specifically, training initiatives that closely align with upholding an organizational identity (e.g., the DoD), appealing to the perception that all members of an organization are ingroup members, may be of particular importance. This also aligns well with Shore and colleagues' (2011) inclusion framework that highlights the importance of instilling a sense of belonging and feelings of being an insider of the organization.

Reframing training initiatives in terms of authority/respect towards organizational rules and norms may be particularly effective in aligning to conservative values. Those who value authority/respect are strongly concerned with social hierarchies, obedience to rules and regulations prescribed by legitimate authority, and respect towards traditions (Feinberg & Willer, 2019; Haidt & Graham, 2007). In the case of training towards higher levels of professionalism and positive interpersonal relationships by Individuals who value authority/respect may further adopt leadership that communicate and clearly convey a message of tolerable and non-tolerable behavior in the workplace.

Finally, reframing diversity and inclusion initiatives through the lens of purity/sanctity may also have a positive impact in persuading personnel who hold these values. Purity/sanctity is based on the emotion of disgust and is often associated with the contaminants of the body that can cause bodily harm or illness (e.g., carcasses, mosquitos, rotten food; Haidt & Graham, 2007). However, humans have also extended this into the domain of social interactions (e.g., obesity, disability, and mixed marriage) based on social constructs of what is pure and sacred (Horberg et al., 2009; Koleva & Ditto, 2012). Accordingly, individuals who value purity/sanctity avoid

actions that would lead to self-pollution, such as profane, carnal, filthy, or animal-like behaviors, thoughts, and actions (Horberg et al., 2009; Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Indeed, research has empirically shown, negative perceptions of immigration to be related to purity/sanctity values, with scholars suggesting that beliefs that immigrants bring with them dangerous contaminants from abroad (e.g., gangs, disease, communism/socialism; Koleva & Ditto, 2012), invoke negative emotions and subsequently reduced support for immigration. Reframing training initiatives from the perspective of purity/sanctity may at first glance appear to be a challenge. Bloemraad and colleagues (2016) examined whether the use of rights, economic, or family frames of immigration would be effective in the persuasion of positive endorsement of immigration policy in California. Results of their study indicated that the family frame, or more specifically maintaining family bonds and preventing separation of the family unit, increased endorsement of policy that supports permanent residency and paths to citizenship.

Therefore, while difficult, framing training initiatives within the purity/sanctity value system may be effective in promoting professional and interpersonal relationships. This can be heightened by extending purity of self-behaviors that should avoid profane or carnal behavior, when building interpersonal relationships and encouraging professional behavior. This includes suggestions that interpersonal conflict should avoid impulsive actions (carnal reactions), that individuals should consider the perspectives and experiences of others, rather than follow raw emotions, and finally appeal to neighborly/friendly beliefs towards peers and other organizational members (i.e., like the family reframe).

Reframing Through the Five Moral Foundations

In Figure 1, we visually present an example of how the DoD can leverage the five moral foundations to improve the overall messaging of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. As seen

in the figure, the primary outcomes are improved professionalism and interpersonal relationships. Inherent in these outcomes are the values of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, thus requiring minimal reframing (Koleva & Ditto, 2012). When personnel act professionally and have positive interpersonal relationships, they act in ways that prevent or reduce harm towards others and support policies, practices, and actions that reduce or prevent harm towards others. Also embedded is fairness/reciprocity in both professionalism and interpersonal relationships. Specifically, individuals who work together and form a working relationship expect fair treatment, equal distribution of work, and accountability. Moreover, when an individual affords a favor or completes work, they expect some level of reciprocity, whether it be in the form of gratitude, equal reciprocation, or compensation. Therefore, while it remains important to maintain the training initiative within harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, much of the work in developing training around diversity, equity, and inclusion will be around ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity.

Appealing to morals around ingroup/loyalty requires reframing around common conceptions of what constitutes members of the ingroup. This involves bringing to fore a higher level of organizational identity and membership, as opposed to organizational silos, gender groups, racial groups, etc. When members achieve higher-order organizational identity, we can expect greater levels of professionalism and interpersonal relationships as members are more willing to bridge the gap and strive for higher-order goals of the group. Additionally, developing an organizational identity reduces the common us-versus-them mentality that often plagues siloed organizations. Reframing diversity, equity, and inclusion training initiatives through the authority/respect moral foundation suggests that to appeal to those who value authority/respect, leadership and policies should be clear and followed. Thus, including and highlighting support

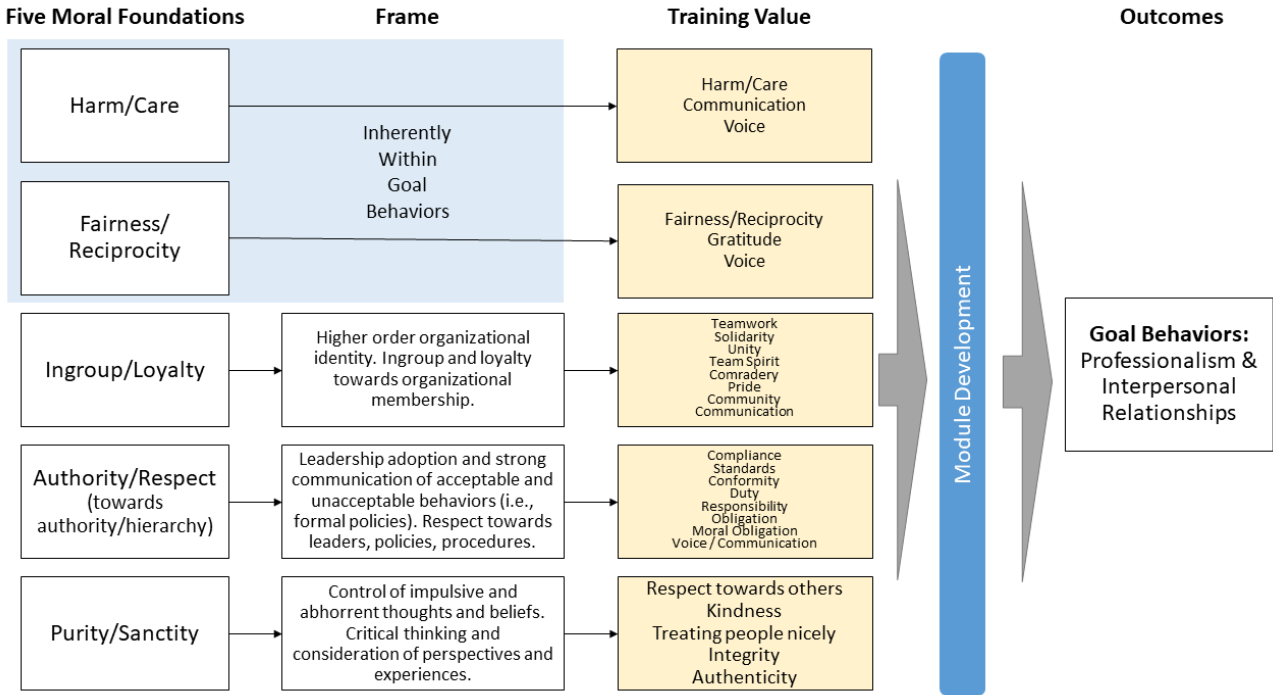
from leadership; providing declarative knowledge around diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and practices appeals to those who value authority and respect as the message not only comes from authority figures supporting this initiative; but also include codified rules for members to follow. Finally, using the lens of the purity/sanctity moral foundation emphasizes the need to behave in ways that are thoughtful and respectful, rather than impulsively and rude. Thus, as a standard of behavior for those who value purity/sanctity, elevating and highlighting that falling to carnal and base behaviors and emotions, such as anger and lust are socially unacceptable and repulsive behaviors, whereas thinking through and overcoming problems and emotions are more socially acceptable.

Conclusion

Reframing diversity, equity, and inclusion training within a moral framework may be an effective way to resonate with a broader audience and increase its overall effectiveness. Trainees are composed of various individuals from different backgrounds and values. By framing and relying on obvious moral values in diversity, equity, and inclusion training, such as harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, we may not fully appeal to a substantial portion of the population because they prioritize the five values somewhat equally. Hence, we encourage curricula developers to design diversity, equity, and inclusion training through a value framework perspective.

Figure 1

Reframing Training within a Moral Foundations Framework



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