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| Comprehensive knowledge assignments | |
| Reflections on program student learning outcomes | |
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| Comprehensive knowledge |
| A journey of self-reflection and application |
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| The purpose of the Comprehensive Knowledge Assignments is intended to educate students so that they graduate from the program with the ability to successfully:   1. Evaluate core concepts of organizational leadership theories, models, and approaches. (Leadership Theories, Approaches, and Models) 2. Discuss behaviors of effective leaders. (Leader Behaviors) 3. Explain personal and organizational ethics. (Personal & Organizational Ethics) 4. Determine the role of diversity and culture on the leadership process. (Diversity & Leadership) |

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| |  | | --- | | Application | | SLO 1: Application of different organizational leadership theories, models, or approaches | |

The application of different organizational leadership theories, models and approaches in my current workplace have been both beneficial and challenging, depending on the specific task my team is assigned with accomplishing. It should be mentioned that my workplace changed significantly from the start of my program in Spring 2023. Two years ago, my workplace consisted of being assigned to an elite special operations Army aviation unit. The demographics of service members in this unit varied greatly. Experience levels fluctuated between junior Soldiers with less than twenty-four months of service, most of which had mainly been spent in initial training environments, all the way up to senior leaders with decades worth of experience, thousands of flight hours and a phenomenal understanding of leadership in the Army. Regardless the experience level, the beauty of this unit is that the mission was “no fail” and there was minimal micromanaging from senior leaders. The trust in others to do their job made it easy to be less involved in picking up the pieces where others fell short and allowed members to focus on executing their job requirements to their fullest extent. In fact, members of this unit were consistently being assessed and if they were unable to accomplish their tasks, they were swiftly reassigned to another organization. During my time with this unit, the opportunity presented itself to apply for an Army program that allowed me to stay on Active-Duty status, while simultaneously completing my graduate degree, participating in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) classes and being a full-time college student. This program would become my new workplace for no more than twenty-one months. The change in pace, peer relations and expectations and required mission set significantly changed the leadership approaches I had to exercise to be successful while enrolled in the ROTC program.

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Early into my Organizational Leadership program, one course required me to take three different assessments on leader behaviors and styles, in order to better identify areas that I could work on to become a more effective leader. These three assessments included the Student Leadership Practice Inventory ® (SLPI), the CliftonStrengths assessment and the Jung Typology assessment. These assessments measured various styles of approaches and applications that the test taker could then use to better align with effective practices found in *The Leadership Challenge* (6th Edition) by James Kouzes and Barry Posner. The idea behind Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership is that it sets a roadmap for developing effective behaviors in leaders, across individuals, teams and organizations (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 23). Prior to understanding the different leadership approaches, my initial SLPI assessment revealed that my top leadership behaviors were taking initiative, setting personal examples, challenging skills and abilities, praising people and following through on promises. Trailing closely behind were my five bottom leadership behaviors that needed improvement; fostering cooperative relationships, talking about how the future could be better, supporting others’ decisions, providing leadership opportunities for others and seeking feedback about the impact of actions. While at the time I didn’t think I could develop new ways to approach tasks from the perspective of the results of my leadership analysis, it wasn’t until I had started my new “career” as a full-time student within the WKU ROTC program that I found I could implement these improvements. Using the SLPI results, along with my top five CliftonStrengths results of context, restorative, input, responsibility and relator, I was able to fine tune my personal and professional approaches and see the results unfold in real time in my new role.

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A later course that was required by my program emphasized the study of leading organizations. This course introduced concepts that provided me with opportunities to apply personal leadership attributes to a larger group dynamic and addressed ways of operating organizations with effective results by focusing on four specific frames. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, authors of the book *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (7th Edition), explained how organizations can be improved by organizing intents and goals into four frames; the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 20). By gaining an understanding of how these frames better organized goals and outcomes within an organization, I was able to exert streamlined effort into appropriate matters within my organization. This new understanding of organization framing, coupled with my individual leadership assessments, ended up helping me significantly in my role as a cadet leader within the WKU ROTC program.

My approach in leading others in the ROTC program required a rather foreign approach than what I had used in my previous workplace. I had to understand that my new, college- aged peers were less experienced when it came to issues in life, in the military, and that they were not required to fall into order like junior Soldiers I had previously led in my prior unit. This posed a challenge because I was limited in imposing consequences if tasks were not accomplished. I found that a transformational leadership approach would be the best fit for leading while in the ROTC program because it allowed me to use my previous, real life military experience to reinstate the importance of meeting certain benchmarks required by ROTC program and later in the Army. In fact, *The Heart of Coaching: Using Transformational Coaching to Create a High-Performance Coaching Culture* (4th Edition), put emphasis on the Transformational Coaching Process. This process put forth useful guidelines that meshed extremely well with my personal leadership traits that were highlighted in my initial leadership course. By pairing my experience with the Transformational Coaching Process’ desires for leadership roles (coach, facilitator, servant, role model, visionary), I found fulfillment in leading others with less experience, as well witnessed a significant culture change in how others around me led (Crane & Patrick, 2017, p. 18). I quickly saw how my actions were emulated by others as fellow peers appeared to be inspired to re-create the emphasis I put on other’s achievements, peers were quicker to be proactive instead of reactive in completing taskings, and everyone was getting better at being humbled and okay with laughing at their mistakes. Once I had set the tone as a classmate who was willing to operate like a cadet within the same capacity of my peers, my decade and a half worth of experience appeared to have become more meaningful and respected by those in my “year group”. It started to surface that I had significantly influenced my peers’ development when it came to achieving results and remaining calm in emergent situations. Over the course of two semesters and by continually exercising this transformational leadership approach, I found that our program’s overall climate became more conducive to producing effective leaders within the ROTC program.

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Currently as Military Science Level IVs (MS4s), many of us are set to graduate and be commissioned as Army officers in less than fourteen weeks. As of the start of this semester, I was assigned by our Professor of Military Science (PMS) to be the Battalion Executive Officer (XO). In this role, I am the liaison between the cadets in our program and the cadre of the Military Science Department. While I was initially less than thrilled about this additional responsibility in ROTC, I found that my fourteen years of military experience has provided unwaivable influence and leverage in the process of onboarding freshman and sophomore cadets. I believe these specific students to be the most influential because they are not obligated to attend ROTC engagements outside of normal class hours, as ROTC for them is an elective. At the same time, these students have the potential to contract into the United States Army, and post-graduation, become Army Officers. The intent of involving the underclassmen with the senior cadets is to inspire them to become the next generation of military leaders. I have found that in my new role I gravitate towards teaching and participating in activities with these younger cadets. The level of influence that I have over them, compared to the older cadets seems to be more impactful and at times I find myself able to communicate with them easier as I see them as junior Soldiers, like “privates” in service. I have found that for a long time, the culture of our program revolved around the notion that cadets should just do something because they are told to do it, rather than being provided clear or creative guidance on why they should do something. I found that utilizing the concept of creativity in our organization resonates much better with the younger demographic. Using Daniel Levi’s *Group Dynamic for Teams* (5th Edition), I was able to adjust my desire for cadet success based on organizational environment and creativity. Levi’s book emphasizes the importance of creativity and how organizations seek innovation (Levi, 2017, p. 246). I exercised this approach by implementing different creative avenues throughout physical training, military lab training and end of semester events. While the problems that these creative solutions solved weren’t explicitly identified by cadre, peers or the ROTC program itself, the execution and success of changing the approach to different requirements in our program allowed for the entire cadet body to retain knowledge and achieve goals much more consistently.

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| |  | | --- | | Exemplifying | | SLO 2: Exemplifying effective leadership behaviors | |

Application of effective leadership behaviors is critical for success in any organization. While different assignments may require different types of leadership behaviors, knowing how and when to apply the appropriate approach can set individuals apart from being known as great leaders versus great leaders. According to Lynch (1993) “as the pace of change accelerates, the need for leadership becomes more critical. Those who continue to manage in the old ways will find their organizations in crisis” (p. 3). While this statement was mentioned nearly three decades ago, the meaning has not changed. More than ever, leaders must understand how to develop and apply effective behaviors within their given roles to maintain a productive organization. Over the last 13 years, I have had the immense pleasure of serving our great Nation, as Soldier in the United States Army. During my time I have experienced different levels of responsibility, varying from very little when I first enlisted in the service, to a larger scope of responsibility as a senior sergeant. In my current role, I am preparing for the conversion from senior noncommissioned officer to junior commissioned officer, where I will find myself back on the bottom of the totem pole. In this unique case, while I will have nearly a decade worth of experience compared to my peers, we will all possess the same authority level based on processes of the military ranking system.

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While this new position of leadership is uncharted territory, I am fully prepared to take this challenge head on. I am confident because I have a much better understanding of what my personal leadership traits are, as well as knowing how to best apply them to specific situations. I have discovered that I am inspired by the idea of transformational leadership. I desire to be more than just a boss or leader, I want to inspire and mentor others (Crane, 2017, p. 35). Most of my leadership behavior and assessments have collectively shown that I am an individual who is in tune with her surroundings, I am compassionate and empathetic to situations, I am adaptive and can understand unique problem-solving measures, and I have a creative vision. These traits have allowed me to remain flexible in situations where unknown challenges may arise and still complete the mission and maintain the motivation of the team. Effective leaders have clear visions and can think strategically to achieve long-term goals. They also communicate clearly and effectively, which can be supplemented with other behaviors such as empowering members of their team and delegating tasks. The most important effective leadership behavior is possessing emotional intelligence and empathy, which plays into successful decision-making and accountability skills. Individually, these skills are great ones to possess, but their collective application can significantly impact the tone and output of an organization.

Again and again, my Jung (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) personality type consistently identifies me as an ISFJ- introverted, sensing, feeling and judging. As an ISFJ, I prefer to remain in a more introverted, reserved status with a smaller, more intimate group. My sensing reflects that I prefer to focus on concreate details and practical information that is factual, versus wasting my efforts on speculation. My feeling results prioritize empathy and consideration for others, as well as making decisions based on personal values and the impact on people’s well-being. As an ISFJ, my judgement trait prefers organization and structure. I prefer having clear plans and schedules and work methodically to get the job done. ISFJs tend to be highly effective leaders because their personality traits align with the behaviors of effective leaders. Attention to detail lays out clear vision for the team. This outline prevents unnecessary work and effort on tasks that may not matter to the overall goal. Assigning roles to specific tasks also allows for clearer accountability to better organize the team, as well as allocation of resources. As a practical problem solver, I focus on practical solutions which are adept at addressing immediate needs and challenges. This approach has helped my team navigate complex situations effectively, while also empowering individuals and reassuring my teammates that I am aware of addressing their needs. ISFJs tend to be dedicated and dependable, which makes me a trustworthy leader. My commitment to my responsibilities and my team inspires confidence and loyalty in others. While I hope to inspire confidence and loyalty in my team, I am also hoping to empower those I serve. When members feel like their decisions matter and they step out of their comfort zone, we inadvertently give them the ability to become accountable for their decisions. While the decision may not always be correct, trusting in the process sparks innovation and creativity. It also reinforces the concept of trust among constituents in an organization (Crane, 2017, pp. 177-178).

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A few examples of different effective leadership behaviors come to mind when I think about my previous work within organizations. The example that stands out the most was my role during the retrograde of American forces from Afghanistan. In the Spring of 2021, 60 others and I were sent over on a quick, thirty-day rotation to Afghanistan. As the month came to an end, we had noticed that our leadership had become more elusive about the details of our return. In fact, we were extended for another thirty days without any reason. In June of 2021, word had finally made it down to our level that President Joe Biden had made the decision to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by August. This had always been the rumor since the start of the operation, but it actually appeared this this retrograde timeline was actually going to happen. As we were given orders to leave Afghanistan, we had received instruction on personnel movement, specialized equipment that would need to be sent back and the timeline it was required to be completed in. Making matters more complicated, we had limited logistics due to all efforts being shifted to getting all equipment and personnel back to the states. If special equipment was required, it would need to be provided from somewhere in the immediate area, even if that meant an unconventional means. My unit would leave the immediate area on 40 different chalks of C-17 military aircraft. Ironically, of all the individuals assigned with and attached to our unit, I was the lucky one to be tasked with this massive undertaking. While the reason I was selected was never identified, I knew that I had my work cut out for me. Through demonstration of effective leadership behaviors, I was able to task delegate and motivate others to see not only my vision, but our senior leaderships’ vision for our exodus from the Middle East. I quickly identified two points of contact for each C-17 chalk. These contacts would oversee personnel management and the load plans for equipment that would be returned on their assigned flight. This allowed for better organization and empowered the chalk leaders to organize timelines and movement specific to the needs of their aircraft and hit times. If I had taken on this task alone, especially given the circumstances of the expeditated movement of all military personnel, I would have surely missed critical benchmarks on our deadline. While each chalk leader was handling their aircraft accordingly, I was then able to be the liaison between my unit and our parent organization. This streamlined communication from the senior level, down to the most junior individual. Furthermore, as aircraft started leaving Afghanistan, I was able to follow up with independent chalk leaders and correct deficiencies as they came, versus speculate on things that “could go wrong.” Even as timelines shifted, my cooler head prevailed, and I was able to coordinate safe and reliable movement back to the states. As I boarded the final aircraft in the manifest, I was relieved to hear that other aircraft were starting to land stateside. Offloading personnel and equipment was well organized and outside of minor delays, stateside commanders were able to assume positive handover of their Soldiers and equipment without any loss. I give incredible credit to the Soldiers that I served with during that time. They were flexible, they quickly attempted to rectify any issues they faced, and they were rockstars when it came to communication. Because of this, I was able to couple my effective leadership behaviors with their willingness to complete a mission and oversee a successful retrograde of our unit from Afghanistan.

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| |  | | --- | | Personal ethics | | slo 3: personal ethics and their connection to leadership | |

Personal ethics are the guiding principles that an individual holds, commonly shaped by their values, beliefs, and experiences. These principles, such as integrity, honesty, fairness, and compassion, serve as a moral compass that directs behavior and decision-making in various situations. On the other hand, organizational ethics refer to the collective ethical standards and practices that govern the behavior of members within an organization. These ethics are often published through codes of conduct, policies, and cultural norms that align with the organization's mission and values. Organizational ethics promotes a cohesive and ethical work environment by ensuring that all members adhere to the same principles, fostering trust, accountability, and social responsibility (Gortner, 1991, p. 106). When personal and organizational ethics align, they create a strong foundation for ethical leadership, decision-making, and a positive organizational culture.

Personal ethics encompass a variety of principles, such as integrity, respect, responsibility, fairness, and compassion. These principles shape and develop our core values, which in turn become the foundation for successful organizations we associate with. They dictate how individuals and organizations will guide their actions. Personal ethics serve as navigational tools that help us better prepare for challenges and issues we may face while leading our organizations. Over the past decade, I have identified areas within my personal code of ethics that needed further development and found new approaches to inspire others to share organizational values, while also solidifying my shortcomings. Regardless of the situation, my reflection on demonstrating organizational ethics always aligns closely with my personal values. I take pride in promoting an organization and culture of integrity by leading by example and maintaining high moral standards in both my personal and professional life. I am even more proud to be part of a larger organization that emphasizes and supports my personal ethics. As a leader in the United States Army, it can be challenging to ensure mission accomplishment under strict guidelines, often making the easier path seem tempting. However, deeply embedded Army values help us make good choices under pressure. In a fast-paced culture, everyone feels pressure to be successful. This pressure may lead to the temptation of cutting corners, but I have discovered ways to buy myself time in decision making without compromising my values.

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The Army defines its organizational ethics using the acronym “LDRSHIP,” which stands for loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. LDRSHIP is engrained in Soldiers well before they step off the bus at their basic training location, many times as soon as they step into an Army’s recruiting office or while seeing a televised Army recruiting advertisement. When combined with my personal values of integrity, selflessness, honor, and grit, the organization I serve enables me to embody these principles in everyday life. With its diverse personnel pool, the Army leverages LDRSHIP to provide an ethical and moral framework guiding Soldiers in their daily actions and decisions. This framework parallels with Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. By modeling the way and leading by example I gain the trust of others in my organization by setting the standard I expect out of my peers (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). My personal ethics, such as integrity, selflessness, honor, and grit, are invaluable to the team and align seamlessly with the Army's values of LDRSHIP (loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage). By consistently demonstrating these values, I inspire trust and confidence among my team members. My commitment to integrity ensures that decisions are made transparently and fairly, fostering a culture of honesty and accountability. Selflessness encourages a collaborative environment where the team's success is prioritized over individual accolades. My sense of honor motivates others to uphold high standards and take pride in their work, while my grit drives perseverance and resilience in the face of challenges. Channeling my personal ethics alongside the Army values creates a supportive and ethical foundation that empowers the team to excel and achieve its goals, while maintaining the highest standards of conduct and patriotic service.

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Ethical dilemmas I have overcome in my workplace range from balancing mission objectives with the personal lives of my Soldiers, reporting accuracy in mission essential equipment, disciplinary actions and conflicting loyalties between Soldier’s career progression and unit leadership. By applying logical empathy, professionalism and both my personal and organization’s ethical values to these challenges, I have been able to make sound decisions that fared well for the individual, as well as the organization. In the circumstance where challenges were still faced even after ethical decision making was used, I had to ensure that dignity and fairness was applied to the specific circumstance. Regardless of the situation, I have always ensured that decisions I made would not violate mine, my Soldiers’ or the Army’s values. Anyone who has worked alongside me knows that I am a firm believer in supporting everyone’s successes, much in line with a quote from John C Maxwell’s book Ethics 101- *What Every Leader Needs to Know*, “ethics plus competence is a winning equation” (2005, p. 11).

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The alignment of personal ethics and organizational ethics is fundamental to fostering ethical leadership, sound decision-making, and a positive organizational culture. Personal ethics, shaped by values, beliefs, and experiences, serve as a moral compass that guides behavior and decisions. When personal principles, align with the formalized ethical standards and practices within an organization, it easily creates a cohesive and ethical work environment. The cooperation between personal and organizational ethics promotes trust, accountability, and social responsibility. Over time, by identifying areas for personal ethical growth and finding new ways to inspire shared organizational values, individuals can strengthen both their personal code of ethics and the ethical framework of their organization. As a leader in the United States Army, I am proud to embody and promote values that align with the Army's LDRSHIP principles. These values provide a clearly defined moral and ethical framework that guides Soldiers in their daily actions and decisions. By consistently demonstrating integrity, selflessness, honor, and grit, I inspire trust and confidence within my team, fostering a culture of honesty, accountability, and excellence.

Through overcoming ethical dilemmas and applying logical empathy and professionalism, I have ensured that my decisions uphold both my personal values and the Army's values. In doing so, I support the success of my team and contribute to the organization's mission, all while maintaining the highest standards of conduct and service. Ethics, coupled with competence, truly form the foundation of effective leadership and organizational success.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | Diversity and Inclusion | | SLO 4: Diversity and Inclusion and their connection to leadership | |

Over the last 30 days, the Department of Defense has significantly changed their diversity practices across the force. Some of these policies have put a stop to hosting cultural celebrations and retaining specific service members. While I am not at liberty to share my personal views on the specifics of this updated policy, due to potential violation of the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, I can say that the withdrawal of said practices is creating a rift across the force. What I can speak on are the practices of how diversity, equity and inclusion have strengthened the ranks of our organization. Diversity and inclusion have emerged as critical components in the evolution of military leadership models. The ability to effectively manage and harness the power of diverse teams is paramount to any organization’s success. My time in the military, as well with supplement from courses in the Organizational Leadership program, I have witnessed the significance of diversity and inclusion in leadership, the impact it has on work practices, and strategies to ensure inclusiveness across various dimensions such as age, culture, and ability levels.

At the heart of current, modern leadership lies the understanding that diversity and inclusion are not merely ethical priorities but strategic advantages. Leaders who champion these values foster an environment where varied perspectives are valued, leading to more innovative solutions, better decision-making, and enhanced member engagement. The military, while slower in implementing inclusion practices than other organizations, has emphasized the importance of strength in a variety of ways. The United States Army has opened all jobs to female service members, including combat roles, in a highly supported initiative signed into effect in January 2016. This opportunity paved way for female Soldiers who were already serving in sustainment roles, to exercise their leadership initiatives across the force, and in a more direct extent. While initial pushback was received by a society that had adapted to a mindset that female Soldiers were not physically capable to serve in these roles, as of 2024, nearly 5,100 female Soldiers are leading in a combat arms role across the Army (Beynon et al., 2024).

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This significant change highlights the importance of how diverse teams bring together a wide range of experiences and viewpoints, driving creativity and innovation. Leaders who embrace diversity are better equipped to navigate complex problems and identify unique opportunities. From the book, *Group Dynamics for Teams* says that “in research on project teams, teams with greater familiarity are better able to gain the benefits of diversity from team members” (Levi, 2017). Levis’ statement emphasizes the importance of varied employees within an organization. Diversity brings fresh ideas, new concepts and more flexibility to problem solving when dealing with a customer base that shares the same qualities. Inclusive workplaces where employees feel valued and respected see higher levels of engagement and lower turnover rates. Leaders who prioritize inclusion create a sense of belonging, which is crucial for employee satisfaction. During my time as a Soldier, I have felt both included and excluded in units that I have served in. From firsthand experience, I can wholeheartedly say that my work output increases when I feel like my skills and background are not held against me due to gender or other bias. Furthermore, I felt more comfortable about bringing issues to light when I wasn’t concerned with being outcasted due to my gender.

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Organizations known for their commitment to diversity and inclusion attract top talent and build stronger relationships with customers and partners. Inclusive leadership practices contribute to a positive organizational image. The United States Army has implemented practices to avoid diversity biases and promote the top, qualified candidates. Some of these practices include redacting any type of personal identifiers from evaluation reports during promotion reviews. Identifiers such as a DA Photo (Department of the Army Photo), names, pronouns and other information that would reveal anything outside of performance benchmarks has helped in selecting the most qualified leader for a promotion or selection board.

To effectively include different cultures, ages, and ability levels within the workplace, leaders can implement the following strategies: employing blind recruitment techniques to help minimize unconscious bias in the hiring process, establishing policies that cater to diverse needs, such as flexible working hours, religious accommodations, and accessible facilities and hosting regular training sessions aimed at enhancing cultural intelligence among staff members in order to create a more empathetic and understanding workplace. Changes that have helped Soldiers to continue to honorably serve while balancing parenthood are the Army directive changes to post-partum mothers, allowing them an additional 12 weeks of maternity leave combined with the six weeks of convalescent leave, a significant change from the previous six weeks of leave prior. This directive has also implemented the requirement for breastfeeding mothers to be given a clean and permanent lactation room at their unit. This directive is not just focused on mothers across the force, as it also allows fathers to receive three weeks of paternity leave, while giving time for adoptive parents to bond with their children. Embedding practices like these into the Army has allowed the organization to be more accommodating to those who are serving our Nation. Other practices that the Army has implemented are cultural awareness training for a specific area of operation, prior to a unit’s deployment or rotation to that location. This training educates leaders and Soldiers about the cultural norms of a region to ensure that as guests operating in a host nation, efforts can be focused on partnership.

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Despite controversies surrounding the withdrawal of certain practices, the enduring value of diverse perspectives remains clear. All service members should be living and abiding by the Army Values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage. By promoting these values, along with emphasis of utilizing the diversity of service members’ backgrounds, we can become a better equipped organization. Effective management of diverse teams fosters innovation, enhances decision-making, and promotes member engagement. Organizations that prioritize DEI attract top talent and build stronger relationships with stakeholders. Ultimately, embracing diversity and inclusion strengthens the military's ability to navigate complex challenges and drive organizational success, ensuring a more effective and resilient force.

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