

Beyond Rhetoric: Building a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion in the Irish Defence Forces.

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Issues of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) have received considerable attention in recent international debate relating to the values and organisation of armed forces. With reference to the Irish example this paper argues that, to better reflect the society which it represents, the Irish Defence Forces (DF) should ensure that Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) is embraced and that authentic D&I values are inculcated. Only by doing so can the DF move away from the traditional military construct and address organisational failings, identified by the recent Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces (2002), which described DF culture as masculine, gendered, and patriarchal.

This research, qualitative in nature, engaged with six participants - four internal to the organisation and two external - through the use of semi-structured interviews. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the data gathered from the internal participants provided context and insights into the DF's D&I journey, while the data from the external participants provided alternative perspectives and lessons which the DF should consider. Thematically, the research focused on areas such Exclusion and Inclusion; Representational Diversity; Invisible and Visible diversity; Employee Voice; Leadership; D&I challenges; and the role of D&I allies.

The findings show that D&I has become important to the DF, but the organisation's current diversity priority is primarily greater female representation with the ambition of achieving thirty-five per cent. The findings also highlight that greater understanding and awareness of D&I is required, particularly when it comes to distinguishing between both terms. Going forward, this research has proposed several recommendations which include the launch of a D&I awareness campaign, the rollout of the Voice of the Employee initiative, and the expansion of the Office of the Gender Equality and Diversity Advisor.

Many militaries have been on a journey, a cultural awakening which has prompted them to reconsider their traditional culture of hyper-masculinity (Greco & von Hlatky, 2020) and structure which has been described as being "*relatively closed and mechanically organised*" (Torgersen & Carlsten, 2019, p.138). Therefore, Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) has become an important aspect of this cultural awakening, including the Irish Defence Forces (DF).



In terms of its own journey, the DF, similar to many militaries, “*has traditionally been a very masculine, gendered organisation*” (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.94) and it is recognised that this masculine and gendered culture has detrimentally affected the organisation and runs contrary to academic research. Research highlights that gender diversity is important and can positively affect decision making, sustainability, and organisational performance (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022).

To provide context, it is important to review some key D&I policy documents pertaining to the DF. Over several decades, the DF has experienced transformative, or reformative, change and the organisation has been the subject of significant structural adjustment both in terms of numbers and organisational design. The most recent review occurred in 2022 through The Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces (CODF), the purpose of which was to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of the DF in light of a rapidly changing global security and defence landscape (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022). The CODF explored many issues, but close attention was also paid to organisational culture and the importance of building a culture that promotes D&I.

The introduction of D&I can be traced back to the White Paper on Defence 2015, which sets the initial ambition for the DF:

A diversity and inclusion strategy, building on the existing policies in relation to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and equality, will be developed to underpin a supportive and challenging workplace environment where individuality and diversity is respected by all (Department of Defence, 2015, p.79).

Moreover, the Department of Defence and Defence Forces Annual Report 2016 continued the theme stating that the priorities in relation to Gender, Equality and Diversity are centred on the areas of Equality of Opportunity, Interpersonal Relationships, and Ethos and Values (Department of Defence and Defence Forces, 2016). This report also points to the fact that a specific recruitment strategy for females was developed in 2016, as well as ensuring the delivery of “*diversity messages*” (Department of Defence and Defence Forces, 2016, p.40) to diversity centres throughout Ireland.

In 2016 the DF progressed its work on D&I through the development of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Statement and Action Plan (Defence Forces Ireland, 2016), the ambition of which was “*to ensure the Defence Forces is reflective of Irish society*” (p.3). In terms of the reports model of inclusivity, its key pillars were human resource policies, leadership commitment, ethos and values, training, communication, and being reflective of society.

Aim of the Article

The aim of this article is to examine D&I within the DF and to ascertain how the DF can foster an authentic D&I culture. Therefore, the following research questions will be explored:

Table 1: Research Questions

Research Question 1	To examine the exclusive/inclusive nature of the DF and to ascertain whether the DFs' D&I strategy is concentrated on representational diversity.
Research Question 2	To examine whether the DF is paying enough attention to invisible diversity, particularly with regard to team design, and if the DF culture facilitates Employee Voice.
Research Question 3	To examine DF leadership in the context of Irish society particularly with regard to masculine and feminine leadership styles.
Research Question 4	To examine the challenges the DF may face when inculcating a D&I culture and the role of D&I allies in this context.

Relevance to the Defence Forces

The CODF published report recognised some of the positive work undertaken by the DF to create a positive working culture, but so too did it perceive that *“there are elements of its culture that are a deterrent to the Defence Forces achieving its full potential”* (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.90). The CODF makes an important point suggesting that the current culture disadvantages and/or damages certain members such as women, junior officers, lower ranks, and specialists. Recognising the unique nature of culture in a military organisation such as the DF, the report also highlighted the lack of agency felt by its members particularly with regard to human resource matters, stating that such a *“culture can express itself as a strong sense on the part of members of not being appreciated or understood”* (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.91). In terms of the DFs' organisational values which are Respect, Loyalty, Selflessness, Physical courage, Moral courage, and Integrity (Defence Forces Ireland, 2023), the CODF states that while such values may be cherished by individual members, this is not necessarily the case or the lived experience of many of its serving members.

Specifically looking at diversity, the report recognises the work undertaken by the DF, highlighting the DFs' Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Statement and Action Plan which was launched in 2016, the external review of which was carried out in 2020, and the initiatives which the DF have sought to carry out in order to increase diversity throughout the ranks. It also recognised the establishment of the DF Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally network in 2016, and the participation of the DF in the annual Dublin Pride parade. However, despite such developments, the report points to several organisational failings particularly with regard to its treatment of women and lower ranks, stating (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.90):

There is evidently a culture across the Defence Forces which is masculine and has a limited appreciation of diversity of all kinds. There is a patriarchal approach that takes responsibility for lower ranks to the point of disabling them, and is resistant to females and so creates an uncomfortable place for them to work. This culture is grounded in long outdated social concepts, such as the male being the breadwinner in a family, a creation of male and female roles and linking salary to self-worth.

The CODF recognises that D&I is a component part of any human resource strategy, stating that the DF must be *“reflective of the diversity of Irish society and with appropriate participation at all ranks, including the most senior ranks”* (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.96). Ultimately, the report clearly highlights severe shortcomings within the DF in terms of its genuine appreciation for D&I and points to a radical overhaul of the culture within the organisation in terms of representation, inclusion, and employee voice. Looking forward, while the DFs’ 2016 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Statement and Action Plan’s central ambition is to be reflective of Irish society, the CODF report identifies this as a key area for the organisation to address and states: *“a more determined effort should be made by the Defence Forces to recruit a more diverse workforce, both permanent and reserve, uniformed and civilian. Diverse not only in gender and ethnicity, but also in socio-economic, educational and geographical background”* (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.97).

PART ONE. Literature Review.

Having set the contextual scene and outlined the objectives for conducting this research, this Part of the article will focus on key themes pertaining to Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), and in doing so, a framework for the subsequent discussion will be provided. Structurally, this Part will explore the origins of D&I in terms of organisational culture, examining why organisations prioritised movement from the concept of the exclusive club to one that is inclusive (Katz & Miller, 1996). This will be followed by a review of some of the key definitions, in an attempt to go beyond one’s assumed or traditional understanding of what D&I means. Having provided a theoretical structure, attention will turn to why D&I is important for organisational effectiveness, focusing on areas such as employee assimilation and operationalising D&I. A review of D&I in the military will follow, and this will focus on why a rigid structure such as the military needs to recognise the benefits of a diverse workforce when it comes to dealing with unforeseen and complex challenges. While the literature certainly points to the benefits of inculcating a culture that promotes D&I, it is also important to examine the challenges of building such a culture. Finally, some thought will be given to the role that bystanders and allies can play in creating a D&I culture.

Tracing the Roots of Diversity and Inclusion

D&I as terms and concepts can be traced back to the 1980s, however, prior to 1987, the literature on diversity was scarce (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). As the phrase diversity gained popularity in the 1980s, it essentially pointed to demographic changes in the workforce and work organisations, namely in the areas of race, sex, and ethnicity (Hays-Thomas, 2017). In terms of our understanding of the term diversity, Hays-Thomas (2017) makes a further contribution when positing that diversity can be considered through a broad and narrow lens, that is, narrow referring to physical characteristics, while broad accounts for other factors such as education levels, language, and value systems.

Hays-Thomas (2017), in her discussion on inclusion, states that early diversity work concentrated on what was termed representational diversity, that is, bringing those who were different than the current employees into an organisation, or the task of comparing majority and minority group effects (Chung, Dean, & Ehrhart, 2019). To enhance our understanding of inclusion, she further states that inclusion looked at the factors and conditions required to *“lead people of difference”* (Hays-Thomas, 2017, p.3) to become fully accepted and productive. A failure to champion organisational inclusion may lead to what can be described as the ‘outsider within’, which from an employee perspective can lead to stress,

premature resignation, and professional stagnation (Collins, 1986). Inclusion, therefore, can be viewed as the intersection where professional and personal identities meet in an organisational context, and it is at this intersection where experiences of minority members are shaped (Combs & Milosevic, 2015).

From an organisational perspective, Biggs (2017) credits Frederick A. Miller as being the first person to realise the importance of workplace D&I. Miller stated that diversity was not a political correctness issue, but rather a business imperative and organisations need to strive to leverage diverse groups of people by creating and sustaining an inclusive work culture (Katz & Miller, 1996). Miller further posited that organisations shifted their discourse from managing diversity to leveraging diversity such is its importance as a performance enhancer (Miller & Katz, 2002).

By 2010 there was a shift in terminology from diversity to inclusion (Oswick & Noon, 2014) and this was viewed as an important step. This shift progressed the focus of diversity issues, which accounts for employee characteristics, to inclusion characteristics, which takes into account organisational culture and climate where diversity is fostered and nurtured (Shalini & Sangwan, 2021). Consequently, workplace diversity, if approached in a manner that maximises inclusion and minimises resistance (Dass & Parker, 1999), can present organisations with the opportunity to nurture and unleash the human potential within their organisation (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008) as well as being an opportunity to create value and develop a competitive advantage (Dass & Parker, 1999).

An important concept to note is that of the Path Model (Katz & Miller, 1996), see figure 1, which illustrates a shift in organisational culture from one which espouses an 'exclusive club' culture to one which fully embraces inclusivity, that is, organisations commit themselves for continuous change and improvement and strive to optimise the results gained from the synergies of tapping into the distinct individual characteristics of a team or group.

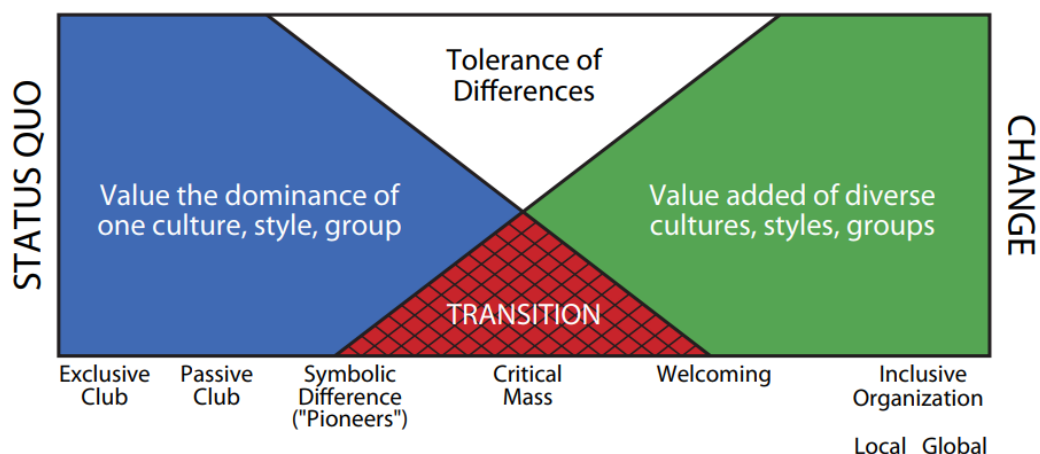


Figure 1: The Path Model (Katz & Miller, 1996, p.107)

Defining Diversity and Inclusion

Having explored the emergence of D&I as concepts, some focus on its framing definitions is important to provide further depth and breadth. As can be expected, there are numerous definitions and approaches to diversity and the term has evolved as society has developed

(Torgersen & Carlsten, 2019). As stated by Combs, Milosevic, and Bilimoria (2019), diversity is a term “*not always clear and definitively specified*” (p.278). Nevertheless, drawing on the work of Patrick and Kumar (2012, p.1), they conceptualise diversity as being:

A set of conscious practices that involve understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment; practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own; understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing; recognizing that personal, cultural, and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others; and building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

A key aspect of this comprehensive definition is the idea of *ways of knowing*, or put another way, the idea that a cognitively diverse group, based on experience and education, may be able to offer an alternative perspective which can benefit effectiveness. While much of the literature concentrates on diversity from a surface-level sense (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998), a study by the Norwegian Defence department also stressed the importance of invisible diversity, or deep-level diversity (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). It is within this grouping of invisible factors, with particular attention being paid to education, experiences and competence, that the topic of cognitive diversity can be explored, that is, differences in perspective or information processing style (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017). Reynolds and Lewis (2017) argue that the standard diversity areas of, inter alia, age, ethnicity and gender make little or no difference to a team’s ability to deal with complex problems, but rather, the cognitive diversity of the team was the key to their success. This point underscores the relevance of the finding of the CODF which states that the DF must endeavour to be “*diverse not only in gender and ethnicity, but also in socio-economic, educational and geographical background*” (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.97).

Torgersen and Carlsten (2019) capture the term diversity in a holistic way and in a manner that synthesises the points raised previously. They regard it as comprising human diversity (physical, personal preferences, and life experiences), cultural diversity (beliefs, values, and personal characteristics), and system diversity (organisational and management systems and structures). However, it could be argued, that given the complexity and wide ranging nature of diversity, be it visible or invisible, human, or cultural and system, endeavouring to give true meaning to the term diversity is a task loaded with inconsistencies and differences depending on a geographic region or country (Jonsen & Özbilgin, 2014).

When it comes to defining inclusion, Greco and von Hlatky (2020) state that inclusion is essentially “*meaningful participation in the organisation*” (p.194). Belanger (2018) further contributes to our understanding stating “*diversity is about counting numbers. Inclusion is about making numbers count*” (p.32). By means of a comparison and to offer an alternative perspective, turning to the field of education, Felder’s (2018) fictitious example of two classrooms captures the concept and meaning of inclusion. Felder (2018) posits that if inclusion is simply about children being under the same roof, then the task for educational policy is simply a matter of placement and representation. If, however, inclusion is viewed through the lens of active participation through a common framework, then inclusion is about belonging and shared experiences. This example underscores the point of meaningful

participation (Greco & von Hlatky, 2020) and making numbers count (Belanger, 2018). Ultimately, inclusion can be boiled down to the degree to which an employee feels that he or she is an esteemed member of the organisation/group by the degree through which their need for belongingness and uniqueness are sated (Shore et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, while the concepts of D&I are easy to define and understand separately, linking the two has proven problematic. If one views diversity simply as a matter of representation - notwithstanding the challenges of realising and recognising all of the component parts of diversity both visible and invisible - an organisation can put systems in place to ensure adequate representation. The challenge, therefore, would seem to be engaging all of the representative parts in a meaningful way and as Felder (2018) posits, *"there is much more ambiguity if one looks deeper into the values often associated with inclusion"* (p.2). Despite the perceived challenge of moving an organisation beyond diversity to inclusion, the goal is to be cognisant of the fact that inclusion brings out the best in terms of a team's intellect, culture and experiences through the diversity inherent in its members (Miller, 2021).

The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion for Organisational Effectiveness

Having developed our understanding of D&I through a critique of its definitions, it is now important to explore the requirement for a robust D&I culture in an organisation. Kim, Lee, and Kim (2015) state that policies and practices that support employee differences ultimately benefit the organisation in terms of its competitiveness and productivity. Moreover, Chung, Dean, and Ehrhart (2019) posit, human resource practices which are inclusive in nature, that is, they embrace uniqueness and belongingness, will enable an organisation to attract and retain employees in tandem with its ability to develop and sustain its business objectives, be they products or services. Similarly, Konrad (2003) puts forward four points which further highlight the need for D&I within an organisation, which could also be applied to the military context if viewed in a general way. First, the 'war for talent' requires a workforce diverse in nature. Second, a diverse workforce is better equipped to anticipate and understand diverse demands. Third, a diverse workforce will have a greater range of perspectives and as such will be innovative and creative in terms of tackling problems. And fourth, diversity management is simply the right thing to do. Therefore, constructing an inclusive culture through supportive relationships and networks is key to the creation of an environment that supports people being their true selves (Combs, Milosevic, & Bilimoria, 2019).

Echoing the principles of equal participation (United Nations General Assembly, 2023) and the lack of deference to power in hierarchical organisations (McLeod & Herrington, 2017), the topic of 'Employee Voice' is an important one to note as it is recognised as a key ingredient for any form of meaningful organisational commitment (Pfeffer, 1998). To that end, organisational commitment cannot be achieved if Collins' (1986) concept of the 'outsider within' is present in an organisation. Hirschman's (1970) definition of employee voice provides guidance on this topic and he states that it is *"any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs"* (p.30).

However, while the literature confirms the positive correlation which exists between organisational performance and an employee's willingness to be themselves in the workplace, to express their employee voice, so too does it highlight the concerns that an employee may have in doing so. As highlighted by Creed (2003) *"the natures of both voice and silence may vary across identity groups that have different legacies of oppression and*

avenues of resistance" (p.1507). Therefore, the willingness of an employee to freely use their employee voice may hinge on what they assume to be the associated risks. Such associated risks, from an employee's perspective, will ultimately depend on the cultural and environmental conditions of an organisation and whether such conditions address the ambiguity in terms of values which can be associated with inclusion (Felder, 2018).

However, when it comes to actually 'operationilising inclusion' in an organisation, Shore et. al., (2011) states that "*group members endeavour to feel valued for their unique attributes at the same time that they want to belong to the group*" (p.1273). So too did they identify employee assimilation as a key inclusion factor where minority individuals move from being an outsider to an insider, but only when they conform to the values of the wider network. Shore et. al., (2011) further posits that organisational structures which are strong and uniform in nature may actually impose pressures on the minority members to conceal or dilute the unique aspects of their identity to ensure conformity with the wider audience. Therefore, if one applies that logic to the Path Model (Katz & Miller, 1996), an organisation may only move from the 'exclusive club' to the 'inclusive club' if, in fact, their minority employees adopt the values and traits of its exclusive members, which is contrary to authentic D&I and is a negative result for those employees.

Beyond the Rhetoric: Diversity and Inclusion in the Military

The concept of the exclusive and inclusive club is an appropriate segue to the next section of this literature review which will examine D&I within the military context. The military culture is a distinct one and as stated by Greco and von Hlatky (2020), was traditionally regarded as being hyper-masculine and resisted "*non-conforming masculinities and femininities*" (p.190). Moreover, Klenke (2011) described the military ideation as being male dominant and rigidly structured, while Torgersen and Carlsten (2019) describe militaries as being "*relatively closed and mechanically organised*" (p.138). In terms of representation in militaries, it is fair to say that militaries comprise an array of individuals with differing identities, and military organisations are heavily influenced by the social context of the population from which it is drawn (Goldenberg, von Hlatky, & Hughes, 2022).

However, despite this fact, militaries have been guilty of resisting change and diversity among the ranks, and examples can be seen through the military's treatment of women and people from the LGBT community. An example of this is the former policy of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', adopted by the United States military which was a work-around policy enacted to allow members of society who were gay, lesbian, or bi-sexual to serve as long as their sexual identity remained hidden (Dietert & Dentice, 2015). A further example can be seen in the Irish Defence Forces and as identified in the Report on the Commission on the Defence Forces (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022), it remarked that the organisation was a "*very masculine, gendered organisation*" (p.94), further stating that "*a radical approach on female participation is now required*" (p.95).

Although modern international militaries have adapted to facilitate unbiased enlistment in terms of gender, it could be argued that this path towards greater representation of the sexes has been reluctant (Soeters and van der Meulen, 2007). A similar point can be made about the participation of the LGBT community as it was initially felt that such members may have a detrimental effect on unit cohesion, morale and discipline (Polchar et. al., 2014).

However, owing to globalisation and the rapidly evolving security landscape, Loughlin and Arnold (2007) posit that modern soldiers must now be equipped with the skills and characteristics to play the role of *“international social workers”* (p.148). Building on this point, Torgersen and Carlsten (2019) state that diversity is a *“necessity for handling unforeseen situations in a successful way”* (p. 128). Nevertheless, the task for military strategic leaders to build competence, increase efficiency, and optimise the potential of a workforce is a complex one, particularly when that workforce is expected to operate in complex and challenging environments (Torgersen & Carlsten, 2019). Moreover, one must at all times remain cognisant of the fact that military personnel operate in extremis situations and the outcomes can be *“characterised in terms of hurt or healthy, dead or alive”* (Kolditz & Brazil, 2005, p.6). Consequently, the issue of being able to handle challenging and unforeseen events is an important one, particularly in a military context when unforeseen challenges may result in extreme outcomes. Therefore, Torgersen and Carlsten (2019) highlight the need for *“difference and variety in competence”* (p.130) when it comes to dealing with both the complex and unforeseen, in the sense that *“something that occurs relatively unexpected and with relatively low probability or predictability for those who experience and must deal with it”* (Torgersen, 2015, p.30).

To exploit diversity potential as a competence, to promote greater adaptability within an organisation, and to be equipped to deal with the unforeseen, Torgersen and Carlsten (2019) posit that implementing the Norwegian relational phenomenon of ‘Samhandling’ is required (see figure 2). As a term Samhandling assists in working towards a common goal through communication, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, and its core tenets are trust, involvement, balance of power and role consciousness (Torgersen & Steiro, 2018).

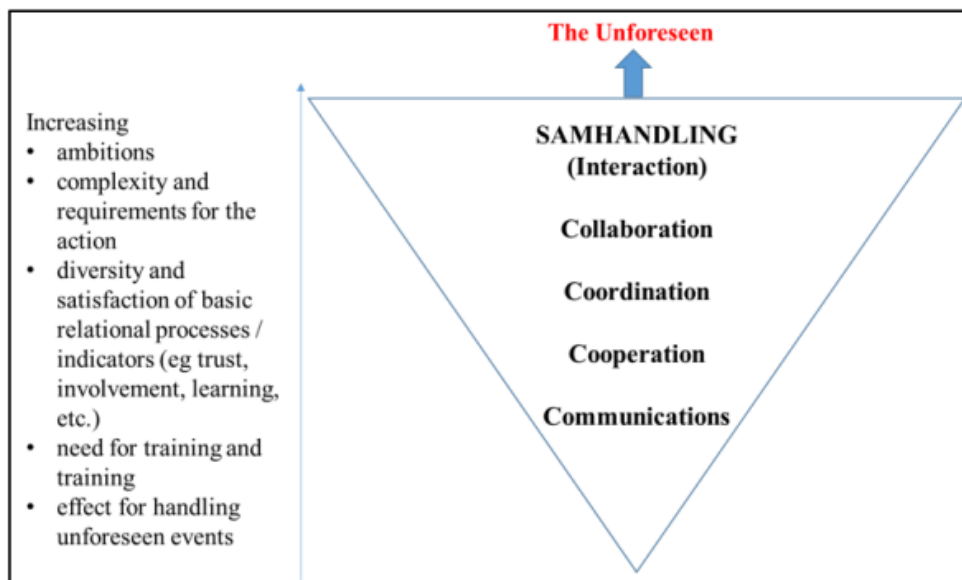


Figure 2: Samhandling Model (Torgersen & Steiro, 2018, p. 56)

A further aspect of the Samhandling construct is the importance of competence across various sectors. This involves training and concurrent learning where all involved learn from each other and synergise their respective skills with members of the team who possess different competencies (Torgersen & Carlsten, 2019). Moreover, Torgersen and Carlsten (2019) underscore the importance of implementing new ways of training, which are viewed

in a broad perspective, that is, competence must go beyond the traditional terms of, inter alia, gender, education level, and age. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that developing and implementing diversity strategies in an organisation is difficult as there is a requirement for leaders to possess a professional competence in both the concept of diversity as well as knowledge in how to effectively implement bespoke diversity strategies for the various sections of the organisation.

Another important point to address in the context of D&I in the military is that of leadership. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) state that the leadership styles associated with males and females differ, but that militaries tend to favour the leadership attributes associated with males. Moreover, Drolet (2017) posits that owing to the concepts of military leadership formulated through organisational culture, it is likely that gender stereotyping and bias will be present in how one's leadership is assessed. Drolet (2017) further presents the case that even when men and women are engaging in similar leadership behaviours, women tend to be assessed as being less effective, underscoring the point of stereotyping and bias when it comes to assessing leadership effectiveness (Bass, 1990). To add to this, and based on preconception of gender roles, there is a danger of bias which forms in relation to women based on subjectively positive feelings where women can be idealised and protected (Glick & Fiske, 1997).

In addition to preconceived ideas of leadership behaviour, the definition of leadership roles is another factor that needs to be considered. Greco and von Hlatky (2020) posit that our understanding of leadership roles needs to be redefined in a manner that encourages diverse leadership and which espouses the value of both feminine and masculine traits. However, Johnstone and Momani (2019) point to the fact that owing to their need to ensure stability, militaries tend to be slow to change. Therefore, an important step towards the creation of a diverse workforce and a leadership model that puts diversity and inclusion at its core, is breaking the association between change and stability (Greco & von Hlatky, 2020).

While the above speaks to the issue of representation in the military community, it is necessary to move beyond the concept of diversifying through representation to full inclusion, which means meaningful participation in an organisation (Greco & von Hlatky, 2020). Until organisations and its leadership at all levels recognises unconscious bias, privilege, and meritocracy, the evolution of diversity to inclusion will remain impeded (Belanger, 2018). Belanger (2018) further states that despite efforts from senior leadership within the CAF to create a diverse organisation, it struggled to move beyond the “*diversity talk*” (p.32) and the organisation remained stalled, failing to understand and facilitate inclusion.

The Challenge of Building a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion

While this section has so far highlighted the need and benefits of inculcating an organisational culture that promotes and nurtures D&I, it is important to draw attention to some of the potential second and third order effects which may not be as positive. Research conducted by the Copenhagen Business School and The Danish National Research Centre for the Working Environment, raises the concern about how managerial strategies designed to promote D&I can contribute to the development of new differences and exclusions (Dahl, 2014). By means

of example, Boogaard and Roggeband (2009), in a study of intersectionality of socio-demographic identities in the Dutch police force, highlight how this organisation has formulated D&I as a business case requirement. Their findings highlight that the business case approach can, in fact, provide unforeseen leverage to some minorities because their diverse traits provides skills such as language and culture, which their co-workers may not possess. Consequently, managers' efforts to create a diverse and inclusive culture can actually lead to the construction of difference.

In addition, when viewing diversity in a traditionally homogeneous culture, Mehng, Sung, and Leslie (2019), in a study of male dominated organisations in South Korea, state that while diversity can positively affect organisational performance if diverse perspectives are used from a decision-making perspective, so too can it be detrimental to performance if diversity is a source of conflict and if negative interpersonal dynamics are at play. This, they posit, depends on whether diversity is being viewed through an information and decision-making paradigm or a social categorisation paradigm. In relation to these two paradigms, the information and decision-making paradigm is viewed as positively affecting organisational performance because diverse individuals offer alternative perspectives and traits (Ely & Thomas, 2001; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). On this point, it is posited that individuals with a distinct identity, whether it be cultural or ethnic, can add to organisational and team performance through their varied knowledge and perspective (King, et al., 2011). Alternatively, it is stated that diversity through the social categorisation paradigm, which is based on social identity and self-categorisation theory, will negatively affect organisational performance owing to the fact that social group membership is likely to lead to low levels of social cohesion among its members (Leslie, 2015).

While the literature clearly highlights the overwhelming benefits of an organisational culture rich in D&I, so too does it highlight the fact that for every action there is a reaction. As a result, organisations need to consistently remain cognisant of their motives, aside from their moral ones, for building a diverse and inclusive culture, bearing in mind the balance between employee inclusion and organisational performance.

Building a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion

At this juncture it is timely to examine how organisations can build a culture that espouses D&I. The first point to note is the issue of D&I training and in a study of educational organisations, Kossek et. al., (2022) states that improving the knowledge base for staff with regard to D&I is key for employee well-being and staff retention. Furthermore, Yap et. al., (2010), in a Canadian study comprising over eleven thousand participants, states that there is a direct positive correlation between diversity training and organisational commitment.

Kossek et. al., (2022) specifically looked at the issue of microaggressions and the targeting of same. Microaggressions are defined as a stress factor for minorities and specifically refer to *"brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages"* (Sue et. al., 2007, p.273). A key aspect in combatting the existence of microaggressions in an organisation is the promotion of bystander awareness and allies who will support the development of an inclusive climate. According to Sue et. al., (2019) a bystander, in the context of microaggressions, refers to people *"who become aware of and/or witness unjust behaviours or practices that are worthy of comment or action"* (p.133).

Furthermore, allies are defined as “*individuals who belong to a dominant social group (for example, whites, males, heterosexuals)*” (Sue et. al., 2019, p. 132). The goal, therefore, is to train bystanders to recognise the occurrence of microaggressions and to promote a move towards allyship (Scully & Rowe, 2009). To that end, Applebaum (2019) posits that to effectively understand the occurrence of microaggressions and to create a willingness to tackle it, attention must be given to why, how, and when they can occur. Moreover, effective training to deal with microaggressions should provide staff with a safe place to be open about their uncertainties, while at the same time creating a space for agency and open dialogue (Sue et. al., 2019). Finally, as potential D&I training objectives, Kossek, et al., (2022) puts forward three areas for consideration: an increase in knowledge and awareness of the importance of advancing D&I for organisational performance; an increased understanding of microaggressions and their effect; and finally, the development of strategies to use inclusive language and behaviours, therefore, aiding bystanders to become allies.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this literature review was to thematically chart the rise and importance of D&I for organisations not only because it is the right thing to do (Konrad, 2003), but because it brings added value to organisations’ effectiveness. While it could be assumed that D&I are terms many organisations feel the need to include in their mission statements or doctrine, Katz & Miller (1996) state that D&I should not be viewed as something which is politically correct, but rather as a business imperative, and organisations should strive to leverage the diverse nature of their work pool in order to enhance performance. Ultimately, organisations have recognised that a diverse and inclusive work culture should foster and nurture concepts such as employee voice, which is seen as a key ingredient to organisational commitment.

From a military and DF perspective, any prudent and forward thinking organisation - particularly one such as the DF which was recently described by the Commission on the Defence Forces (CODF) as taking a “*patriarchal approach that takes responsibility for lower ranks to the point of disabling them*” (p.90) - would realise that a culture that fully embraces and promotes a diverse and inclusive workplace is key to addressing ongoing issues with staff recruitment and retention. However, as highlighted by Belanger’s (2018) research on the CAF, militaries must move beyond diversity in terms of representation and shift the gears to move towards inclusion. Similarly, a change in thinking and approach towards leadership in the military is important particularly when it comes to the notion of gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1997).

Nevertheless, the research has highlighted the benefits of building a diverse workforce when it comes to handling unforeseen challenges and the Samhandling concept provides a basic construct for the creation of teams with a diverse range of competencies. However, it is important for an organisation to be aware of the potential challenges it may face when attempting to inculcate a D&I culture. Therefore, staff training and the creation of a staff knowledge base is key (Kossek, et al., 2022) . Moreover, imbedding the correct framework, such as The Path Model (Katz & Miller, 1996), seems necessary for an organisation to develop a D&I culture as a means of moving from exclusive to inclusive, as is the need to promote and champion the role allies play in this transition.

PART TWO. Methodology and Research Design.

In terms of methodology and research design, the research, qualitative in nature, engaged with six participants - four internal to the organisation and two external - through the use of semi-structured interviews. In terms of data collection, purposeful sampling was selected as the chosen method as it enabled the research to “*deliberately select individuals because of their unique ability to answer a study’s research question*” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p.83). Moreover, purposeful sampling allows the researcher to strategically select research participants based on certain experiences, knowledge, and phenomenon, or because of the position within which they hold (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the data gathered from the internal participants provided context and insights into the DF’s D&I journey, while the data from the external participants provided alternative perspectives and lessons which the DF should consider. Thematically, the research focused on areas such as Exclusion and Inclusion; Representational Diversity; Invisible and Visible diversity; Employee Voice; Leadership; D&I challenges; and the role of D&I allies. Finally, in terms of interpreting the data gathered, the research processed the research data through analytical interpretation, by maintaining a connection to the research question, and by linking the data and analysis to the research literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The research participants are set out below:

Participant	Appointment	Appointment Abbreviation	Organisation	Internal / External
Participant 1	DF Head of Transformation	HoT	Defence Forces / Department of Defence	Internal
Participant 2	DF Head of Strategic Human Resources	HoSHR	Defence Forces / Department of Defence	Internal
Participant 3	DF Gender Equality & Diversity Advisor (DF GEDA)	GEDA	Defence Forces	Internal
Participant 4	General Officer Commanding, Defence Forces Training Centre	GOC DFTC	Defence Forces	Internal
Participant 5	Director General, Chief Professional Conduct & Culture	DG CAF	Canadian Armed Forces	External
Participant 6	D&I Lead	BoI DIL	Bank of Ireland	External

PART THREE. Research Findings

The purpose of this section is to analyse and interpret the research findings which emerged from the data collection. As set out in Part Two, this will be achieved by analysing the data in the context of the research questions and themes derived from the research literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In terms of how the data will be presented, as four of the participants were 'internal' to the DF, their data will, in general, be presented first. This will allow the reader to form an understanding of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the Defence Forces (DF). The remaining external participants' data will then be presented to provide additional or alternative perspectives to the research themes. As participants were selected based on the appointment they hold, they are identified according to their appointment title: DF Head of Transformation (HoT); DF Head of Strategic Human Resources (HoSHR); DF Gender Equality & Diversity Advisor (GEDA); Canadian Armed Forces Director General, Chief Professional Conduct & Culture (CAF DG); Bank of Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Lead (BoI DIL); and General Officer Commanding, Defence Forces Training Centre (GOC DFTC).

Research Themes

The four themes with their associated sub-themes discussed in the research interviews were designed to be consistent with the four research questions set out in the Introduction. Research Question One looked at the exclusive/inclusive nature of the organisation and questioned whether the organisation's primary D&I effort is representational diversity. Research Question Two examined the area of invisible or deep-level diversity as well as questioning whether the organisation facilitates Employee Voice. Research Question Three examined DF leadership in the context of Irish society particularly with regard to masculine and feminine leadership styles. Finally, Research Question Four looked at the possible challenges the organisation may face, and the role of D&I allies in championing a D&I culture. The breakdown of the research themes and sub-themes can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Research Themes and Sub-Themes

The Journey from the Exclusive Club to the Inclusive Club.
• Moving from Exclusivity to Inclusivity. • Representational Diversity
Never Judge a Book by its Cover.
• Invisible and Visible Diversity. • Employee Voice.
The Challenge of Leadership: Diversity and Inclusion in the Context of Leadership.
• Inculcating a D&I leadership culture reflective of Irish society. • Masculine versus Feminine Leadership.
Every Challenge You Face Today Makes You Stronger Tomorrow.
• Diversity and Inclusion Challenges. • The Role of Allies.

The Journey from the Exclusive Club to the Inclusive Club

Participants were asked to share their views on the inclusive or exclusive nature of the DF and whether the DF was primarily concentrated on representational diversity (Hays-Thomas, 2017) as opposed to dealing with D&I in a more holistic manner whereby the DF establishes the conditions to *“lead people of difference”* (Hays-Thomas, 2017, p.3). This section also highlights the importance of addressing issues such as stereotyping and bias (Drolet, 2017) and the need to increase D&I awareness and understanding (Kossek, et al., 2022).

Moving from Exclusivity to Inclusivity

The issue of the hierarchical nature of militaries was raised by several participants as being a contributing factor to the development of an exclusive culture in the DF. GOC DFTC stated that in a historical sense the DF was more aligned with the exclusive club perspective but this could be attributed to the organisational and rank structure, but highlighted that *“there is a shift underway which fully embraces inclusivity.”* He expressed that the organisational change underway may highlight differences between the perspectives of the organisation and the individual: *“there's the organisational perspective, and then there's the individual perspective, and I'm not sure if you'll ever square that circle for everybody.”* In that sense, he referred to the policies and practices the DF are invoking to facilitate diversity while at the same time ensuring the organisation continues to uphold discipline, the DF values, and the achievement of the mission.

GEDA stressed the importance of the military's hierarchical structure: *“we are a military organisation and we have to adhere to the rank structure and if there's a hierarchy, that's how we function.”* Regarding exclusivity and inclusivity in a cultural sense, she highlighted that certain cultural elements may be holding the organisation back in terms of moving from exclusive to inclusive but *“that's being eradicated now, that we're already in a period of change in respect to how we all look at ourselves and how we all look at the organisation.”* This point raised by DF GEDA highlights the findings of the Commission on the Defence Forces (CODF) who stated that *“there are elements of its culture that are a deterrent to the Defence Forces achieving its full potential”* (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.90).

In terms of organisational structure, HoSHR acknowledged that the current leadership, given its male dominant nature, is exclusive and that the DF had not progressed to the same degree as other organisations. To qualify this statement, he further stated:

That's not to say that those that are in those positions don't recognise the need to change and want to change, and more importantly, are working together with me to create conditions, over time, to make that change. The DF board are fully supportive and are driving the change from the top.

When asked about the exclusivity and inclusivity of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), CAF DG stated that initially the organisation went through a period of denial. To address this issue the organisation needed to *“name the problem”* and referred to their colonial past and that the organisation comprised *“basically white heterosexual males being kind of the privileged group.”* He further stated that *“awareness and understanding”* is key to their journey in addressing a general lack of understanding on D&I.

Furthermore, he stated that *“you can start doing the right things, you can start bringing diverse people around the table, that doesn't mean they're included”*, highlighting the importance of understanding the difference between diversity and inclusion and that diversity is a term *“not always clear and definitively specified”* (Combs & Milosevic, 2015, p.278).

Representational Diversity

On this issue, which looks at majority and minority group effects (Chung, Dean, & Ehrhart, 2019), much of the information received from the participants revolved around the male/female gender imbalance in the DF. Nevertheless, addressing this issue is a central element in moving from a culture of exclusivity to inclusivity, and as posited by Katz and Miller (1996), to make this transition, a point of critical mass must be achieved.

HoT stated that setting targets, and in particular the aspiration of achieving thirty-five per cent female representation, is a key, albeit challenging, transformation priority. Consistent with HoT, HoSHR acknowledged that gender representation is the immediate issue for the organisation, stating that this must be tackled through recruitment and by creating favourable promotional conditions. On the challenge of representing all aspects of Irish society, HoSHR stated:

We do need to take corrective action on the gender side of things, there is no doubt about that, and at the same time, broaden out our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategy to look at underrepresented groups across Ireland. We are not representative of Irish society, not unlike the vast majority of organisations. For us right now, for us to say that our ambition is to be that, I think that's fair, but I don't think we can give ourselves a timeframe given we're so underrepresented in lots of other groups. Right now, we are trying to create the conditions for talent at all levels to come through if they so wish whilst at the same time, modify our recruitment and retention initiatives.

The statements from both HoT and HoSHR illustrates that gender representation is the current D&I focus for the DF, but it also highlights the findings from the CODF which stated that the DF must endeavour to be *“diverse not only in gender and ethnicity, but also in socio economic, educational and geographical background”* (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022, p.97).

By comparison, BoI DIL stated, *“we don't have quotas, we have targets, and we want to get gender balance representation, but we're very focused on what we need to do to get there.”* She also stressed the importance of measuring data *“because whatever gets measured gets done.”* She highlighted that while the initial priority for BoI was gender representation, BoI *“now measure D&I data on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and so have evolved how we measure in terms of diversities.”* But in addition to measuring representational data, BoI also measure and track how their employees feel, which is a key factor in assessing levels of inclusion.

CAF DG highlighted the importance of being representative in a wider societal sense and the representational targets for the CAF include women, and people from indigenous and racialised communities, stating: *“we are recruiting similar to the makeup of our society.”* However, he pointed to the fact that a significant number of people from minority communities are leaving the CAF after five to ten years, stating two possible reasons for this

exodus: lack of role models in leadership positions from minority communities, and discrimination.

Never Judge a Book by its Cover

In this section participants were asked to comment on the issue of invisible or deep-level diversity, particularly with regard to how the DF creates teams and staffs, and if the DF promotes the concept of 'employee voice' in the workplace.

Invisible and Visible Diversity

In the White Paper on Defence 2015 (Department of Defence, 2015), the DFs' D&I ambition was to develop a strategy which builds on policies in relation to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and equality. However, while Harrison, Price and Bell (1998) highlight that much of the literature concentrates on diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and physical capabilities, a study by the Norwegian Defence Department stressed the importance of deep-level or invisible diversity. This study focused on factors such as education, experiences, and competence and that the traditional visible diversity areas of ethnicity and gender make little or no difference to a team's ability to deal with a complex problem, but rather it was the cognitive diversity of the team which enabled success (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017).

HoSHR acknowledged that on the matter of creating DF teams and staffs there was a tendency to perhaps select personnel based on rank and experience, as opposed to viewing the matter in a more holistic way:

We have a tendency to look at rank actually. So we need three OF 2s, an OF 5 and an OF 9 [the OF system is used to distinguish the ranks of military officers] to the to stand up this project. Whereas maybe in the actual new labor decision, the capabilities required in a particular team to achieve an outcome are not the first thing we talk about.

Similarly, GEDA stated that the current system of creating teams is quite rigid and until the organisation has a deep understanding of its staff, identifying and selecting personnel based on their deep-level characteristics will be a challenge. She further raised the importance of tracking data as a method of understanding one's staff and stated:

I think that when we do start to do that day-to-day data analytics, on the current people in the Defence Forces, which will inform our HR strategies going forward, I think that will offer a lot in this space, and a greater understanding of that, but we're not at that stage yet.

GOC DFTC stated that when it comes to *"invisible diversity or deep level diversity particularly regarding the creation of teams, and staffs, unfortunately, I think the answer is no and it's a capacity issue."* He further stated that *"if we had a full establishment, we would have much more latitude to design teams."* On the issue of competence as a factor of deep-level diversity, GOC DFTC highlighted that the DF has *"broad levels of education in our organisation."*

He did, however, caveat selection based on competence, stating that the organisation should be willing to give personnel *"stretch challenges"* but in doing so, it is important to ensure that personnel are supported. Linking competence to promotion, he said:

If you stretch people as in, I suppose we're talking promotion here, you know, you put them in ranks earlier than was historically, you have to then support them and understand that there's a little bit of risk for the individual and for the organisation.

This statement from GOC DFTC highlights a possible challenge to a D&I strategy and the points raised by The Danish National Research Centre for the Working Environment who raised concerns about how managerial strategies designed to promote D&I can, in fact, create new differences and exclusions (Dahl, 2014).

CAF DG reiterated the importance of mindset and the need to increase understanding and awareness of D&I in a comprehensive sense. Referring to minority communities, he stressed the importance of building trust, but balancing this trust with accountability. On the matter of competence, he raised the issue of making unbiased decisions, particularly when it comes to selecting people for roles and how the CAF evaluation system now considers 'how' leaders achieve their tasks, stating: *"we start looking at people with their competence, and not kind of going 'they both look good, but I trust that white male better'."* This point highlights the necessity for organisations to recognise the importance of unconscious bias, privilege, and meritocracy as impediments for the evolution of representational diversity to organisational inclusion (Belanger, 2018).

On this issue of 'how' leaders achieve their tasks, he stressed the importance of how people are treated and *"that as we look at potential people for senior positions and leadership positions, that 'how' matters more than the what"*, that is, in the achievement of a task or objective, how did the leader treat and deal with his/her staff. Recognising that the CAF has a lot of competent people at senior levels, the CAF evaluation system now focuses on *"character- based leadership."*

The points raised by GOC DFTC and CAF DG point to many of the core tenets and fundamentals of the Norwegian Samhandling model (Torgersen & Carlsten, 2019): trust, involvement, balance of power, and role consciousness. Moreover, in relation to competence, this model underscores some of the main findings which emerged from this section, namely, the requirement for training and concurrent learning, and the need for leaders to possess a professional competence in D&I.

Employee Voice

Recognised as a key ingredient for any form of meaningful organisational commitment, the concept of Employee Voice is an important one (Pfeffer, 1998), and as posited by Collins (1986), organisational commitment cannot be achieved if the concept of the 'outsider within' is present within an organisation.

To understand employee perspectives from within the DF, HoSHR stated that numerous strategic level surveys had been conducted and that a further cultural engagement survey is planned to establish benchmarks and create the data required for human resource strategies. Referring to the DF Town Hall meetings he had attended, he witnessed open discussions from various ranks with the Chief of Staff (CoS) which he felt was due to his inclusive nature. He further emphasised the importance of digital platforms as a means of communicating with the wider DF community, stressing that some work is required in this regard particularly with Connect, which is an internal communication application designed

for mobile phones but according to HoSHR four and a half thousand members have subscribed with three thousand yet to do so.

He highlighted that it might be the case that greater effort is required at a unit level to ensure that members are kept informed of wider DF developments.

HoT stated that while the organisation could do more to improve employee voice, he qualified this by stating that balance was required and certain situations, such as operating in a kinetic environment, may not be an appropriate time to voice an alternative perspective. In relation to wider organisational suggestions, outside of a complaints procedure, he stated the following:

Do we need a better opportunity for individuals to be able to raise issues, now this is outside of complaints and inappropriate behaviour, this is just organisational, operational suggestions? Yeah, we probably do.

GOC DFTC highlighted the creation of a Voice of the Employee initiative in the Defence Forces Training Centre (DFTC), managed by the formation's Gender Advisor. This system allows personnel to offer their perspective on issues they believe to be important. However, presently this system is limited to the DFTC, but a case has been brought forward to extend this initiative across the DF.

At a strategic level, CAF DG highlighted the importance of engaging with all minority groups, stating:

We've really gotten to try to understand what people need. We have a construct that's a Defence Advisory Group, so for each of the equity seeking groups we have national co-chairs, military and civilian. We consult them when we develop policies, and we want to hear from them. They meet twice a year with our team and the Chief of Defence Staff and Deputy Minister to make sure that they are heard at a higher level.

He further reiterated the importance of promoting employee voice at a unit level, stating: *"by regularly talking to your equity seeking groups and junior members, by default, you have a better sense of what's happening than if you're staying in your ivory tower."*

The Challenge of Leadership: Diversity and Inclusion in the context of Leadership

In this section participants were questioned specifically about the challenges DF leaders may face when trying to inculcate a D&I culture which better reflects Irish society. Moreover, participants were also asked to comment on the patriarchal and masculine style of leadership which the DF has been purported to promote (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022). This CODF finding is consistent with the literature, which states that militaries tend to favour masculine leadership characteristics (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) and that gender bias and stereotyping is an issue when male and female leaders are being assessed (Drolet, 2017).

Inculcating a D&I leadership culture reflective of Irish society

There was general consensus among the internal participants that DF leadership is not reflective of Irish society. GOC DFTC stated that evolving the current model of leadership to better reflect Irish society *"is a challenge"*, but *"that doesn't mean we can't deal with that,"*

and we are." Moreover, he highlighted that the current system of promoting females is undergoing review and that changes will be made to address this issue.

HoSHR acknowledged that DF leadership is not reflective of Irish society, stating: *"it's almost exclusively male right and it's also almost exclusively Irish males."* However, he expressed that efforts are ongoing, and leadership is *"collectively trying to create the conditions that we move towards the inclusive environment we aspire to."*

This point was further highlighted by HoT who stated that time is required to provide people, in this case females, with the necessary skills-sets to progress through the organisation but steps have been taken and the organisation now has a *"female voice at every Defence Force Board meeting, and so the female participation in the leadership level has been improved."*

From a strategic perspective, HoT further stated:

But if you look at the strategic framework, which over pins everything, that makes it very clear that the objective is to ensure that the Defence Forces is reflective of society, is an employer of choice, and provides for fairness and equity.

To better represent Irish society, GEDA highlighted the need to be *"out there and meeting people, introducing ourselves to all these new minority groups within our society and communicating to them that this is an organisation that wants people to join."*

Bol DIL stated that the Bol model is reflective of the fact that society comprises fifty per cent males and fifty per cent females, and their leadership executive reflects this fact. She further stated: *"if you're sitting at a group executive table and it's 50:50, well then you know, you're going to have the female voice, you're going to have the male voice, so I think that is important."* On the matter of ethnic minorities, Bol now considers this an area of importance and is working to ensure that the seven per cent of ethnic minorities in Ireland are represented.

In terms of leadership, CAF DG described the changes which have and are still occurring as an evolution. Regarding female leadership, he stated:

On the gender space, we're there, and I think we're also very honestly at the point where female leaders are there because they are simply the best people for the job, and it doesn't have to do with the fact that they're women.

In addition, he highlighted that CAF leadership introspectively examined its leadership model and in doing so:

We deliberately looked at what some of the barriers were and how do we enable women. How do we remove some of the barriers to enable women to get to higher rank and by default, that conversation has led us to better understand that we were privileging or focused on more masculine traits, and you know, you hear all about vulnerability, compassion, which arguably some genders are doing better than others.

Masculine versus Feminine Leadership

The report from the CODF described the DF as being a traditionally gendered and masculine organisation, and where a patriarchal approach was taken towards lower ranks (Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022). This finding is consistent with Greco and von Hlatky who described militaries as being hyper-masculine and resisted “*non-conforming masculinities and femininities*” (p.190).

GEDA acknowledged the findings from the CODF but highlighted that this style of management was no longer tolerated and that steps are being taken to mitigate against such behaviour. HoSHR stressed the importance of education to ensure masculine and feminine leaderships styles are viewed in the correct manner, while also pointing to the importance of the DF Leadership Doctrine and the DF Values in Action.

Regarding masculine and feminine leadership traits, GOC DFTC highlighted the importance of team design and ongoing education, and when teams are being designed, the question must be asked: “*are we addressing diversity?*” He further addressed the issue of how the leader operates and manages the team under their charge, a point which, again, underscores the importance of the ‘how’, as raised by CAF DG.

Similarly, CAF DG stated that the CAF has moved on from viewing leadership in a binary way, that is, male versus female, or from someone the organisation would have considered to be an “*operator*.” He stated:

It's not because we're deliberately identifying a woman. It's because we're looking at true leadership and ethics, values, moral compass, and compassion, with the equivalent competence and commitment, and that is leading us away from operators, a little bit away from where we were probably by default, thinking hey, this person's an operator.

The points raised about masculine and feminine leadership characteristics and the necessity for different, non-traditional traits, underscores the point posited by Loughlin and Arnold (2007) and Greco and von Hlatky (2020) that modern soldiers are now required to be equipped with the skills and characteristics to play the role of “*international social workers*” (p.148). Similarly, Greco and von Hlatky (2020) state that our understanding of leadership roles needs to be redefined in a manner that encourages diverse leadership and which espouses the value of both feminine and masculine traits. Moreover, it also highlights Torgersen and Carlsten’s (2019) point that “*difference and variety in competence*” (p.130) is required when dealing with the complex and unforeseen.

Every Challenge You Face Today Makes You Stronger Tomorrow

While the literature in Part One and the feedback received from all participants pointed to the fact that building a D&I culture can only be a positive for the organisation, so too does the literature highlight that inculcating a D&I culture may also create certain second and third order effects which may not be positive. Therefore, participants were asked to voice their views on the challenges the DF may face when trying to inculcate a D&I culture and how such challenges can be addressed, as well as commenting on the role of allies in this process.

Diversity and Inclusion Challenges

HoSHR acknowledged that the process of inculcating a D&I culture within the DF will be a challenging process, stating:

Inculcating an authentic D&I culture will be challenging but everyone is up for the challenge. It is going to take time given we're coming from a relative standing start. Everybody I have met, including everyone from the DF Board, knows and agrees that having more authentic inclusive and diversity, and they're not the same thing, and a more equitable culture, is absolutely where we need to be. Are we all 100% educated on it, and do we know exactly what the future and good will look like? No, we don't. But there is the will to do it. And for me, that's a big hurdle overcome. I am confident that the DF will get there in time.

He further emphasised that people will need to see *“demonstrable on the ground change”*, placing significant emphasis on the requirement for a greater number of females in senior positions, including the position of COS.

GEDA believed that change regarding how things are done, changes to attitude, and changes to culture, could be a challenge to the organisation. She highlighted those elements of the organisation who had *“prospered in what was the old way of doing things, don't want to see that change because they're afraid of what will happen.”* Consequently, *“changing people's mindsets and their attitudes towards other people is going to be the most difficult.”*

Adding to this point, GOC DFTC believed that the *“status quo”* is a challenge, pointing out that *“people are very comfortable with where they are.”* He further articulated that if you are going *“to project someone, and it's perceived to be that it might disadvantage someone else, or you know, make someone else a bit more vulnerable, there's a resistance around that.”*

BoI DIL stressed the difficulty of implementing cultural change and that the time required to implement such change requires patience, describing it as a *“slow burn.”* On the issue of organisational buy-in, she stated that increasing the levels of understanding on D&I was important: *“we kind of put it back to the person, and would you like to come to work and feel excluded?”* On the matter of resistance to D&I from elements of the organisation, she articulated that there was no overt pushback, but that certain sections were satisfied to know that D&I was being covered but were not actively participating in its development, describing it as *“admiring from a distance but not actually doing anything.”* To address these *“passive”* sections of the organisation, BoI introduced divisional targets, and in doing so, responsibility for D&I implementation was spread across the organisation.

Speaking to the complexity of D&I and reiterating the importance of enhanced understanding, CAF DG stated that the *“challenge is how do you make the complex simple and how do you make the simple compelling?”* Echoing the point of demonstrable change, as articulated by HoSHR, CAF DG stated that D&I must be *“compelling and concrete in terms that people can apply”*, underscoring the importance of moving D&I beyond just simply *“diversity talk”* (Belanger, 2018, p.32).

He further pointed to the fact that D&I needs to *“translate into day-to-day actions like physical fitness”* and the importance of creating a workplace culture *“where not talking about an issue feels wrong.”* Referencing the concept of Just Culture in flight safety, CAF DG

highlighted the importance of, but the challenge associated with, creating a culture where open discourse is encouraged to ensure the team improves and develops. To view D&I in a holistic fashion and to deal with its complexity, CAF DG stressed the importance of stakeholders, internal and external, and engaging with *“people with lived experience, veterans, academia, you need to have those people.”*

D&I Training and Allies

Key to the successful creation and implementation of a D&I culture is training (Kossek, et al., 2022), and the role allies - *“individuals who belong to the dominant social group”* (Sue et. al. 2019, p.132) - play in dealing with issues such as microaggressions, and the development of an inclusive climate (Sue, et al., 2019; Scully & Rowe, 2009). Therefore, participants were asked to comment on the role of allies in the DF, their importance, and whether enough was being done by the organisation to champion this role.

HoSHR stated that allies are *“extraordinarily important in promoting and abetting D&I”*, raising the importance of engaging with allies external to the organisation, a point similar in fashion to the one raised by CAF DF on the importance of stakeholder engagement. When asked about internal allies, HoSHR stressed that the organisation could be doing more but there was also an individual responsibility *“to get into the right forum to talk about something you want to talk about.”* While HoSHR acknowledged that this role needs to be championed and the organisation could go to greater lengths to support this, organisational capacity constraints are an issue, echoing the capacity point also raised by GOC DFTC.

HoT highlighted the importance of alignment, stating that those who are championing D&I and are challenging those *“people who have a mindset, which is just not going to be aligned with what we're trying to do”*, must therefore be *“seen publicly to being backed by the senior management.”*¹

GEDA reiterated the requirement for the DF to do more regarding allies, and to do this the organisation needs to expand the office of the Gender Equality and Diversity Advisor with an office dealing specifically with D&I. This would provide the necessary structure required to effectively manage D&I, a part of which would be the identification of allies.

GOC DFTC, who on several occasions mentioned the importance of coaching and mentoring, expressed that the term ally was relatively new to him, and it was his belief that *“the term is new to a lot of people”* and that *“we have to be more educated about this.”*

Nevertheless, he believed that the role of allies and organisational mentors were key to addressing inappropriate behaviour within the organisation:

That area of allies, that earlier area of mentoring, that's important here, because that's how people feel or gain the confidence to project themselves, and to start being seen and start being visible in the organisation.

BoI DIL highlighted the importance of allies and as a means of generating organisational buy-in, personnel have the opportunity to complete an online accredited course.

¹ This point supports the literature on bystander awareness and allies in combatting issues such as microaggressions (Sue et. al., 2007).

CAF DG reiterated the centrality of allies and spoke of the importance of viewing allies in a holistic sense:

You need to bring in more allies, more people from the privileged majority that understand why we're doing that. So slowly, we increase awareness, we increase understanding, and we break down the barriers that are there based on prejudice and unconscious bias. Prejudice and biases are learned, they are taught, they can be untaught, but we need to deliberately do that.

The points raised by participants in this section highlight some of the key D&I training objectives as put forward by Kossek, et. al., (2022) which are increased knowledge and awareness, and the importance of strategies and behaviours which promote the role of allies.

Final Remarks

Using thematic analysis based on four themes which support the research objectives, this section provides an understanding of the current D&I environment in the DF. Additionally, the insights gained from BoI and the CAF provided an alternative perspective from another military as well as private industry. In addition to gaining an understanding of where the DF has come on its D&I journey, the findings also point to its possible trajectory and can provide guidance for how the DF should develop D&I.

A key takeaway from the research findings was the necessity to develop an enhanced understanding, at all organisational levels, of what D&I means, its benefits, which essentially espouse the sentiment of BoI DIL who stated: *would you like to come to work and feel excluded?* The findings also highlight that gender representation is the current D&I focus for the DF, but there is an awareness that being reflective of all aspects of Irish society is important. Moreover, the findings indicate that inculcating D&I should not be simply viewed as the right thing to do, but rather should be treated as an organisational imperative from a performance and effectiveness perspective. The points raised in this section will now be carried forward into Part Four and will form the basis of the research conclusion and recommendations.

PART FOUR. Conclusions, Implications And Recommendations

The purpose of this paper was to examine Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the Irish Defence Forces (DF), recognising the fact that the DF, similar to many contemporary militaries, is on a journey to inculcate a culture that strives to go beyond one which is *“relatively closed and mechanically organised”* (Torgersen and Carlsten, 2019, p.138). The literature explored in Part One provided the justification for this research, and the academic scaffolding created in this chapter supplied the themes which were unearthed in Part Three. Furthermore, the synergy between the research objectives, the literature, and the research interviews have given rise to concrete conclusions with associated recommendations.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The Journey from the Exclusive Club to the Inclusive Club

Examining the related issues of exclusivity and representational diversity, the analysis highlighted the differences between the perspectives of the organisation and the individual, the organisation's focus on female representation, and the importance of D&I data as a building block in understanding the organisation's constituent parts. Participants acknowledged that the hierarchical nature of the DF was a contributing factor to a certain

degree of organisational exclusivity, but also underscored that such a structure is key to the effective running of any military. Addressing the gap which may exist between the perspectives of an individual and the organisation is a consideration in this regard and increased awareness is key to affecting greater alignment between them. The data highlighted the DFs' current focus on female representation, but to be truly reflective of Irish society as a whole, it is important that the organisation pays due regard to all minority groups. This section also highlighted the importance of understanding the difference between diversity and inclusion, recognising that while appropriate representation is important from a critical mass perspective, the organisation must ensure that the necessary conditions are in place for meaningful contribution from all its personnel. Finally, for an organisation to develop a holistic understanding of its talent, it is necessary to ensure that both diversity and inclusion data is tracked and measured.

Never Judge a Book by its Cover

This section examined deep-level diversity in the context of team design and the importance of Employee Voice but emphasised that the DF continues to work in quite a rigid and traditional manner. The findings suggest that teams are selected based on factors such as rank, and that greater consideration could be given to the selection of personnel based on deep-level factors such as education and competence. However, to affect such change, improved organisational understanding is required. The issue of unbiased decisions regarding personnel selection was also an important takeaway, as was the necessity to capture character-based leadership in personnel evaluation, which examines 'how' a leader achieved their task as opposed to 'what' they achieved.

On the issue of Employee Voice, digital platforms emerged as a key requirement for organisational connectivity and an enabler for employees to offer their perspectives. While certain operational contexts may not lend themselves to open discourse, it was acknowledged that more work is required to promote this concept and initiatives such as the Voice of the Employee can act as a strategic enabler in this regard. Moreover, the findings highlight the necessity to formally engage, at a strategic level, with all minority groups to gauge responses and receive views on policy creation. Finally, it emerged that unit commanders should also champion Employee Voice at a unit level to ensure connectivity with all sections of a unit.

The Challenge of Leadership: Diversity and Inclusion in the Context of Leadership

On the issue of whether DF leadership reflected Irish society, the data indicated, given the current leadership make-up, that this is not the case. The findings highlight the organisation's goal for greater female participation in leadership roles, and efforts are being made to remove barriers which impede this progression. However, it is also clear that time is required to ensure the correct conditions are set for greater female participation. Notwithstanding the importance of increased female leadership, the importance of increased engagement with all minority groups was reiterated. Another important point to emerge was the question of how D&I is being addressed when it comes to management of teams and 'how' leaders manage the various sections of those teams.

A key point to emerge on the issue of masculine and feminine leadership styles was the need to understand the importance of non-traditional traits when it comes to dealing with challenging and complex situations. This highlighted the importance of moving away from the default 'operator' mind-set to one which recognises that different situations may

require different characteristics, reinforcing the relevance of team design which opts for a variety in competence. Finally, the findings highlight the need for the DF to have an increased understanding and awareness of the benefits of feminine leadership characteristics. Consequently, the organisation should stress the importance of understanding the benefits of non-traditional leadership traits such as compassion and vulnerability, and encourage the development of a 'hybrid' style of leadership, which espouses both masculine and feminine traits.

Every Challenge You Face Today Makes You Stronger Tomorrow

There was agreement among all participants that imbedding a D&I culture in the DF is, and will be, a challenging process. Both time and patience will be required from an organisational and individual perspective, and the DF community will need to see demonstrable change to ensure buy-in and engagement. From a cultural change perspective, addressing the 'status quo' sections of the organisation may be one of the more difficult challenges to address, as will moving those who choose to be passive to active. Therefore, D&I engagement needs to be filtered down to all levels of the organisation in a concrete and compelling way. Moreover, the findings also highlight the importance of external stakeholders and the necessity to engage with a varied audience who can offer alternative insights.

Regarding the role of D&I allies, their importance was strongly highlighted by all participants, and the organisation should strive to increase awareness of this role and to create a culture where organisational by-standers want to become allies. Moreover, from a psychological safety perspective, it is clear that strong alignment between allies working at a unit level and the organisation's strategic level is of fundamental importance. Additionally, regarding the office of the DFs' Gender Equality and Diversity Advisor, it is clear that this office requires restructuring to be able to deal with the range of issues associated with D&I.

Recommendations

Based on the above research conclusions, there are a number of recommendations which the DF should consider, and these recommendations have applicability across the entire organisational spectrum.

Awareness and Understanding

Throughout this research, it became clear that awareness and understanding of the importance of D&I from the perspective of both the individual and the organisation is key to ensuring buy-in and sustainability. As highlighted by CAF DG, D&I is a complex topic, but it is imperative that it is made compelling. Therefore, it is recommended that the DF initiate an information campaign to explain to its members what is meant by D&I, why it is important, and what its members can do to make the DF a more inclusive place to work. It is further recommended that the Voice of the Employee initiative be formally rolled out across the organisation to provide the necessary platform for all levels of the organisation to be heard.

D&I Data

To develop a holistic understanding of the DFs' demographics, it is recommended that the DF develop a comprehensive database of its membership. This should not only capture diversity data from a surface level sense, but so too should it contain information pertaining to invisible diversity. Such information has many human resource advantages, but it can also assist with team design, adopting a novel and innovative approach, when necessary, beyond the traditional manner of selection based on rank. Finally, it is equally as important for the

organisation to measure and capture data on inclusion to assess how engaged and included the organisation's membership feels.

Outreach

This research clearly highlighted the DFs' ambition to increase its female representation, but due regard needs to be paid to all sections of Irish society. Therefore, it is recommended that the organisation develops bespoke outreach strategies for the many elements which comprise Irish society and that active engagement with these sections occurs. Linked to this issue is the need for internal and external stakeholder engagement and it is recommended that the DF actively participate in fora which can assist in the development of a comprehensive approach to D&I. Finally, it is recommended that the DF formally champion the role of D&I allies. To achieve this, greater awareness of this role is required, and supports, such as courses, should be established.

Diversity and Inclusion Office

For the organisation to manage the breadth of work associated with D&I, it is recommended that the Office of the Gender Equality and Diversity Advisor is significantly expanded. The current structure is not adequately designed to deal with the array of matters associated with D&I. Therefore, significant enlargement is required with specific offices to deal with specific D&I matters.

Research Strengths and Limitations

Given its qualitative nature, this research focused on a select group of individuals whose stories provided a strategic insight into D&I. The narratives retrieved from the internal participants painted a picture of D&I in the DF and the work required to advance this issue. To complement this, the contributions from the external participants provided valuable insights from which the DF can learn. As a limitation, this study did not engage with a wider DF audience to gather their thoughts and to gain insights into their lived experiences of D&I in the DF.

Further Research

D&I is an area which is constantly evolving, and concepts such as Equity and Belonging were unearthed during the literature review and research interviews but were not explored. Moreover, the issue of neurodiversity is also an important area which is applicable to the DF and was raised by Fleming (2023) in a previous thesis.

Final Remarks

In conclusion, the DF is on a journey when it comes to D&I and this research has highlighted several areas in which improvements can be made. While this journey will require time and patience, it is imperative that the DF strives to be a more diverse and inclusive organisation and one which truly represents the many sections that comprise Irish society. DF leadership, at all levels, must continually reflect on 'how' they are doing things as opposed to 'why', and to question the degree to which their subordinates feel included. Finally, D&I should be viewed as an opportunity for growth, not a challenge, and the DF should aspire to be an exemplar of D&I across Irish society.

Please note that the views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and should not be taken to represent the views of the Irish Defence forces or of any other group or organisation.

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