

Diversity in Insider Threat Programs: Crucial to Mission Success

Henry Nelson

“Diversity is a mission imperative.” That’s what senior leaders across the Intelligence Community and Department of Defense have been saying for years, from Congressional hearings to workforce messages. Insider Threat Programs are part of dynamic and constantly evolving mission space that must change as rapidly as the threat landscape. So, how does diversity in those programs benefit that mission?

Threats are becoming increasingly sophisticated, requiring a diverse set of skills to proactively combat them effectively. By bringing together individuals with expertise in areas such as counterintelligence, human resources, cyber, law enforcement, security, threat assessment/threat management, and behavioral health, it heightens the opportunity for a holistic approach to insider threat detection and mitigation.

As insider threat tradecraft has evolved, the focus has been primarily on technological mitigations. We look for ways to speed up the evaluation process, to make informed decisions using corroborated and validated data, and to more thoroughly vet and resolve potential concerns. Many of these are reactive measures as we strive to keep pace in this 21st century threat environment. We have seen what happens when cleared individuals go out of their way to subvert our processes and security posture. It’s our duty to stop them.

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Henry Nelson serves as the Deputy Director, Enterprise Programs at the DoD Insider Threat Management and Analysis Center (DITMAC). In this capacity, he oversees and executes key offices, including the Assessment and Professionalization Office (APO), Unauthorized Disclosure Program Management Office (UD PMO), Mission Integration Office (MIO), and the Performance, Requirements, Information, Standards, and Metrics (PRISM) Office. Prior to his role at DITMAC, Mr. Nelson held the position of Chief, Counter Insider Threat Investigation Division at the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA). There, he successfully managed NGA's unauthorized disclosure program, leading a diverse team in two locations, and pioneered the integration of modernized investigative techniques, incorporating data science to detect, identify, and mitigate potential or actual threats to NGA personnel, resources, and information.



That is why diversity is so important in this field and why a multifaceted approach is necessary. Diversity goes beyond representation of different cultures and races; it also extends to a range of backgrounds, skill levels, technological aptitudes, educational levels, generational differences, and career disciplines. We know that diversity of thought and experience is a unique superpower when it comes to analysis – and the same is true for insider threat programs.

Diversity among insider threat programs gives us lots of advantages. First, it enables us to uncover vulnerabilities and threats that might not be readily apparent. These diverse perspectives enable a more nuanced and individualized approach to implementing mitigation strategies. For example, throughout the Defense Department, we have experts in Russian, Middle Eastern, and Asian affairs. Why do we have these experts? To comprehend the nuances of different cultures to facilitate the refinement of our tools, techniques, and procedures. Second, it allows us to explore a wider range of appropriate mitigation strategies and potential countermeasures, which gives us a more comprehensive understanding and assessment of risks.

This is especially important with a continuously evaluated, trusted workforce. People and culture change over time, so it's vital that we are able to discern and differentiate between life events that might be cause for concern or action versus those that are simply part of life. For example, integrating the expertise of a behavioral scientist or mental health professionals, can help insider threat programs better understand personality dynamics, social stressors, and the intersections of these on behavior – and that enables us to better assess and mitigate risk.

Beyond the practical advantages, fostering diversity within insider threat programs just makes sense. For insider threat programs to be effective in protecting our country, our people, and our resources, we must equip them with every possible advantage. We must fill them with creative, diverse people. We must give them the resources to integrate the latest technology. We must ensure they are prepared, at every moment, to adapt as threats emerge and to stay a step ahead of those who might harm our national security. Diversity - in all its forms - is a strategic and tactical advantage we cannot afford to overlook. ✓



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