

OPA DEOCS Redesign: Response to DACOWITS

Summary

The Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) was transitioned from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) to the Office of People Analytics (OPA) in 2018. OPA is currently conducting a redesign of the survey. The DEOCS was designed as a tool for commanders and does not produce valid aggregate-level data. In addition, the DEOCS has changed multiple times during the past 10 years. Both of these factors preclude us from providing the results that DACOWITS has requested. As OPA works to redesign the DEOCS, we anticipate data from the new DEOCS will be informative for the purposes the Committee has requested in the future.

DACOWITS RFI #3 for June 2020

“The Committee requests a written response from the DoD Office of People Analytics on the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) survey data collected from the Military Services, to include:

- a. Provide data aggregated by each Military Service (including the Coast Guard, Guard and Reserve) on DEOCS survey questions pertaining to the following categories: organizational commitment; group cohesion; connectedness; job satisfaction; engagement; and inclusion at work.
 - i. Break down by gender, then by race/ethnicity and by rank
 - ii. Provide above information in three data intervals: most recent survey year; five years prior to most recent survey; and 10 years prior to most recent survey.
- b. Provide analyses/trends/benchmarks available that could support/inform Service initiatives to improve retention?”

DEOCS Redesign

Transition to OPA

Responsibility for the DEOCS was transferred from DEOMI to OPA via a 21 Feb 2018 Action Memo from USD (P&R), “Realignment of Force Resiliency Elements of the Office of the USD (P&R)” OPA was charged to “revitalize and modernize the survey to preserve and enhance its utility and credibility into the future.” Consultation with senior leaders, key stakeholders, Commanders, and Service members indicated a need to update other content of the DEOCS to enhance its relevance to key personnel issues.

OPA (formerly DMDC) has conducted surveys for the Department of Defense since the 1970s using industry-standard survey methods outlined in OMB’s guidance on “Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys” and American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Best Practices. Survey results are regularly shared with senior leaders to help improve their data-driven decision making needs in support of a wide-variety of program and policy issues.

Many of OPA's other surveys (e.g., the Workplace and Gender Relations survey, the Status of Forces survey) are administered annually or biennially and are reported at the aggregate level (total DoD or total Service). These reports are primarily designed to inform policy-makers and meet Congressional requirements. The DEOCS is different. As a tool for Commanders the DEOCS is continuously fielded by units either once a year or when a unit receives a new commander. The results from the DEOCS are reported to the commander and their supervisor to be used to improve conditions in the unit. The DEOCS is always available for a commander to assign to their unit and it is crucial that results are reported quickly to Commanders in the field. The data from the DEOCS is not collected in the same way, or used in the same way, as military or Service wide sample surveys. OPA's approach to update and redesign the DEOCS recognizes its unique features (how the DEOCS is fielded and how the data are used), while also leveraging our knowledge and expertise in survey design and implementation more broadly.

Redesign Lines of Effort

The DEOCS redesign involves three separate but related lines of effort; 1) build a new government-owned survey administration platform, 2) select new content for the survey, and 3) design a dashboard for leaders and other personnel to view climate survey results, other relevant climate information, and access to resources to address climate-related challenges.

The new survey administration platform will launch at the end of July 2020 with DEOCS 4.1 (the current version) and the online dashboard will also be available at the end of July 2020. This initial launch of the dashboard will be a preliminary version; we will continue to collect user feedback and add capabilities/features through 2024 (pending resources). The updated survey content will launch on the new platform in October 2020.

To inform the redesign of the DEOCS, OPA has conducted four information gathering efforts; 1) focus groups with OPA Climate Assessment Summit participants (held in July 2019 with over 100 researchers, policy-makers, and SMEs from within and outside of DoD) and focus groups with Service members, current and former Commanders, and Equal Opportunity Advisors, 2) review of past DoD research and academic literature from relevant fields; 3) stakeholder interviews with OSD and Service-level offices; and 4) survey and open-ended feedback from DEOCS survey respondents collected through the DEOCS research block.

The new version of the survey will measure cross-cutting risk and protective factors to support prevention efforts that "get to the left" of problematic outcomes (harassment, discrimination, sexual assault, suicide) and bolster desirable outcomes (retention, readiness). For example, workplace hostility is a risk factor for harassment and sexual assault and negatively related to retention intentions (i.e., experiencing workplace hostility makes people more likely to want to leave the military). On the other hand, as an example, unit cohesion is a protective factor that lowers risk for assault and suicide, while bolstering retention intentions. These are examples of the types of risk and protective factors that will be included on the survey (not necessarily these specific examples). Because we are aiming to keep the survey relatively brief, we are doing extensive work to identify the most relevant and actionable risk and protective factors to include on the survey, to give "the biggest bang for the buck" in prevention.

Aggregated DEOCS Results

Challenges with Aggregating Results

The DEOCS was designed to be a tool for Commanders, to provide unit-level data and insights. The survey was not designed to provide aggregated data at the total DoD and Service level. The survey is unweighted and not scientifically collected (i.e., with a randomized sample) in a way that meets criteria to produce generalizable, aggregated data. Thus any aggregations of these data are not generalizable and should not be relied upon by decision-makers.

DEOMI produced “roll-up” reports of aggregated DEOCS results in recent years, however, an independent review found these reports were not scientifically valid. Mr. Booth, Director, DHRA, issued a memorandum in October 2018 that put a moratorium on reporting aggregated DEOCS data until this aggregation could be completed in a way that is scientifically valid. Therefore, we cannot provide valid aggregated DEOCS data from the current DEOCS 4.1 or from any prior versions. In addition to the weighting and aggregation challenges described above, the DEOCS has gone through multiple iterations that prevent us from making comparisons over time.

Next Steps for DEOCS Data

OPA is in the process of developing and testing an approach to scientifically weighting DEOCS results. Weighting of probability-based surveys is best practice across DoD, the Federal Government, and industry-wide. The new approach to aggregation will follow these best practices. Pending results of our tests, we anticipate reliable aggregated DEOCS results will be available in 2022, and trends will be available starting with 2021 results (but not from prior years). The DEOCS redesign also aims to provide valid trending capabilities moving forward.

We anticipate the new DEOCS will be a very valuable data source in the future for understanding trends and patterns in climate risk and protective factors, and their impact on retention (and other critical outcomes), while remaining true to the primary goal of the survey, which is to serve as a tool for Commanders.

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