Measuring Service Climate with an Eye for Diversity

MLDC Research Areas

Definition of Diversity

Legal Implications

Outreach & Recruiting

Leadership & Training

Branching & Assignments

Promotion

Retention

Implementation & Accountability

Metrics

National Guard & Reserve

This issue paper aims to aid in the deliberations of the MLDC. It does not contain the recommendations of the MLDC.

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Abstract

Drawing on surveys administered by Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) and the Services as well as on outside literature on organizational climate, this issue paper describes aspects of climate currently measured by the military, methods of data analysis currently used by DEOMI, alternative measures used by public agencies, and key issues to consider when selecting climate survey measures. Our review indicates that many efforts to understand various aspects of climate are under way. Although the different surveys explore some common topics (e.g., leadership, unit cohesion, attachment to the Service), each of them measures the topics in different ways. In addition, DEOMI notes that potentially helpful constructs, such as leaders' use of diversity competencies, are not yet measured. Most importantly, research indicates that measures should be valid, reliable, and linked to the organizational mission and goals.

G iven demographic trends in the United States, demographic diversity in the military is likely to increase over time. Prior research has found that a major organizational problem with managing diversity stems not so much from an inability to hire as from the difficulties experienced in making the best use of each employee's potential and in retaining and promoting talent after initial recruitment (Thomas, 1990; Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). Research has also found that climate perceptions are associated with both individual job performance (Pritchard & Karasick, 1973; Brown & Leigh, 1996) and organizational performance (Lawler, Hall, & Oldham, 1974). Surveys are often used to assess employees' feelings, perceptions, and experiences, and findings can help inform

policy and practice or highlight areas that require further investigation. The Services employ a variety of surveys to examine numerous facets of climate. These facets can be grouped into three categories: general organizational climate, equal opportunity (EO) climate, and diversity climate.

The MLDC charter tasks the commission with examining existing metrics and identifying new metrics to facilitate the future evaluation and oversight of Department of Defense (DoD) diversity plans. To support this tasking, this issue paper describes

- the facets of climate that are currently measured

- the content of some surveys currently used across the Services

- methods of analysis currently used by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI)

- some alternative measures used by public agencies

- key issues to consider when selecting climate survey measures.

Facets of Climate Currently Measured

The three facets of climate described in the previous section are currently measured by the Services and have implications for the management of diversity. *Organizational climate* refers to employees' shared perceptions or experiences of the policies, practices, and procedures of their workplace and the behaviors that are expected, rewarded, and supported. In the literature on industrial organizational psychology, climate questions are usually framed in terms of what respondents perceive are the behaviors/actions that leaders or managers take with respect to some specific organizational goal. In this issue paper, we use the term *organizational climate* more colloquially, so it encompasses such concepts as morale, trust, leadership, and teamwork. Analyzing such data by demographic group allows leadership to determine

whether certain demographic groups perceive and experience the organization and their individual job situations differently than others.

Interest in measuring *EO climate* emerges directly from EO laws. A positive EO climate describes an environment in which people are not excluded based on such immutable traits as race/ethnicity and gender and in which all receive equal treatment and respect, ensuring that no discrimination or hostile environment exist in the workplace. Prior research has found that, among active-duty personnel, a positive EO climate is associated with positive organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and perceived work group effectiveness (McIntyre, Bartle, Landis, & Dansby, 2002; Estrada, Stetz, & Harbke, 2007), whereas negative EO behaviors (e.g., racist behaviors and sexual discrimination) are associated with lower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work group effectiveness (McIntyre et al., 2002).

Emerging from efforts to measure the EO climate are efforts to measure the *diversity climate*. Prior literature has identified two aspects of diversity climate: an individual aspect, meaning individuals' views and feelings toward people who are different from them, and an organizational dimension, which encompasses leadership's policies and procedures targeted toward women and minorities (Mor-Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998). Diversity climate often encompasses the concept of inclusion—the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as a full member of the group by others in a work system (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999).

Current Efforts to Measure Aspects of Climate

Surveys and Topics. The military uses several surveys to assess various aspects of climate.[1] DEOMI administers two surveys for the Services: the DEOMI Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS), which measures organizational climate dimensions that can affect organizational effectiveness, and the DEOMI Diversity Management Climate Survey (DDMCS), which measures climate factors associated with diversity and inclusion. With the exception of the Air Force, all the Services use these DEOMI surveys. The Air Force uses its own Unit Climate Assessment (UCA) rather than the DEOCS.

In addition to the DEOMI surveys, the Services also administer separate climate surveys and conduct exit interviews. Table 1 lists the surveys and exit interviews that were provided to the MLDC by the Services. The table shows the purpose of the survey, the response format, and the topics measured by each survey. This list excludes other surveys and interviews administered by the Services. [For instance, we believe that each of the Services conducts exit interviews, even though the Coast Guard was the only Service to provide us with an exit interview protocol. However, the extent to which exit interviews are formalized and the data are shared beyond the unit is unclear.]

The table shows that some topics are of interest across the Services, such as leadership, unit cohesion, attachment to the Service, and the EO environment. However, each of these surveys or interview protocols measures these topics in different ways. We are clear to call these *topics* because, except in the case of the DEOMI surveys, we were not provided information regarding whether the survey items under these topics are merged into scales that are reliable and valid for analysis. Survey scales provide a quantitative measurement of an abstract theoretical concept (e.g., leadership, unit cohesion).

Constructs Measured Through DEOMI Surveys. DEOMI provided definitions of the constructs that it measures through the DEOCS (Table 2) and the DDMCS (Table 3). These serve as examples of how diversity-related constructs are defined and measured.

DEOMI Analysis of Survey Data. DEOMI supplied information on how data from the DEOCS are analyzed.[2] First, analysts calculate the averages of each climate factor for the unit and compare them with the overall average for the respective Service and with the overall average for all Services combined. These averages are calculated using DEOCS data from the most-recent six months, which creates a contemporary comparison.

Finer-grained comparisons between complementary groups of respondents across the 13 climate factors are also provided in the DEOCS report. These comparisons are intended to highlight potential climate problems that may exist among subgroups within an organization. Examples of such problems include women reporting lower trust in the organization than men, civilian members reporting lower job satisfaction than their military counterparts, and enlisted members reporting a higher likelihood of witnessing racial discrimination than officers.

Table 4 provides an overview of these comparisons. To facilitate interpreting these subgroup comparisons, the DEOCS uses a color coding scheme (green, yellow, orange, red) that, for each comparison between complementary groups, plots the lower mean of the two groups against the magnitude of the disparity (Cohen's d).[3] Green indicates an organizational strength, and yellow, orange, and red indicate organizational concerns of progressive severity (Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 2008). To help ensure anonymity, no comparisons are provided for any group with fewer than five respondents.

Beyond providing these general indications of organizational climate, the DEOCS can also be used to provide guidance for further exploration of issues revealed by the survey via focus groups and interviews, behavioral observations using a naturalistic approach, or the examination of written records and reports.

In thinking about analysis, it is important to note that prior research has found that the work group to which an

employee belongs has great influence on his or her views of the organizational diversity climate. For instance, a woman who is a member of a work group that gives her more professional and promotional opportunities may view the organizational diversity climate more favorably than one who belongs to a work group that discriminates against women (Mor-Barak et al., 1998). Thus, for the purposes of the military, examining these measures by unit and military occupational specialty (MOS)—not just by Service—may be important.

Alternative Measures

Many studies and organizations measure climate to help understand how diversity is managed within an organization. For the purposes of this issue paper, we present two sources of alternative measures: those identified by DEOMI researchers and those used by two other government agencies—the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Table 1. Surveys and Interview Protocols Provided to MLDC

	Purpose	Response Format	Organizational Climate Topics	Equal Opportunity Climate Topics	Diversity Climate Topics
DEOMI DEOCS	"DEOCS is a management tool that allows leaders to proactively measure critical organizational climate dimensions that can affect organizational effectiveness in both military and civilian contexts. . . . Each organization can include 10 Locally Developed Questions (statements that respondents agree or disagree with using a five-point scale), and five Short Answer Questions" (Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, n.d.).	Likert scale	- Organizational commitment - Trust in the organization - Work group effectiveness - Work group cohesion - Leadership cohesion - Job satisfaction	- Differential command behavior - Positive EO behaviors - Racist behavior - Discrimination (on the basis of sex, age, religion, or race)	None
DEOMI DDMC	"The questionnaire measures climate factors associated with diversity and inclusion. The DDMC allows leaders to proactively assess critical diversity climate dimensions that can impact their organizations" (Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, n.d.).	Likert scale	None	None	- Inclusion - Benefits - Justice
Army Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP), 2009	"The SSMP collects information on a wide range of issues important to the Army, active Army soldiers and their dependent families. Army agencies and commands request the questions that are included in the SSMP. The results of the survey are used by Army policymakers to assess Soldier and family well-being, develop plans, guide and assess policies, and evaluate program operations and outcomes" (U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 2009)	Likert scale	- Job satisfaction - Leadership - Fairness of selections - Attachment to the Army - Unit morale	- EO environment - Sexual harassment and assault	None
Navy ARGUS	Upon milestone events, such as reenlistment, advancement, transfers, or redesignations, the Navy administers ARGUS. ARGUS covers such topics as pay, compensation, benefits, educational opportunities, personal and family life, housing, travel opportunities, professional development, physical fitness, and the mobilization/de-mobilization process.	Likert scale; most responses are framed in terms of propensity to stay in the Navy	- Working relationships (e.g., between the sexes, racial/ethnic groups, officers/enlisted) - Leadership (quality, trust, and support) - Attachment to the Navy - Unit morale - Communication	None	None
Air Force UCA Survey	The Air Force has administered the UCA since the early 1980s. It allows each individual major command to add up to five questions, and it also provides the local unit commander with the ability to add up to ten locally developed questions. Each EO office conducts personal interviews to validate the survey. Their recommendations to the commander may include targeted training, conflict resolution, and other elements required to meet the needs of a particular unit.	Likert scale	- Cohesion and pride - Motivation and morale - Supervisory support	- Perceived discrimination - Overt discrimination - Command EO policy	- Diversity management
Marine Corps Climate Assessment Survey (MCCAS), 2008	The MCCAS collects data to evaluate existing and proposed Marine Corps personnel policies, procedures, and programs in the areas of EO and sexual harassment.	Dichotomous response (yes/no) and two open-ended questions	- Unit cohesion - Professional development - Satisfaction with the Marine Corps - Career progression - Accountability - Mentoring	- Leadership for EO - Use of the internal resolution system - EO complaints - Discipline - Presence of extremist groups/gangs - Discrimination behaviors - Gender-related experiences - Sexual harassment and sexual assault	- Diversity (awareness/leadership support)

Alternative Measures Proposed by DEOMI. According to DEOMI researchers, there are next-generation diversity and inclusion metrics that are not currently included in current diversity surveys. These dimensions include microaggressions and diversity competencies. Subtle forms of discrimination are referred to as *microaggressions*, which are instances of intentional or unintentional brief verbal, nonverbal, or behavioral communication that is hostile, derogatory, or negative (Sue et al., 2007). This form of discrimination can be measured with situational judgment tasks, vignettes, and/or Likert scale items, such as, "Has anyone ever said the following? 'How did you get promoted?' or 'Are you sure this was your idea?.'"

Many effective diversity initiatives are focused on developing skills and competencies that afford leaders the opportunity to leverage the knowledge, skills, and abilities contained within the workforce to accomplish mission success and growth. Framing diversity in terms of competencies communicates to an organization that diversity does not apply to one group or cohort but rather to the entire workforce. Therefore, the identification and definition of key leader diversity competencies is necessary. A self-report or a 360-degree survey facilitates assessment of a leader's diversity competencies.

Examples of Measures Used by Other Government Agencies. Table 5 shows examples of climate measures used by GAO and the FAA. GAO uses four "people performance" measures to assess its human capital management: organizational climate, staff development, staff utilization (see Table 5), and leadership. For the FAA, Naff and Thompson (2006) investigated the impact of teams on the diversity climate (see Table 5).

Issues to Consider When Selecting Climate Measures
Several factors determine the quality of survey-generated climate measures. Two key factors are validity and reliability. A measure has validity if it properly represents the theoretical construct it is meant to measure. A measure has reliability if repeated measurements under the same circumstances tend to produce the same results. Not all measures are valid and reliable. In fact, research found that one of the best-known general measures of organizational climate both lacked validity and was not a consistent measurement device (Patterson et al., 2005). In addition to validity and reliability, other attributes determine whether a climate measure is appropriate for guiding policy. One of these is the extent to which the measure is aligned with the goals, mission, and priorities of the organization.

Table 2. DEOCS Climate Factor Scales and Descriptions

Scale	Description
EO/EEO-Related Scales	
Sexual harassment and discrimination	Perceptions of how extensively sexual harassment and discrimination (such as gender-insensitive language, sexist jokes, and sexually suggestive language) are thought to occur within the respondent's unit
Differential command behavior	Perceptions of differential treatment on the basis of race/ethnicity
Positive EO behaviors	Perceptions of how well majority and minority members get along in the unit and are integrated in the unit's functioning. This scale addresses how frequently positive actions occur.
Racist behaviors	Perceptions of overt racist behaviors, such as name-calling and telling racist jokes
Age discrimination	Perceptions of whether older people are discriminated against because of their age
Religious discrimination	Perceptions of discrimination based on religion
Disability discrimination	Perceptions of instances of discrimination due to disabilities or handicaps
Organizational Climate–Related Scales	
Organizational commitment	Degree to which members "bond" with the organization
Trust in the organization	Whether people perceive the organization as a place where people trust and care for each other
Work group effectiveness	Perception of how productive and effective the unit is in accomplishing its mission instead
Work group cohesion	How well groups work together, cooperate on projects, and care for and trust each other
Leadership cohesion	Perception of how leaders above work together and trust each other
Job satisfaction	Degree of satisfaction with current job

NOTE: DEOMI refers to the organizational climate scales as "organizational effectiveness" scales.

GAO has identified nine key attributes of successful performance measures; they are listed in Table 6.

Conclusion

The Services employ a variety of surveys to examine general organizational climate, equal EO climate, and diversity climate. With the exception of the Air Force, the Services also use DEOMI surveys for this purpose. The surveys explore some common topics, such as leadership, unit cohesion, attachment to Service, and the EO environment. However, each of these surveys measures the topics in different ways.

In addition, DEOMI notes that, although it is currently unmeasured, leaders' use of diversity competencies could possibly be measured. Research has shown that, to be effective for guiding policy, measures must be statistically valid and reliable. Climate measures are also more likely to drive the desired behavior if they are linked to organizational missions and goals.

Table 3. DDMCS Items

Construct & Definition	Survey Items
Inclusion: Reflects respondents' perceptions of how well the organization recognizes and integrates the attributes of the workforce into the work environment	My immediate supervisor is able to recognize my strengths. My immediate supervisor offers an environment in which I feel comfortable sharing my ideas. I can depend on my immediate supervisor to consider my suggestions.
Benefits: Reflects the degree to which the organization recognizes the value of the workforce	Diverse viewpoints add to mission success. An environment of mutual respect and integrity enhances critical thinking. A workforce with different backgrounds and approaches leads to the creation of better processes and routines.
Justice: An indicator of how people perceive the organization as following fair personnel practices and policies	I am well informed about career enhancement opportunities (education). My organization fosters an environment of mutual respect and integrity. In my organization, key assignments are determined by merit.

Source: DEOMI, n.d.

Table 4. DEOMI Disparity Index

SOURCE: Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 2009.

Notes

[1]Periodically, DMDC administers the Status of Forces Survey (SOFS) to personnel across the Services. SOFS has been administered to the active, reserve, and civilian components. The 2008 SOFS measured the attitudes and perceptions of active-duty members. During winter 2008, the survey was released to Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force members, excluding the National Guard and reserves. The online survey measured 17 topic areas, including mentoring, overall satisfaction, retention intention, perceived readiness, stress, tempo, permanent change-of-station moves, and Military One-Source. DMDC also has conducted special surveys focused on EO issues; examples are the 2005 Workplace and Equal Opportunity Survey of Active-Duty Members and the 2006 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active-Duty Members.

[2]Data from the DDMCS are analyzed in a similar way.

[3]Cohen's *d* measures the difference between two means divided by a standard deviation for the data.

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Table 5. Examples of Climate Measures from GAO and the FAA

Construct	Response Scale	Survey Items
Staff utilization (Government Accountability Office, 2009)	Likert scale	During the last 12 months, how often did each of the following occur? • My job made good use of my skills and abilities. • GAO provided me with opportunities to do challenging work. • In general, I was utilized effectively.
Model work environment success (Naff & Thompson, 2006)	Likert scale	To what extent has the FAA done a good job of creating • an environment where discrimination is not tolerated • an environment where sexual harassment is not tolerated • a productive and hospitable place to work • an environment in which all employees have an opportunity to broaden their knowledge of the FAA • an environment in which all employees have the opportunity to participate in developmental activities • an environment in which all employees get the chance to fully contribute to meeting their organization's missions?
Eliminating a hostile work environment (Naff & Thompson, 2006)	Likert scale	Complaints about discrimination and harassment are not taken seriously by management where I work. Sexual harassment is a problem in my workplace. Jokes about women, people of color, etc. are common in my workplace. To be a "part of the crowd" in my workplace, I have to go along with jokes about people of color, women, etc.

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Table 6. Nine Key Attributes of Successful Performance Measures

Attribute	Definition	Potentially Adverse Consequence of Not Meeting the Attribute
Linkage	The measure is aligned with the division and agency-wide goals and mission and is clearly communicated throughout the organization.	Behaviors and incentives created by the measure do not support achieving the division or agency-wide goals and mission.
Clarity	The measure is clearly stated, and the name and definition are consistent with the methodology used to calculate the measure.	Data could be confusing and misleading to users.
Measurable target	The measure has a numerical goal.	One cannot tell whether performance is meeting expectations.
Objectivity	The measure is reasonably free of significant bias or manipulation.	Performance assessments may be systematically over- or understated
Reliability	The measure produces the same result under similar conditions.	Reported performance data are inconsistent and add to uncertainty.
Core program activities	Measures cover the activities that an entity is expected to perform to support the intent of the program.	The manager may have to sort through redundant, costly-to-obtain information that does not add value.
Limited overlap	Measures provide new information that goes beyond data provided by other measures.	The manager may have to sort through redundant, costly-to-obtain information that does not add value.
Balance	Balance exists when a suite of measures ensures that an organization's various priorities are covered.	A lack of balance could create skewed incentives when measures overemphasize some goals.
Government-wide priorities	Each measure covers a priority, such as quality, timeliness, or cost of service.	A program's overall success is at risk if all priorities are not addressed.

SOURCE: Government Accountability Office, 2009.