

The QPTB recently underwent an initial active-duty pilot that undeniably led to a more fruitful discussion. A Center for Army Lessons Learned handbook titled *People First Task Force: Integrating People and Training—Considerations and Concepts* further describes these concepts and other tools that leaders can use to improve the integration of people and training.

Implement Command Climate Assessment Reform

The proposals thus far have been intended to enable a meaningful dialogue on climate assessment feedback and provide a tether to evaluative mechanisms.

We must constantly evolve our efforts to address climate. Doing so better equips leaders to understand and inculcate prevention, and ensures they have the tools to respond appropriately to support those within their unit. We believe that the success of these initiatives is contingent on climate assessment reform that also enables review longitudinally. Importantly, we conceptualize climate assessment mechanisms as *tools* in a *process*. The tools, which include the department-standard Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) mainly, should be augmented by periodic checks (e.g., pulse surveys, sensing sessions) as part of a larger systemic process (e.g., MEC, QPTB, leader counseling) to drive change. How we measure climate matters, and again, the Army lacks a trusted measurement tool for organizational climate. There are things we can do internally and things we must continue to work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense to accomplish. Some of our proposals are under implementation now.

First, we have proposed adjustments to regulatory guidance (as shown in the table). Army Regulation 600-20, Appendix E (see figure, page 18), which describes intended survey audiences, is largely not adhered to. For example, many are surprised to hear that the only organization that is supposed to administer a climate assessment to its entirety is a company.

Table. Summary of Proposed Climate Assessment Reforms

- Update Army Regulation 600-20, Appendix E.
- Encourage localized policy letters to provide sufficient time to complete assessments and increase sample size.
- Enforce commander-to-commander counseling on assessment feedback and action plans.
- Enforce leader-to-soldier out brief of assessment feedback and action plans.
- Change assessment timing to occur before changes of command.
- Expand access to prior command climate assessments for the incoming commander.
- Add climate-related language to the OER and NCOER with an emphasis on the rater and senior rater narratives.
- Work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense on parallel reform.

(Table by authors)

Higher echelons of command are supposed to only administer the survey to subordinate command teams and staff elements. Units commonly distribute surveys beyond these parameters, leading to survey fatigue and noisy data that dilute attempts to establish meaningful thresholds.¹⁹ The thresholds will never be reliable or accommodate a comparison between like units if regulatory guidance is not followed uniformly.

If the premise is accepted that the arbiters of command climate exist generally at the battalion and below, then regulatory guidance must reflect more appropriate survey audiences (e.g., staff sergeant and above for battalions; every soldier for companies). The audiences for brigade-sized units and above should remain consistent with current regulatory guidance. This requires enforcement. Subsequently, localized policies should establish parameters for assessments that include expectations of providing sufficient time to complete assessments, increasing sample sizes, ensuring out briefs up and down the chain of command, and expectations of reporting any delays in the production of assessment results. There are examples of this already occurring (e.g., III Corps Policy Letter #19, “Command Climate Assessments and Action Plans,” 29 April 2021).²⁰

Next, we have recommended changing the timing of the DEOCS assessments to lead and not lag

E-2. Requirements and explanation of terms

See table E-1.

Command level	Frequency (days)	Requirements
Company or equivalent	RA: 60 days and annually thereafter USAR: 120 days and annually thereafter	1) Inform the members of the organization of the upcoming assessment 2) Survey for entire organization (minus leadership team) 3) Use other assessment tools, as needed 4) Prepare CCA summary and action plan 5) Brief to commander or supervisor at next higher level (no later than 30 days (two MUTA (60 days)—4 for USAR) after receipt of survey results) 6) Conduct formal feedback session(s) with organization (same as requirement 5) 7) MEO professional enters data into MEO database (no later than 35 days (three MUTA (90 days)—4 for USAR) after requirements 5 and 6)
Battalion or equivalent	RA: 60 days and annually thereafter USAR: 120 days and annually thereafter	1) Inform the members of the organization of the upcoming assessment 2) Survey for battalion staff element and company command teams 3) DRS roll-up of subordinate organization (companies or equivalent) survey responses and comparison of historical data 4) Use other assessment tools, as needed 5) Prepare CCA summary and action plan 6) Brief to commander or supervisor at next higher level (no later than 30 days (two MUTA (60 days)—4 for USAR) days after receipt of survey results) 7) Conduct formal feedback session(s) with organization (same as requirement 6) 8) MEO professional enters data into MEO database (no later than 35 days (three MUTA (90 days)—4 for USAR) after requirements 6 and 7) 9) Monitor compliance of subordinate organizations

(Figure from Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy* [2020])

Figure. Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, Appendix E

a commander's evaluation, providing one of many inputs to that evaluation. The climate assessments would be amplified by periodic pulse surveys offset from DEOCS. Additional surveys, such as the IRC's recommended "pulse," would be sequenced at intervals between DEOCS and on an as-needed basis.²¹ These unit-driven assessments would provide an azimuth check, enabling course corrections as needed while demonstrating to soldiers the importance of their feedback and resolve to address concerns.

The 2013 National Defense Authorization Act mandates conducting a climate assessment within 120 days of assuming command.²² This led the department to expand the use of DEOCS as a baseline.²³ However, while new commanders receive feedback on their organization's climate, that climate is either a by-product of the environment established by their predecessor or a confusing hybrid with their own. This dynamic exacerbates command climate change denial.

It also misses a feedback mechanism that would be useful in evaluating commanders' potential for future service and addressing climate-related issues through an

ongoing dialogue (e.g., Did a commander "move the needle"? Did the higher headquarters assist an overwhelmed commander?). Addressing these questions should be the focus of a renewed emphasis on commander-to-commander counseling that includes climate assessment feedback. It would be better to learn about red flags earlier in an officer's career and coach or develop that officer instead of having him or her learn about it during a command assessment program. Officer evaluation reports, and perhaps noncommissioned officer evaluation reports, should also include such language in the sections most relevant to promotion boards.

The timeliness of feedback in the current model is also too late to assist incoming commanders with establishing organizational priorities. Waiting for feedback several months in, as is the current practice, mortgages critical time. Not only should they have access to the most recent climate assessment, but we should also expand their access to at least the past five years' data, which current business rules prevent.²⁴ This access would better enable the incoming commander to understand an organization's culture. While there are numerous characterizations of what

constitutes the difference between climate and culture, a simple explanation is to consider climate as temporal, whereas culture extends over multiple commanders.

Lastly, while we can advance these changes as an institution, we must continue to work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) to better represent the Army's needs in future DEOCS increments, shaping its development and implementation. We envision such efforts to include, at a minimum, exploring novel approaches to increase survey accessibility to soldiers and gaining expanded access to the Army's data to respond to senior leader inquiries. Aggregated protective risk scores, for example, might drive decisions on future resource allocations. We must also help develop a suite of tools to assist commanders build viable action plans. The Army's Center for the Army Profession and Leadership has already done tremendous work in this area with their "Command Climate Navigator."²⁵

Conclusion

We began this article by describing a thought experiment, and we will end with a counterfactual. What if we maintain the status quo? We believe that failing to place the requisite premium on organizational climate will impede our critical effort to prevent harmful behaviors. We will subsequently sustain a hollowness in our readiness assessments and risk our ability to attract future generations of soldiers. The stakes are high and

require a comprehensive approach beyond the recommendations discussed here.

We value results-driven leaders and, like all large organizations, are inherently resistant to change. We expect cynics to bemoan the connection between climate and readiness as if it is zero-sum. Again, command climate change denial takes many forms. We hear these assertions already, but we suspect this is because of the ambiguity in how soldiers and leaders interpret "People First." Simply put, "People First" means building cohesive teams that are highly trained, disciplined, and fit.²⁶ It does not mean "me first," but it requires humble leaders to recognize the vital linkage between competence and a command climate. People are the antecedent condition in any readiness construct—and they are our greatest strength. Otherwise stated, we cannot win without an enduring focus on them.

Our humble prescription in this article is to offer a series of reforms that elevate climate in keystone processes to drive changes in behavior. Initial feedback on the MEC and QPTB is positive. We recognize these ideas are not a panacea, but they can drive changes in behavior by establishing a tether to our evaluative mechanisms. We hope that they are met equally with commitment and resolve. ■

The views expressed in this article are the authors' and not the views of the United States Army or Department of Defense.

Notes

Epigraph. Christine E. Wormuth, "Message from the Secretary of the Army to the Force," Army. mil, 8 February 2022, accessed 26 August 2022, https://www.army.mil/article/253814/message_from_the_secretary_of_the_army_to_the_force#:~:text=We%20should%20strive%20to%20connect,important%20indicator%20of%20our%20readiness.

1. We thank Lt. Col. John Gabriel, who shared his thoughts on the mission essential task proficiency, climate, and endurance during large-scale combat operations over a series of phone conversations in November–December 2021.

2. Wormuth, "Message from the Secretary of the Army." Wormuth describes the reduction of harmful behaviors as "integral to sustaining a positive command climate at scale." There is also a significant body of literature reinforcing this relationship. See Dennis McGurk et al., "Destructive and Supportive Leadership in Extremis: Relationships with Post-Traumatic Stress During Combat Deployments," *Military Behavioral Health* 2, no. 3 (2014): 240–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2014.963765>; James

J. McGuffin et al., "Military and Veteran Help-Seeking Behaviors: Role of Mental Health Stigma and Leadership," *Military Psychology* 33, no. 5 (2021): 332–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2021.1962181>; Amanda L. Adrian et al., "Integrating New Soldiers: The Role of Leaders and Unit Members," *Military Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2018): 131–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2018.1425064>.

3. Center for a New American Security, "Virtual Fireside Chat: Honorable Christine Wormuth," YouTube video, 8 February 2022, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.cnas.org/events/virtual-fireside-chat-honorable-christine-wormuth-secretary-of-the-army>.

4. Jody Daniels, "Changing Culture: Moving from Metrics to Readiness," U.S. Army Reserve, 5 April 2022, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.usar.army.mil/Portals/98/Documents/CAR/Changing%20Culture%20FINAL%2004052022.pdf?ver=Kz91X-Qs2nuVg-IrGeqLRQ%3D%3D>.

5. Rachel Clare et al., *Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) Redesign: Phase 1 Overview Report* (Alexandria, VA: Office of People Analytics, October 2012), accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.opa.mil/research-analysis/quality-of-work-life/>

[workplace-climate/defense-organizational-climate-survey-deocs-redesign-phase-1-overview-report/](#).

6. *Hard Truths and the Duty to Change: Recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2 July 2021), accessed 26 August 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jul/02/2002755437/-1/-1/0/IRC-FULL-REPORT-FINAL-1923-7-1-21.PDF/IRC-FULL-REPORT-FINAL-1923-7-1-21.PDF>; Christopher Swecker et al., *Report of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee [IRC]* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 6 November 2020), accessed 26 August 2022, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/forthoodreview/2020-12-03-FHIRC_report_redacted.pdf.

7. Everett Spain, Gautam Mukunda, and Archie Bates, "The Battalion Commander Effect," *Parameters* 51, no. 3 (2021): 101–14, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol51/iss3/10>. There is a significant body of literature on a leader's central role in creating a healthy work environment to drive organizational success. We also acknowledge there are examples of competent leaders who displayed toxic attributes and were able to achieve results. Recent research suggests that battalion commanders have an extensive influence in retaining high-performing officers and on the retention and attrition of their officers altogether. This influence, positive or negative, has a cascading impact on future formations.

8. Louis D. Brandeis, *Other People's Money and How the Banks Use It* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914), 92.

9. Center for a New American Security, "Virtual Fireside Chat: Honorable Christine Wormuth."

10. Paul Boyce, "Time, Trust are Teamwork Foundations for FORSCOM's Monthly Training Days," Army.mil, 8 December 2020, accessed 26 August 2022, https://www.army.mil/article/241497/time_trust_are_teamwork_foundations_for_forscoms_monthly_training_days.

11. Wormuth, "Message from the Secretary of the Army to the Force."

12. Gen. James McConville, quoted in Michelle Tan, "McConville: Army Stronger After 'Challenging' Time," Association of the U.S. Army, 12 October 2021, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.USA.org/news/mcconville-army-stronger-after-challenging-time>.

13. Jeremiah Gipson, "Mission Essential Task Zero: Place People First," From the Green Notebook, 15 February 2021, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2021/02/15/mission-essential-task-zero-place-people-first/>.

14. "Protective Factors," Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.defenseculture.mil/Assessment-to-Solutions/Factor-Products/Protective-Factors/>; for more on protective factors, see "The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html>; Clare et al., *Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) Redesign: Phase 1 Overview Report*, 115–95.

15. Field Manual 7-0, *Training* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], June 2021), 3-6, accessed 26 August 2022, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN32648-FM_7-0-000-WEB-1.pdf.

16. For an excellent overview of modern QTB dynamics, see Joseph E. Escandon, "Better Training Begins without PowerPoint,"

Armor (Spring 2021), 19–25, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.benning.army.mil/armor/eArmor/content/issues/2021/Spring/2Escandon21.pdf>.

17. For more information on the CR2C, see "Commander's Ready and Resilient Council [CR2C]," Army.mil, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://home.army.mil/apg/index.php/about/CR2C>.

18. For more information on the CRRT, see "Army Publishes Guidance on the Use of the Commander's Risk Reduction Toolkit [CRRT]," Army.mil, 3 May 2021, accessed 26 August 2022, https://www.army.mil/article/245912/army_publishes_guidance_on_the_use_of_the_commanders_risk_reduction_toolkit.

19. "DEOCS: Frequently Asked Questions" (Patrick Space Force Base, FL: Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 28 April 2021), accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.tecom.marines.mil/Portals/90/SpecialStaff/Equal%20Opportunity%20Advisor/OPA-DEOCS-SurveyAdminFAQs-20210429.pdf>. Former versions of DEOCS thresholds were admittedly arbitrary.

20. "III Armored Corps/Fort Hood Policy Letters," U.S. Army Fort Hood, accessed 1 September 2022, <https://home.army.mil/hood/index.php/about/iii-corps-fort-hood-policy-letters>.

21. The pulse survey stems from IRC recommendation 3.7a. According to the IRC report, the "survey is not meant to replace the DEOCS, but rather to supplement it as a new means for leaders to conduct 'spot checks' with an on-the-ground look for timely action specific to sexual harassment and sexual assault. The pulse survey should be conducted between required administrations of the DEOCS." *Hard Truths and the Duty to Change*, 48.

22. Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 24 July 2020), 140, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/images/pdf/Policy/600-20%20Army%20Command%20Policy.pdf>. Subsequent climate assessments were directed to occur at least annually to prevent and respond to sexual assaults. AR 600-20 requires commanders to conduct a climate survey within "60 days and annually thereafter." Evidence suggests command climate surveys are not administered as prescribed by Appendix E.

23. "DEOCS: Talking Paper" (Patrick Space Force Base, FL: Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, March 2022), accessed 26 August 2022, https://www.defenseculture.mil/Portals/90/Documents/A25/OPA-DEOCS_Talking_Paper_20220328.pdf?ver=oFA31YZYg7811uLs4QyYw%3D%3D.

24. According to regulatory guidance, "The Military Equal Opportunity professional will secure copies of all command climate assessment executive summaries, action plans and results will be stored in a controlled container for 5 years." AR 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, 139.

25. "Command Climate Navigator," Center for the Army Profession and Leadership, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://capl.army.mil/Developing-Leaders/command-climate-navigator/ccn.php#/>.

26. *Posture of the United States Army, Before the Comm. on Armed Services, United States Senate*, 117th Cong., 1st Sess. (15 June 2021) (statements of the Honorable Christine E. Wormuth, Secretary of the Army, and Gen. James C. McConville, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army), accessed 26 August 2022, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20210615%20-%20HON%20Wormuth%20and%20GEN%20McConville%20-%20SASC%20Army%20Posture%20\(Cleared\)](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20210615%20-%20HON%20Wormuth%20and%20GEN%20McConville%20-%20SASC%20Army%20Posture%20(Cleared)).

Letter to the Editor

Army University Press
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Dear Editor:

Although I agree with the concepts put forth in "Embracing the Need for Command Climate Change," I found there to be a greater issue.

I have discovered that no matter how bad the results of command climate surveys taken over substantial periods of time and with multiple agencies are, if the leader (in my case the senior civilian leader) is repeatedly singled out in writing and the senior leadership does nothing about it, there is the greater problem. Some senior civilian leaders get results at any cost and the senior leadership looks the other way, despite what the Soldiers and civilians have pointed out in multiple command climate surveys. As I articulated to the Secretary of the Army at the time, he valued perceived competence over character.

This, I think is a greater problem. I think that until the Army assigns accountability, even for its senior civilian leaders, it diminishes any progress made to achieve a good command climate.

Thank you.

Don Saio
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Military Personnel and Quality of Life

(Recipient of the "2015 Secretary of the Army Award for Diversity and Leadership" and led an organization to be named a "Top Workplace" by the Washington Post, the only organization recognized within the DoD)

Letter to the Editor from the Hon. Don Saio, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Military Personnel and Quality of Life