HOW ARMY RESEARCH INSTITUTE SURVEYS SUPPORT ARMY TRANSFORMATION

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Introduction

The transformation of the Army to the Objective Force, and the personnel transformation that supports it, will involve changes in the way the Army handles areas such as recruitment, retention, job assignments, training, performance, and readiness. To fine-tune the evolving process, determine how soldiers are adapting to the changing environment, and ensure success, the Army needs a continuous feedback loop between the field and Army decisionmakers. Attitude and opinion surveys conducted by the Army Research Institute (ARI) for the Behavioral and Social Sciences are a critical tool in providing this feedback.

This article addresses the advantages of using surveys, how surveys use emerging technologies, and how survey results are applied.

Survey Advantages

Attitude and opinion surveys can provide valuable information because survey data meet important criteria. Surveys can be designed to provide data that are quantifiable, valid, reliable, objective, comparable, replicable, capable of being generalized, and capable of indicating trends. As such, surveys provide the Army with a highly cost-efficient means of assessing issues that impact soldiers and their dependents.

Using New Technologies

The personnel portion of the Army's transformation puts strong emphasis on streamlining and using the Web for personnel business processes. In line with this emphasis, ARI has developed tools for conducting automated surveys using PCs, the Internet, and a Web site maintained by Army Knowledge Online (AKO). As soon as soldiers gain full access to the Internet and use AKO regularly, the Army will be able to increase use of the Internet to conduct surveys. Significant economies can be realized in terms of both time and money for distribution, administration, and return of surveys, as well as for analysis and reporting of results.

Automated surveys will also decrease the burden on individual respondents. Currently, ARI uses the *Sample Survey of Military Personnel*, an omnibus survey, to consolidate topics identified by proponent agencies and activities in the Army into one survey, thus reducing survey proliferation. Automating surveys will reduce the footprint even further. For example, the Army will be able to conduct shorter surveys because surveys can be designed to automatically direct individuals past topics that are not relevant to them. In addition, the use of automated surveys will eliminate scanning of survey response sheets and will facilitate faster data analyses.

Using Survey Results

In the past, Army sponsors or proponents, special panels, committees, working groups, and senior Army leaders used survey findings for a variety of purposes. The following are some examples:

• Supporting requests for improving retirement benefits,
• Determining policy changes needed to reduce the number of command declinations,
• Justifying required housing square footage,
• Determining the need for dissemination of information (e.g., for clarification of personnel policies), and
• Determining reasons for joining or leaving the Army.

In the future, with respect to the Army transformation, survey results will be used for the following:

• Monitoring current attitudes and perceptions of soldiers and their families,
• Tracking soldier perceptions of and reactions to transformation actions and policies,
• Identifying problem areas, and
• Providing input for solutions.

Survey areas that ARI will monitor relating to the transformation and its impact include morale, motivation, training needs, career goals, satisfaction with job assignments, and assessments of well-being and readiness.

Conclusion

ARI surveys can help ensure the success of the Army's transformation by providing timely information that Army leaders need to make informed decisions. As the transformation progresses, surveys will take advantage of Web technology. This will result in surveys that are less time-consuming, more efficient, and easier for respondents to use. And, they will give soldiers the opportunity to "tell it like it is" to the chain of command—all the way to the top.

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