

**BENCHMARKING MILITARY ATTITUDE SURVEYS:**

**ATTITUDES AS LEVERS TO RETENTION**

**PRELIMINARY REPORT**

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**CAPT URSULA LOVE**  
**LCDR SHANE LATIMER**  
**MS JUSTINE GREIG**

*Directorate of Strategic Personnel Planning & Research  
Australian Defence Force*

Most military organizations conduct regular attitude and opinion surveys with the aim of collecting information, which will provide the basis for the development of personnel policies and enhancement of personnel management practices. One of the main topics, which receives considerable attention in the attitudinal survey literature, is retention behaviour. The long-term goal of this research is to further our understanding of the attitudinal factors as levers to retention by benchmarking military attitudinal surveys. Of specific interest to this research are the attitudinal factors of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and morale.

The objectives of this research are: to document the attitudinal measures used by the participating militaries to date, namely the USA, Canada, UK, and Australia; where possible, to benchmark 'key' attitudinal indicators as they relate to retention, and, to develop a data dictionary or warehouse of instruments.

This paper presents outcomes to date from the first phase of the study currently underway. Two templates were developed for the purposes of collating the survey information and enabling comparisons to be made. The study has highlighted a number of methodological considerations and to illustrate these, three attitude and opinion surveys are discussed.

The outcomes of the study to date highlight the differences in measurement and focus not only across participating nations and services, but also within services. The findings also indicate that there may be scope to make recommendations regarding issues relating to retention behaviour that deserve a greater focus. For example, while Australia has identified Organisational Commitment as a key indicator, it appears to have limited emphasis elsewhere. Conversely, other countries have further refined career-related measures, which may be deserving of greater focus in nations such as Australia.

*Contact:*

Campbell Park Offices

CP2-5-122

Canberra, ACT 2603

AUSTRALIA

Tel: +61-2-62663242

Fax: +61-2-62662982

Email: [tonyursula@optushome.com.au](mailto:tonyursula@optushome.com.au)

# **BENCHMARKING MILITARY ATTITUDE SURVEYS:**

## **ATTITUDES AS LEVERS TO RETENTION**

### **PRELIMINARY REPORT**

#### **Introduction**

Most military organizations are facing increasing retention problems and, in order to understand the factors impacting such behaviour, are focussing their research efforts on the examination of relationships between particular attitudes and retention behaviour. Traditionally, attitude and opinion surveys have been the primary methodology used in such research and the findings have provided necessary data to support and develop personnel policy and improve personnel management practices. This research programme proposes to benchmark military attitudinal surveys in order to further understanding of attitudes as levers to retention. The Australian Defence Forces is conducting the research, with a research grant provided by the US Navy (Grant No. N00014-01-1-1090; Australian Research Grant #8). Nations participating in the International Applied Military Psychology Symposium (IAMPS) have been invited to contribute, and the study has commenced with collecting attitudinal survey reports from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia.

#### **Objectives**

The specific objectives of this research are as follows. Firstly, to document the attitudinal measures used by the participating militaries. Secondly, so far as possible benchmark 'key' attitudinal indicators as they relate to retention. Thirdly, to develop a data dictionary or data warehouse of instruments, providing the opportunity to conduct or develop collaborative research programmes.

This paper reports on the first part of this work, including:

- a. A background summary;
- b. Information on surveys received to date;
- c. Methodological issues, including a template for comparing the instruments;
- d. Comparison of three instruments; and
- e. Further recommendations for how to optimise the data collected in the study.

#### **Background**

There are three phases to this study. Phase one involves each participating nation providing their attitude and opinion survey instruments and reported results for the period 1996 – 2001.

In phase two, the instruments and reported findings of the surveys are reviewed for the purposes of documenting the attitudinal measures being used by each participating military organization and to benchmark the findings, if possible. This benchmarking process does not involve direct comparison of items across countries, as it was assumed there would be few identical item pools. Instead it is hypothesised that a within-country, or time-series approach is appropriate. 'Movements' in key attitudinal indicators for each country/service would be compared cross-nationally. This would indicate which country/services are improving or declining in areas important to retention, such as organisational commitment or job

satisfaction (Timmins, 1999). While beyond phase 2, ultimately, this would provide the basis to nations to investigate which personnel programmes may account for such trends; that is, uncover those personnel initiatives which may best assist with retention.

The third phase relates to the development of a data dictionary or data warehouse of instruments. Collation of items and scales under constructs will be prepared, providing the scope to make recommendations for common items and information for other countries on what items are available/used. A list of instruments will also be prepared, for reference by other nations.

### **Instruments and Reports Provided to Date**

Instruments and reports provided for this research include:

- US Navy-wide Personnel Survey – Reports from 1996 to 1998, and 2000 (data only)
- RAF Continuous General Attitude Survey (CGAS) - August 2000 report (based on aggregated data from November 1999 and February 2000)
- Australian Defence Attitude Survey 2001
- UK Army Continuous Attitude Survey Serving Personnel August 2001
- US DOD 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel – Preliminary Results and First-Term Personnel Less Satisfied with Military Life Than Those in Mid-Career.
- CF Quality of Working Life Survey 2001 (Being cleared for provision)

Several characteristics of the surveys were compared, with particular emphasis on composition of sample or population administered; definitions, if applicable, of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and morale; questionnaire items; reported levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and morale; and respondent response rates. This comparison was conducted against the following methodological issues.

### **Methodological Issues**

This research highlighted a number of methodological issues, which need to be considered in the light of their impact on the desired outcomes. Such issues include:

- Item comparability even within country/service is very limited due to the survey instruments varying greatly in item content.
- Data available covers the period from 1996 to 2001, however not all surveys cover the entire timeframe.
- Administrations vary from quarterly to annually.
- Cross-national comparisons are vulnerable to differences in sample design.
- Longitudinal data is available and reported on in some cases, but not others.
- Delays in receiving the necessary instruments and related reports are impacting the deadlines for this research.

Against these issues, two templates were developed, to contrast the information. A Sample template, allowing tabulation of the sample characteristics, response rates and year of survey was applied to the data, followed by a Topic template, illustrating the key indicators or themes surveyed by each nation/service.

An overview of this information for three instruments, and discussion of these themes as they compare and contrast, is provided below.

## Review of Reported Findings by Survey and Country

### 1. 2001 Defence Attitude Survey (Australia)

#### *Overview of Survey*

The Australian Defence Attitude Survey, which is an amalgamation of previously existing single Service attitude and opinion surveys, measures a number of attitudes such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction for all Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel, including civilians. The aims of this survey are threefold: to underpin personnel policy and planning, both centrally and for the single Services/Australian Public Service (APS); to provide information on organisational climate; and finally to provide ongoing measurement for the Defence Matters scorecard.

The survey has been administered twice in its revised format, firstly in July-August 1999 and again in March-April 2001. It is intended that the survey will be administered every 18 months to thirty percent of Defence personnel, with interim “quarterly attitude survey ‘dips’ of approximately 10% sample size” (Summers, 2001). This will enable feedback at shorter intervals on key Defence issues.

#### *Description of Sample*

This study reviews the data and findings reported in the 2001 report and focuses on uniformed personnel only. The 2001 report also discusses changes in attitudes and opinions, where appropriate, from the 1999 administration.

The 2001 administration comprised parallel questionnaires, one for each Service. The questionnaires, paper and pencil scannable forms, were mailed to a random sample of uniformed personnel at their work addresses. The sample was stratified by Service and rank and generally comprised 30% of each rank. Unlike the 1999 sample, recruits and officer cadets were excluded. The key characteristics for the 2001 survey are described in the following table.

**Table 1.** Sample Characteristics 2001 Defence Attitude Survey

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Total</b>
Random Sample Size	3953	6880	4050	14883
Population Representation				30%
Adjusted return rate by service	52%	50.7%	60.9%	
Total respondents	1788	3314	2307	7409
Other Ranks	66%	76%	73%	72.5%
Officers	34%	24%	27%	27.5%
Male	85.8%	90.2%	86.5%	88%
Female	14.2%	9.8%	13.5%	12%

The average length of service for each Service was approximately 14 years.

#### *Major Survey Topics*

The questionnaire contains three sections, covering Personal Details, Attitudes and Beliefs and Comments.

The following issues are explored within the Attitudes and Beliefs section:

Immediate Supervisor Leadership	Conditions
Senior Staff Leadership	Family and Career Intention
Senior Defence Leadership	Personal Performance
Career Management & Postings	Performance Culture
Change	Information
Your Job and Service Life	Morale

Respondents were asked to rate a number of items using a five-point scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

### ***Findings***

The key issues explored by the 2001 survey are similar to those examined in the 1999 administration. The items are similar for each of the parallel questionnaires, though some of the terminology is tailored to the specific Service. Thus, any changes in the organisational indicators from 1999 to 2001 are reported, as well as comparisons between the individual Services for 2001. The structure of the survey also allows for the continued maintenance and monitoring of single Service measures.

Factor analysis of the 2001 data confirmed that the 1999 and 2001 surveys constituted a similar factor structure between the two questionnaires. The report discusses sixteen organisational indicators, which resulted from the principal components analysis of the data. Thirteen of these are statistically derived factors and three are individual items. Job satisfaction and organisational commitment are the statistically derived factors, which are of interest to this study. There are two indicators for morale, personal morale and unit morale, both of which are individual items.

#### **A. Job Satisfaction**

Average factor scores (indicators) by Service were considered to give an overall indication of sentiment on a particular factor for a specific Service. Job satisfaction was one of the highest (most positively) overall rated factors in the 2001 survey. In the same year, Air Force personnel were significantly more positive about Job Satisfaction than Navy personnel.

While there were 14 significant changes in the organisational indicators between 1999 and 2001, job satisfaction did not significantly change in either direction.

#### **B. Organisational Commitment**

Ten of the indicators revealed a significantly positive change from 1999 to 2001. Of note, Army and Air Force personnel were more positive about organisational commitment in 2001, with Army being significantly more positive than the other two Services.

With further administrations of the survey, it will be relatively straightforward to monitor changes in the attitudes of uniformed personnel and the relationship between such attitudes and retention behaviour.

## C. Morale

As stated earlier in this paper, morale is also of interest as it relates to retention behaviour. There are two item level indicators measuring unit and personal morale respectively. The results of the 2001 survey indicated that improvements in unit and personal morale occurred from 1999 to 2001. Army and Air Force both improved with regard to unit morale, while Air Force was the only Service, which improved in relation to personal morale.

With further administrations, improvements or otherwise in attitudes related to retention behaviour can be monitored both at a general and individual Service level.

## 2. US Navy-Wide Personnel Survey (NPS)

### *Overview of Survey*

The NPS for the years 1996-1998 examines opinions on a range of issues, including job satisfaction and organisational climate. The data are used by the US Navy to formulate and evaluate their personnel programs.

The NPS is an annual survey, which was first administered in 1990. Whilst the data from the 2000 administration are available in tabular form, there are no analyses or management reports available for review at this time. Hence, the 1996, 1997 and 1998 NPS, which have been provided by the US Navy for the purposes of this research, will be reviewed here.

### *Description of Sample*

The NPS is mailed annually to a random sample of personnel at their work addresses. The primary sample characteristics for each of these surveys are described in the following table.

**Table 2.** Sample Characteristics NPS 1996-1998.

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>
Random sample size	15,213	14,958	14,214
Population representation:			
Enlisted	3%	3%	3%
Officers	8%	7%	7%
Adjusted return rate	45%	43%	39%
Total respondents	5,866	5,610	4,045
Respondents - Enlisted Sailors	58%	55%	56%
Respondents - Officers	42%	45%	44%
Respondent's Gender - Male	83%	80%	87%
Respondent's Gender - Female	17%	20%	13%

Only those personnel on active duty with a projected rotation date of January 1997/98/99 or later were eligible to be included in the 1996/1997/1998 samples respectively. Average period of service was 10-15 years.

## *Major Survey Topics*

The following key topics were explored in the NPS from 1996 to 1998.

**Table 3.** Key Topics – NPS 1996 to 1998.

<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>
Background	Background	Demographics
Detailing & Assignment Process	Detailing & Assignment Process	Detailing & Assignment Process
Quality of Life Programs	Organizational Climate	Organizational Climate
Organizational Climate	Health Issues	Quality of Life
Health Issues		Health Issues
Extremist/Hate Group Issues		

From the table above, it can be seen that there is some variation in the focus of the survey from year to year. A key topic such as Organizational Climate however, has been included in all three years of the NPS being reviewed, and examines a number of issues including those relating to job satisfaction. Although job satisfaction is a constant issue across the surveys, the reporting of measures of job satisfaction is not consistent from one year to the next. The statements relating to job satisfaction have remained fairly constant from 1996 to 1998, but the reporting of the findings has varied.

Essentially, respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement, using a five-point scale, with a series of statements pertaining to aspects of their job. The findings are reported either at item level, as is the case in 1998, or by an “Opinion Gauge”, as in 1996 and 1997. As noted in the 1996 and 1997 reports, the opinion gauges were derived from a statistical examination of statements, which pertained to the same topic and used a Likert-type scale. The statements, which contributed to the job satisfaction opinion gauge, varied from 1996 to 1997, thus making comparisons from one year to the next difficult. It is not clear from the literature why opinion gauges were not used for in the 1998 analysis of the data; rather item level data was reported.

## *Findings*

### Job Satisfaction

With regard to job satisfaction, the findings as they are reported in the three surveys, do not allow for easy comparison from one year to the next due to the differences in reported measures. The table below shows the results relating to job satisfaction for each administration of the survey.

**Table 4.** Job Satisfaction measures – NPS 1996 – 1998.

Respondent Group	1996	1997	1998
	Current Job and/or Assignment (Gauge 10)	Overall Job Satisfaction (Gauge 4)	“I am generally satisfied with my current job”
Enlisted	45%	30%	59%
Officers	71%	58%	71%
Total	65%		

Gauge 10 relates to the current job and/or assignment, while Gauge 4 includes not only the job itself, but also statements pertaining to working conditions, supervision, career development, pay and benefits.

Also, although not obvious from the data provided in the three reports being reviewed, the 1998 report noted that enlisted personnel showed a decrease in job satisfaction from 1997, with no significant changes for officers.

Other reported findings in 1998 included comparisons between enlisted personnel and officers on issues such as the work they do in the Navy and physical working conditions. Officers were more satisfied in all cases. It was concluded that in general, most Navy personnel are satisfied with their job and work experiences though this has declined from previous years.

In general, there is some degree of continuity in the statements across administrations, however as mentioned earlier, the data are not always analysed or reported in the same manner. Nevertheless, the items and related data exist, thus providing some scope, perhaps, for future comparisons to be made, at least within service.

From the review of the available data so far, it is evident that there are some common themes between the NPS and the Australian Defence Attitude survey, which may provide some scope for future cross-national benchmarking of attitudes.

### **3. US DOD 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel**

#### *Overview of Survey*

The 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel was developed and administered by the United States Department of Defense (DOD). The survey is described as a recurring survey last administered in 1992. At the request of House of Representatives Subcommittee on Military Personnel, the 1999 Survey was used to assess the impact of the 2000 increased pay and retirement benefits and to assess possible reasons for declining military readiness and decreased retention rates.

## ***Description of Sample***

In May 1999 a sample of 66,040 United States military personnel was drawn from population of 1,419,269 active service personnel below the rank of admiral or general and with at least 6 months of service. The survey was mailed to the sample in May 1999. The weighted response rate was 51%. It is noted that approximately 84% of the force are enlisted personnel, so the survey data was weighted to ensure all personnel were proportionally represented. As noted in the Preliminary Results report, this fact strongly affects any DOD-wide findings.

## ***Major Survey Topics***

The main topics examined in this survey are as follows:

Assignment Information	Family Information
Career Information	Economic Issues
Military Life	Background Information
Programs and Services	Comments

The Military Life topic comprised items relating to a number of issues including sources of job satisfaction and job commitment and overall satisfaction with military life.

## ***Findings***

Several reports have been compiled from the DOD 1999 survey, however only two of them are available for the present study. They are:

- Preliminary Results of DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members; and
- First-Term Personnel Less Satisfied with Military Life than those in Mid-Career.

A discussion of the theme "satisfaction with the military way of life" was reported and is discussed below.

### **Satisfaction with Military Way of Life**

The item "Overall Satisfaction with Military Way of Life" was examined and reported. Half of the active duty personnel indicated that they were satisfied with the military way of life. A greater proportion of Officers (65%) reported being satisfied compared to the enlisted personnel (46%).

The item "Overall Satisfaction with Military Way of Life" was also reported by career term. Mid-career Officers were the most satisfied (62%) with just over half the mid-career enlisted personnel also reporting satisfaction with the military way of life. For those in their first term, a greater proportion was dissatisfied (41%) than satisfied (35%).

This notion of satisfaction is more general than that reported in the NPS and the Australian Defence Attitude Survey, where the notion of job satisfaction specially related to the concept of satisfaction with the current job, rather than the military lifestyle.

With regard to satisfaction, respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with a number of other aspects of military life. On such item of interest was “amount of enjoyment from your job”. This item was not reported specifically in terms of satisfaction ratings, however it was reported as the fourth most important reason for staying or considering staying in the force and also the fourth most important reason for leaving or considering leaving. This illustrates the different emphasis of this survey in relation to satisfaction compared to the two surveys reviewed earlier.

### **Recommendations to Optimise Data**

The project will continue as planned with the comparison process, using the templates identified in this report. It is important to acknowledge that if communality is limited even within service, the investigation has, in itself been extremely useful. It has provided awareness/understanding of the issues and themes investigated by each service, and the differential emphasis across countries.

To optimise the available data, regardless of direct comparability issues, the project will aim to recommend where items could be used cross-nationally/within service. In addition, against this first part of work, it appears there is scope to make recommendations for areas that may deserve greater focus for participating nations. For example, while Australia has identified organisational commitment as a key indicator it appears to have limited emphasis elsewhere. Conversely, other countries have further refined career-related measures, which may be deserving of greater focus in nations such as Australia.

### **Conclusion**

This first report has identified differences in measurement, not just across services and nations as predicted, but importantly also within service. The next stage will better elucidate the extent this is the case for other services. Notwithstanding, the study will go on to highlight key indicators for each participating nation and provide scope for recommendations as to where common items may be used.

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