



SUMMARY REPORT FROM DCIPS SITE VISITS

17 March 2011

OVERVIEW

During Calendar Years 2009 and 2010, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) conducted independent reviews of the Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel System (DCIPS). Both noted the need for greater involvement and interaction with the workforce, and the USD(I) committed to engage the workforce on future DCIPS design issues. Teams from the DCIPS Program Executive Office (DCIPS PEO) in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (OUSD(I)) scheduled a series of site visits to worldwide locations hosting large numbers of DCIPS employees. The purpose of these initial field site visits conducted in the summer and fall of 2010 was to seek employee feedback on the DCIPS performance management system as input regarding planned design improvements. Following the Secretary of Defense's (SECDEF) decision in August of 2010 to retain and improve DCIPS, but without linking future employee base pay increases to performance except within the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), information sessions on the SECDEF decision were added to the town hall agendas for each site.

While it was not possible to meet every employee at every location, 36 town halls and 58 focus sessions were held with diverse groups of employees and managers, representing all 10 DCIPS components, with 8 visits held in the National Capital Area and 14 in other geographic areas around the globe. In addition to the town halls and focus sessions, DCIPS PEO staff met with senior leaders at each location to hear their thoughts as the Enterprise prepared for the next phase of DCIPS.

METHODOLOGY

Between August and December 2010, DCIPS PEO teams conducted town halls and focus sessions. Each visit was hosted by a DCIPS component and included a DCIPS PEO team consisting of two or three staff members, with additional representation from the component's DCIPS team at many locations. Teams offered in-briefs and/or out-briefs with host leadership, and conducted employee and/or manager town hall and/or focus group sessions. Focus groups generally consisted of 15-20 employees or managers who met separately, while town halls were open to all interested parties, but specifically aimed at DCIPS employees and personnel who supervise or otherwise provide personnel servicing to DCIPS employees. Participants in town halls sessions varied in size from 15 to 200.

Goals of the DCIPS PEO team site visits were identified and shared with all via the DCIPS webpage in the USD(I)'s update of 5 August, 2010, and component specific communications. The stated goals of the site visits were:

- 1) Conduct outreach to employees and managers in their geographic locations

- 2) Share information about the way ahead for DCIPS
- 3) Share results of the employee perception survey with employees
- 4) Gather employee and manager perceptions, feedback and concerns regarding the DCIPS Performance Management System

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES AND DCIPS PEO ACTIONS

At each site, the visits included active engagement by participants who shared their thoughts and perspectives, both positive and negative, of DCIPS, and their experiences, and discussions of the way ahead.

During a number of visits, local implementing issues were brought to the attention of the DCIPS PEO teams. In some cases, flexibilities exercised were not popular or understood, participants could not find a link between component policy and DCIPS policy, or participants believed something had not been done according to policy or guidance. The DCIPS PEO teams clarified for all audiences that while DCIPS policy seeks to provide commonality and consistency across the Defense Intelligence Enterprise, there are areas where components have flexibility to adapt specific policies and procedures to the requirements of their individual culture. The teams explained the oversight role of the DCIPS PEO, the reviews currently planned, and how these may evolve in the future. They also explained that DCIPS program reviews will continue to evaluate various aspects of the program, to include component-specific flexibilities, to ensure the overall program goals are being met. They shared results from the IC Climate Survey and the DCIPS perception surveys, and pointed to the site visits as the first steps of the program evaluation efforts that are ongoing and will provide actionable input to continually improve policy and practice across the Enterprise.

While the sites, audiences and component representation varied at each session, a number of common themes were discussed in almost all of the town hall and focus group sessions. These are provided below, and have been identified by the DCIPS PEO as areas for future focus by the PEO and components.

Performance Management

Performance Management Discussion 1. Many employees do not clearly understand their roles in the establishment of their performance plans, or the relationship between their individual performance objectives and their performance elements. While discussions in many sessions reflected an interest in increased engagement, some local guidance was seen as impeding this effort; for example, employee input was not solicited at the time that performance objectives were established.

DCIPS PEO Action 1. All DCIPS training is being reviewed and updated, as appropriate, in the context of findings from program evaluation activities. A new training curriculum will be available prior to individual component transition. Individual components also are conducting their own evaluations and taking action tailored to improve understanding and engagement.

Performance Management Discussion 2. Recognizing the challenge of applying the standard performance elements and the real or perceived administrative burden they add to the process, the DCIPS PEO teams asked for thoughts on changes in this area. Many employees questioned the usefulness of the performance elements as currently used, either because they did not understand the relationship between the elements and objectives, or because there seemed to be redundancy between the write-ups required for the elements and the objectives. Others embraced the elements as the key to DCIPS performance management, perhaps even more valuable than the individual performance objectives when distinguishing levels of performance between employees. At a number of sites, the discussions initially began with suggestions to eliminate the performance elements, but through continued discussion it became apparent that there is a lack of consistent understanding of the purpose of the performance elements in the performance management process.

DCIPS PEO Action 2. Several actions are underway to address concerns heard with regard to performance elements. First, content is being added to specifically address the role of the performance elements and their relationship to performance objectives. Second, new guidelines have been developed and are being added to training programs that are intended to reduce or eliminate redundancy in the narratives associated with the evaluations of record. Finally, longer-term modifications to the performance management system that will better integrate the performance objectives with the performance elements are being reviewed.

Performance Management Discussion 3. The DCIPS PEO teams solicited input regarding performance management as a whole, i.e., the process and the goal of supporting mission accomplishment by driving performance. A frequently heard concern from participants was that they are being rated against other employees rather than how well they achieve their individual objectives and contribute to mission accomplishment. Additional concerns were noted about writing effective performance objectives, and ensuring that such objectives are written to the proper occupations and band level. Similar to the results of the DCIPS employee perception survey that indicated a belief among some participants that objectives were not consistent among peer groups, a number of participants shared the view that objectives were sometimes poorly written, or were not developed appropriately for the position or band level, permitting some employees to be evaluated against “hard” objectives while others were evaluated against “easy” objectives. Participants accurately noted that without enough focus on getting the performance objectives established correctly at the beginning of the cycle, the process could only produce poor results at the end.

DCIPS PEO Action 3. Several actions are underway in response to these concerns. First, to address the quality of objectives, training will continue throughout the Enterprise on writing objectives that are appropriate to an employee’s position and that are well structured. We also are continuing to expand the performance objectives database to include quality examples of objectives from occupational groups and organizations across the enterprise. At the individual component level, many organizations are engaging their Performance Management Performance Review Authority (PM PRA) at the beginning of the performance planning process to ensure high-quality objectives are developed against which employees will be asked to perform. This is

considered a “best practice” and already is showing results in those components using this process. We also are conducting reviews of completed performance evaluations of record at the end of the evaluation cycle to assess the quality of objectives, the quality of employee self-assessments and the quality of the final supervisory evaluation. The results of those reviews will be used to focus improvement efforts for the following evaluation period. Finally, to address the perception that employees are being evaluated against each other, training on conducting evaluation against standards will continue to be highlighted.

Performance Management Discussion 4. At almost every site, concerns were noted about measuring the wrong things, or that metrics were chosen because they were “convenient” or “easy” but were not necessarily appropriate for work of that type or at that level. The DCIPS PEO teams engaged audiences to glean examples and suggestions. Feedback from focus groups confirmed findings from the NAPA review, after action reports from components, and our own review of training and separate reviews of performance objectives that had been used throughout the Enterprise that objectives had been written to focus on quantitative measures, when in most cases qualitative measures were more appropriate. Our reviews of training delivered to components throughout the Enterprise indicated that we had stressed writing objectives to contain qualitative measures. The result was that, in many cases, employee performance was measured against inappropriate measures.

DCIPS PEO Action 4. Training on writing performance objectives is being redeveloped to provide concrete examples of how to craft performance objectives that are appropriate to the mission and that reflect qualitative measures of results that can be related to the mission. To support the training, additional examples of objectives are being added to the objectives database available on the DCIPS Website that include appropriate measures. Communication products on writing good objectives have been revised to focus on measuring impact and results to help drive more qualitative measures. The lessons we have learned from both the focus groups and separate reviews of completed performance evaluations will inform planned improvements to the performance management system in the coming evaluation periods.

Performance Management Discussion 5. During the performance management discussions, employees and managers commented on the amount of time necessary to complete performance management related tasks. Those who had been through more than one performance cycle generally agreed that the first cycle was hardest because it was new; however, there was a consistent message that the narrative requirements were unnecessarily burdensome on both employees and supervisors without commensurate value added. Through discussions of the specific issues, some requirements were determined to have been imposed locally to improve the quality of the performance evaluation process, or resulted from a lack of understanding of DCIPS policy requirements, while others resulted from requirements built into the software tools used for performance management. Other issues raised suggested the need for improved guidance and training to refocus the process on dialog between the supervisor and employee and clear and concise written comments vice the volume of narrative.

DCIPS PEO Action 5. As noted above, the DCIPS PEO will review and update policy, processes, Information Technology support and training in the coming months to address the unnecessary administrative elements of the performance management process. The DCIPS PEO will ask local components to review their own implementing procedures to identify those that are not adding to the quality and effectiveness of the performance management process.

Performance Management Discussion 6. In some discussions, employees and managers referenced local guidance prohibiting the awarding of low scores (e.g., minimally successful) unless the employee had been informed of the score at the midpoint which, as participants pointed out, is not always possible. The DCIPS PEO teams discussed this issue at length during these sessions, noting that performance issues generally do not appear at the end of a rating period without warning. The goal of the performance management process is to maintain dialogue between the employee and supervisor throughout the evaluation period, and to ensure that there are no surprises at the end of the evaluation period. Local policies are intended to ensure that employees are afforded appropriate protections, but also must balance those protections with consideration of the needs of the mission and equity relative to other employees.

DCIPS PEO Action 6. DCIPS policies are being reviewed and revised to support both employee and manager understanding of performance expectations and appropriate actions that may be taken when those expectations are not met. Training revisions will include guidance on documenting performance that is less than successful.

Concerns about forced distributions

Discussion. While this topic is related to DCIPS performance management, the DCIPS PEO teams noted its significance and the need to highlight the concerns, real or perceived, in this particular area. Participants at a number of locations expressed concerns regarding forced distributions, or “quotas”, for DCIPS performance evaluations of record. In a number of sessions participants referenced “models” for ratings passed officially or unofficially through their organizations that inferred an expectation of evaluation of record distributions. In other cases, employees referenced comments, both official and unofficial, by leaders that inferred limitations or prohibitions on giving high scores.

When the prohibition on forced distributions, or “quotas”, set forth in DCIPS policy, fact sheets, and training was mentioned by the DCIPS PEO teams, participants seemed largely unaware of the prohibition, or they expressed concern that their leadership was not aligned with DCIPS policy on this issue. The DCIPS PEO teams responded to these concerns by stressing the importance of common and consistent DCIPS messaging in all components, especially as it relates to employees being rated against their objectives, and the prohibition on forced distributions, with emphasis on top down messaging from senior leaders needed on this issue.

DCIPS PEO Action. The DCIPS PEO provided guidance to all components restating the prohibition of forced distributions of evaluations, and further restating that DCIPS performance evaluations of record are to be based on performance against standards for the performance

elements and the employee's objectives. As noted above, training is being revised to improve the quality of objectives, to emphasize the importance of appropriate application of standards, and to maintain focus on policy. The DCIPS PEO will continue to address this concern in multiple forums to ensure common and consistent messaging is provided to all on this important issue.

Training

Discussion. At most sites visited, participants provided feedback on both implementation and performance management training. At many locations, participants noted concerns about the timeliness, quality and availability of training. There were a number of complaints that there were not enough training opportunities on the fundamentals of DCIPS, while a few participants mentioned they had been required to attend too much training. Additional comments referred to training timelines, with some noting training was provided too early or too late. Some participants commented that substantial efforts were made by the DCIPS components to train their workforces, and noted the successes and the challenges in providing the right training to the right people at the right time.

During discussions of training opportunities that were available, participants in a number of locations indicated varying levels of quality of the training, primarily attributed to trainers who seemed unfamiliar with their subject matter and unprepared to teach.

DCIPS PEO Action. In response to these and other comments regarding training, the DCIPS PEO has designated a DCIPS Training Lead, responsible for identifying training requirements for DCIPS and working to provide common training appropriate for all audiences that will be made available to DCIPS components. The DCIPS Training Lead has formed a DCIPS Training Transition Team with representatives from each DCIPS component, and is developing a revised community-wide training curriculum, shifting focus from component level support to central DCIPS PEO support to reduce workload on components, ensure more effective use of limited training dollars, and provide more consistent centrally created training modules. Several new training modules will be available as early as spring 2011.

Automated Performance Management Tools

Discussion. Participants almost universally shared concerns that the automated performance management tools, the Performance Appraisal Application (PAA) for the Services, DSS and OUSDI, and PeopleSoft for DIA, NGA and NSA, are cumbersome and complicated. Discussions involved a review of various predecessor tools, including paper, word processing-types of documents and other automated tools. Participants generally agreed that understanding of the systems improved with use, but they still felt there was a lot of room for improvement. There were numerous concerns regarding access to needed screens or information, difficulty of navigation, inability to track an evaluation in process, or the inability to retrieve an evaluation erroneously released into the system.

Discussions at sites using the PAA frequently included specific examples and situations where the tool had failed to meet expectations. Participants commented on the lack of intuitiveness of the system, lack of available training, inability to make corrections immediately if a wrong button was pushed and difficulty in tracking the process of an evaluation once it left the user.

Participants seemed pleased to hear that some of the suggestions they had made were already being addressed in the system, including a way to retrieve an evaluation accidentally approved, tracking capability of an evaluation's progress through the hierarchy and spell check for the narrative parts of the evaluation. The DCIPS PEO teams agreed with participants that most of these things should have been automatic; the teams also shared historical information about the selection of the PAA from NSPS.

Similar frustrations with the automated performance management tools were also heard from participants in PeopleSoft organizations. Frequently, component representatives in attendance were able to comment on pending changes to PeopleSoft to address the concerns.

DCIPS PEO Action. As part of its efforts to improve the PAA, the PEO is leading a usability study to determine how and where improvements can be made to the PAA, and to study the long-term application of this system. DCIPS Components using Peoplesoft have been tasked to complete their own usability studies, aligned to the PEO's study of the PAA, to identify and report on areas for improvement. It is expected that additional enhancements to the PAA will be implemented in time for the FY 12 performance planning cycle.

Communications

Discussion. Communications was a common theme raised in visits. Whether employees were referring to personal communication with their supervisor or general informational communications about DCIPS, this clearly was an area where more can be done by addressing the quantity, quality and timing of future communications.

Employee discussions highlighted several areas where they felt more or better communications would be of value. For example, senior leader buy-in was noted by many as an absolute necessity for DCIPS success. Numerous questions on the role and responsibilities of the Performance Management Performance Review Authority (PM PRA) and bonus pools were also identified as candidates for future communications.

DCIPS PEO Actions Undertaken. The DCIPS PEO now has a dedicated communications effort, focused on providing consistent messaging to the appropriate audience to ensure all employees throughout the enterprise receive the same message. High-level messaging developed by the DCIPS PEO will be shared with DCIPS components for their use.

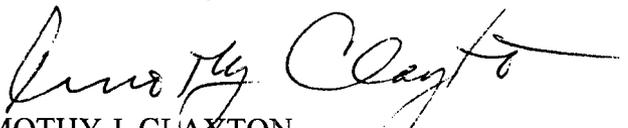
A Change Management Plan which includes a comprehensive communications plan and training plan has been developed and disseminated to component leads and posted on the DCIPS public webpage. This document addresses the necessity for change, the future goals of the system and the challenges the enterprise faces as DCIPS moves forward. It also includes strategies and tactics

for using targeted and integrated communications. Additionally, a DCIPS Communications working group with representatives from all DCIPS components has been established. This forum will aid in consistent messaging and facilitate information sharing.

CONCLUSION

As noted, through the site visits and other feedback avenues, the DCIPS PEO has listened to the concerns of DCIPS personnel and has taken positive action based on the comments heard during the town halls and focus groups. Specifically, by identifying a dedicated DCIPS Training Lead, the process of enhancing all DCIPS training through the use of a community-wide training curriculum has begun; all DCIPS policies are being reviewed and updated to leverage available flexibilities; both short, and long-term studies are being worked to identify and improve areas of focus, including the alignment process, compensation and performance management, have been initiated; and communications are being strengthened by creating a dedicated team to develop targeted tools. The DCIPS PEO understands that some of the comments heard from participants resulted from uncertainty or anxiety that employees were experiencing as a result of the original plan to link base-pay increases to individual performance and there are challenges that come with adapting to any change. The DCIPS PEO also recognizes that with the pending transition to DCIPS Grades, there are understandably questions about the future of DCIPS. Ultimately, as the Enterprise transitions to a DCIPS that will support both bands and grades, reinforcement of a culture founded on integration, collaboration and performance in support of the national security mission is critical. DCIPS as the common system and structure, with common policies and practices, is a tool to help both managers and employees achieve that goal through the linkage of their work to mission objectives.

The DCIPS PEO recognizes that the planning and local support of all DCIPS components was crucial to the success of the site visits. While the site visits identified a number of issues and specific focus areas for attention as DCIPS moves ahead, the positive comments received were appreciated, and in many cases unexpected. All comments received reflected participant involvement and interest in DCIPS, an interest that must be cultivated with transparency and communication of accurate and relevant information. The DCIPS PEO will continue to work with components to ensure that DCIPS remains responsive to emergent requirements. We are committed to providing training and communications support to ensure that all DCIPS employees, in all geographic locations, have opportunities to better understand their roles in DCIPS, and that they utilize the flexibilities DCIPS provides for their career planning and in meeting mission success. Continued feedback on DCIPS to individual components or to the DCIPS PEO through the DCIPS webpage at <http://dcips.dtic.mil> is always welcome.



TIMOTHY J. CLAYTON
DCIPS Program Executive Officer