

Measuring Microaggression and Organizational Climate Factors in Military Units

Ulysses Brown



DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

Directed by Dr. Daniel P. McDonald, Director of Research
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Executive Summary

Issue

Microaggressive behaviors in organizations can reduce employee confidence, performance and productivity, impair mental health, increase morbidity, and are undesirable in work groups, especially in military units where life and death missions depend on work group cohesion and trust (Pierce, 1995). Unit commanders may be interested in reducing or eliminating microaggressive behaviors because they can be deleterious to unit morale and mission readiness.

Current Research

The purpose of this research is to investigate microaggression and organizational climate factors in military units. This study also attempts to develop a reliable instrument to assess microaggression in organizations, specifically in military units. Racial microaggressions are those conscious or unconscious racial slights or indignities experienced by minorities (Constantine, 2007). Using the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute's (DEOMI) Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS), I evaluate the DEOCS responses of 6,816 active duty military members. Multi-group structural equation models were used to compare gender and racial-ethnic groups. Findings across groups revealed that organizational climate factors were salient predictors of microaggression, leadership cohesion, work group cohesion, and work group effectiveness in military units. Work group cohesion was a predictor of work group effectiveness in all models and underscores the explanatory power of this construct. Job satisfaction was a salient predictor of work group cohesion, leadership cohesion, and work group effectiveness in the overwhelming majority of gender and racial-ethnic groups. Trust was a predictor of leadership cohesion in all groups as well. Work group cohesion predicted work

group effectiveness in all models, indicating the importance of cohesive units to organizational performance. Racist behavior was a robust predictor of microaggression in both gender and racial-ethnic models. These findings highlight the important links between racist behavior and climate factors in military units and the nexus between microaggression and the dispositional constructs measured by the DEOCS. Another finding was that microaggressive behaviors influenced work group cohesion in the male and female models; however, microaggressive behaviors predicted leadership cohesion in only the female model, indicating that female respondents perceive leaders work better together when military units have fewer microaggressions. Sexual discrimination was an important predictor of leadership cohesion for females but not for males. In addition, microaggressive behaviors in military units mediated the relationship between organizational climate factors and the various outcome measures (e.g., work group cohesion, work group effectiveness, and leadership cohesion). Mediation effects were established across gender and racial-ethnic models, providing a better understanding of the how and why an effect takes place. Thus, eradicating microaggressive and racist behaviors in the military may have a positive impact on both organizational climate and unit performance.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is that the DEOCS instrument includes several items to assess microaggression in military units. Another recommendation is to implement racial microaggression awareness training in Department of Defense facilities. Commanders are encouraged to support these training efforts to increase the awareness of microaggressions in the workplace.