

January 2023



U.S. Department *of* Defense

Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS)

Guide to Interpreting Written Comments

DEOCS Guide to Interpreting Written Comments

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Overview of the Qualitative Analysis Process	2
Common Pitfalls to Avoid	4
Written Comments Analysis Steps	5
Step 6: Report Findings.....	11
Additional Steps	12

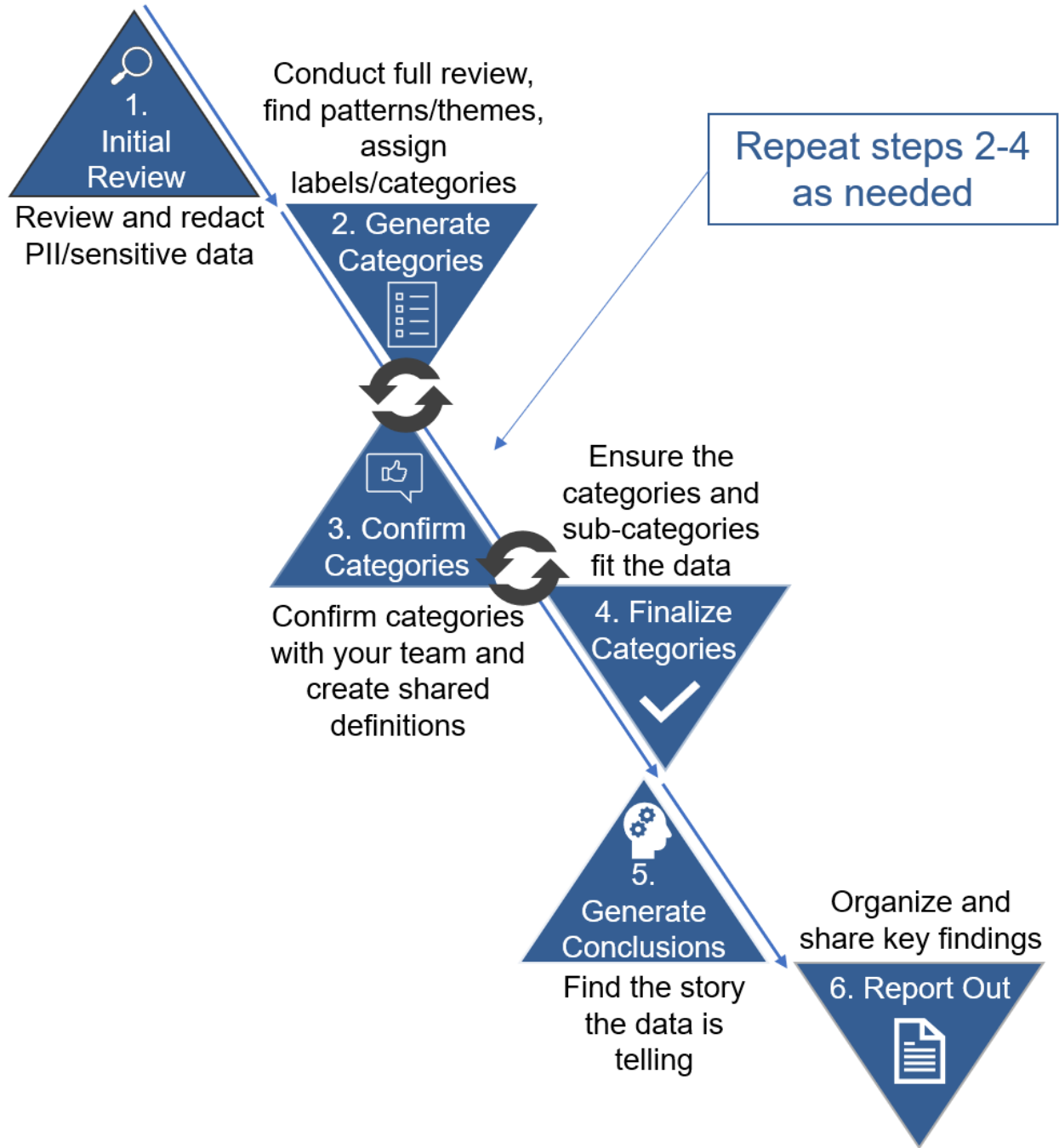
Introduction

When interpreting feedback from the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS), valuable command climate insights come from the written (open-ended) responses. Although these responses provide detailed feedback, they can be difficult to accurately summarize. This is particularly true in larger commands with a greater number of responses. This document provides guidance for interpreting the written comments from your DEOCS short answer questions (SAQ).

Overview of the Qualitative Analysis Process

Open-ended survey questions, a type of qualitative research, are designed to collect richer, more nuanced information than closed-ended survey items can often provide. Analysis of such data begins by conducting a high-level review of the responses to get a sense of their scope. Once this is understood, the reviewer begins the process of identifying themes and patterns that are apparent within the data. These patterns and themes can then be grouped into broader categories. This stage requires an open mind. While it can be helpful to have a general framework of response types in mind before beginning your analysis, it is important to not limit this process to only things you expect to see.

Below is an overview of the qualitative process described in this document.



Common Pitfalls to Avoid

There are some common mistakes that can occur when interpreting and analyzing the written comments from DEOCS SAQs.

- **Confirmation Bias.** When analyzing written comments, be aware that you and your working group/team members may have preconceived notions that could bias your interpretation. Confirmation bias occurs when a reviewer searches for, overemphasizes the importance of, or better remembers data patterns that support their preconceived beliefs. Although this is a natural human tendency, keep in mind that comments that stand out most to you may not be most representative of your unit/organization.
- **Overfocusing on Individual Comments.** Inflammatory or “hot comments”, or comments of a sensitive nature, can easily distract reviewers from the bigger picture. It is important to look across *all* comments for themes and patterns and not overly fixate on notable but less commonly reported ideas. Remember that just because a comment is the “loudest,” it may not reflect a shared experience among survey participants. Note: This is not to discourage noteworthy responses—especially those that speak to particularly problematic behaviors—from being taken seriously if only reported by a small number of participants.
- **Overreacting to Negative Comments.** Negative comments in your DEOCS report do not necessarily mean there are major weaknesses within your unit/organization. It is important to keep an open mind, reflect on each comment, and do your best to respond in a deliberative manner. Negative comments can often feel harsh and personal, but aim to focus on their constructive aspects to best address concerns raised by personnel.
- **Jumping Too Quickly into Solution Mode.** There is a common tendency to spring into action to address an issue at hand. Sometimes this is appropriate and necessary. However, often, spending additional time exploring the issue, seeking input from subject matter experts, and weighing different courses of action is more effective.
- **Using Absolute language.** Avoid using absolute or definitive terms (e.g., “always,” “never,” “causes”). Instead use terms such as “many,” “often,” “few,” “associated with,” etc.

Written Comments Analysis Steps

Identifying patterns and themes within your data and categorizing or labeling those patterns and themes are the main steps of the qualitative analysis process. This process is often iterative, requiring several readings and reviews of your data, refining your categories, and taking time to confirm that other reviewers are interpreting the data similarly. This process can be broken down into the following four steps:

Prepare for written comments analysis:

- Designate personnel from the unit/organization for a working group/team to assist with analyzing written comments/data. This group may consist of Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW) personnel, subject matter experts (SME), key leadership and/or trusted representatives from the unit/organization. Optional: Because DEOCS comment data is extremely sensitive, it is recommended the working group/team members review and sign a local non-disclosure agreement form to ensure confidentiality is maintained.
- Designate a limited number of personnel for the initial restricted review (e.g., survey administrator, commander/leader, legal officer, Chief of Staff).

Step 1: Conduct an initial review of your data.

- Provide the written comments report to previously designated personnel for the initial restricted review.
- It is recommended that you use the Excel version of the written comments report so that responses are grouped by question.

	A	B
1	Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) 5.0	
2	Unit/Organization Title:	DEOCS Testing
3	DEOCS ID:	6702d9ae
4	Service Component:	[DEOCS DEMO TRAINING] Military DEOCS
5	UIC/PAS/OPFAC Code:	1234567890
6	Commander/Leader Name:	John Smith
7	Survey Administrator:	Laura Jones
8	Survey Date:	2/16/2022 - 2/23/2022
9	Subgroup:	Overall Unit/Organization
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		

Survey_Details	Question_Text_Key	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	(+)
----------------	-------------------	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

- Provide guidance for what to look for during the initial review. This might include subjects that would prompt an investigation such as violations of the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), illegal activity, threats to harm self or others and/or presence prohibited behaviors.
- The initial review also includes a comprehensive search for and redacting of Personal Identifying Information (PII) or sensitive topics that should be limited to personnel with a need to know (e.g., through context clues that point toward the unique experience(s) or situation of a certain individual).
- Redact any PII or information pertaining to official investigations (i.e., create a “restricted copy”).

	A	B
1	Group_Name	Q1
2	Overall Unit/Organization	Everything has been horrible so far. I hate SGT [redacted] and I think she is stealing from the [redacted] funds.
3	Overall Unit/Organization	I don't know why there are so many questions
4	Overall Unit/Organization	I have had a good experience with my unit.
5	Overall Unit/Organization	I would like to report sexually harassing behaviors from leadership in the [redacted] Department.
6	Overall Unit/Organization	I joined this unit about 6 months ago but I've had a lot of bad experiences so far with this unit.
7	Overall Unit/Organization	I love my unit and couldn't be happier with it.
8	Overall Unit/Organization	I'm really happy with my decision to join the National Guard! I love my unit and I'm so lucky to be with great people!
9	Overall Unit/Organization	My experience has been good so far. Nothing to complain about.
10	Overall Unit/Organization	My experience has been okay. There are definitely some issues but I feel like it could be worse.
11	Overall Unit/Organization	My experience has been really poor. CPT [redacted] is a toxic leader and I wish I didn't have to work with him.
12	Overall Unit/Organization	My unit is cool. Lots of really cool dudes.
13	Overall Unit/Organization	My unit is good. Honeslty a lot better than some of my friends' units. Everything runs super well.
14	Overall Unit/Organization	My unit is great so far, no bad experiences.
15	Overall Unit/Organization	My unit is just okay. Nothing crazy has happened and everyone is pretty chill.
16	Overall Unit/Organization	my unit is so great.

- Provide the additional working group/team members who will be reviewing and interpreting the written comments with the restricted copy of the SAQ responses so that each team member can perform their own independent review.

Step 2: Familiarize yourself with your data and generate categories.

- Provide the restricted copy of the written comments report to all members of the working group/team.
- Carefully review all SAQ responses. Group SAQ responses into categories and, if appropriate, subcategories. Identify noteworthy patterns/themes (e.g., communication, COVID, leadership)
- The example below shows how you might review responses to parse out different categories and sub-categories. This step would occur after a preliminary review of all responses to an SAQ, such that you would know that “communication,” “negative experiences,” and “COVID” are themes that broadly appear across responses.

Example SAQ: “What three change(s) would you make that you feel would most improve the unit’s/organization’s climate?”

Review	Possible category/label	Possible sub-categories
<p>Review 1: More information pushed down from leadership about how and why decisions are made. I feel like we are left in the dark and that leadership is just making our lives harder with the decisions they make, especially with COVID, even though that’s most likely not the case. More communication with the cadets that is honest would help build more trust between us and leadership.</p>	<p>The primary subject in this concerns communication and how it could be improved.</p>	<p>A possible sub-category for might be leadership. Other subcategories could include peers, and transparency.</p>
<p>Review 2: More information pushed down from leadership about how and why decisions are made. I feel like we are left in the dark and that leadership is just making our lives harder with the decisions they make, especially with COVID, even though that’s most likely not the case. More communication with the cadets that is honest would help build more trust between us and leadership.</p>	<p>This respondent noted that the perceived lack of communication is a negative experience for them.</p>	<p>Possible sub-categories might be negative experiences and transparency.</p>
<p>Review 3: More information pushed down from leadership about how and why decisions are made. I feel like we are left in the dark and that leadership is just making our lives harder with the decisions they make, especially with COVID, even though that’s most likely not the case. More communication with the cadets that is honest would help build more trust between us and leadership.</p>	<p>Even though this text highlight is identical to the one above, an additional major category might be COVID, particularly if this is a known topic of interest to leadership.</p>	<p>A possible sub-category be decision-making (or policy).</p>

Step 3: Reach consensus about categories among working group/team members.

- Discuss the categories you have generated with the working group/team.
- Reconcile any discrepancies in how different reviewers interpreted and labeled the data.

Step 4: Finalize categories and continue with the review process.

- Plan to leave the working group/team discussion with a single, consolidated list of categories.
- Establish definitions for all categories, especially for those that feel vague, or may be easy to interpret differently.
 - For example, defining “deployments” as a broad category is likely simpler to understand and apply than “social stressors.” Having a

detailed definition of “social stressors” will benefit reviewers and increase the quality of the findings.

- Organize your data across the categories.
 - Option 1: Using a spreadsheet, create a row for each unique category and sub-category. Copy and paste the relevant written comment responses into the applicable categories. An example of this is provided below.

Example SAQ: “It is important for us to understand your experience in your unit organization. If you choose, you may use this space to add anything else you want to say.”

Category	Sub-category	Written Response 1	Written Response 2	Written Response 3
Mess Hall	Offerings	The mess hall has not been able to feed all of us properly and there has been days where I haven't had a full meal because the mess hall is short staffed.	The new mess hall policy almost exclusively relied on Fish as the primary protein source. This is widely unpopular as it took away many of our favorite meals, such as pizza, wings, chicken tenders, etc., and it does not allow us to control our own diet.	
	Nutrition	I don't like how there are no nutrition facts/calorie guidelines for the food in the mess hall. I want to be able to make an informed decision about what I am putting in my body	It is hard to stick to a 1200 calorie diet a day, when there are no serving sizes or calorie counts on the mess hall food (my main source of sustenance).	we also do not know what we are eating because nutrition is not posted, we need calorie and macronutrient counts.
	Times/waits	Shorter mess hall lines would be nice.	The mess hall has lines out the door and one can wait for an hour to receive food in the middle of the workday.	
	Misc.	Regarding the mess hall, we are packed into a single area to grab food, stand within 6 feet of each other, and remove our masks. This proves that the "covid mitigation measures" mean nothing		

Category	Sub-category	Written Response 1	Written Response 2	Written Response 3
Diversity & Inclusion	Gender	The actions to create an inclusive environment here are not enough. It will not be enough until everyone can walk around and not hear a passing racist, sexist, or homophobic slur	For as much as I don't like it here, I will say we are taking steps in the right direction to combat racism/sexism. That said, it's never going to be perfect but at an institutional level we condemn it openly.	I've never seen nor experienced racism or sexism.
	Race/ethnicity	The actions to create an inclusive environment here are not enough. It will not be enough until everyone can walk around and not hear a passing racist, sexist, or homophobic slur	For as much as I don't like it here, I will say we are taking steps in the right direction to combat racism/sexism. That said, it's never going to be perfect but at an institutional level we condemn it openly.	I've never seen nor experienced racism or sexism.
	Sexual/gender identity	When we talk about discrimination it's only about race and sex, and no LGBTQ+ issues. They're all equally important but the LGBTQ+ community is just stepped over.	I do not think leadership cares about ensuring members of the LGBTQ community feel included, feel safe, or are valued as members of the team.	

[Note: The example is only for illustrative purposes. These text examples were taken from real DEOCS surveys, but may have been responses to other questions, and/or paraphrased.]

- Option 2: Another way to organize your data is similar to the previous highlighting example (p. 6), where text is color-coded (i.e., with each snippet of text highlighted a different color to denote a different category. This often works well for short and simple responses that do not have many sub-categories.
- Option 3: You can tag text or leave comments with the category name, and you can search and find all text tagged or commented for a category to begin generating findings from your data. This also works well for short and simple responses that do not have many sub-categories.
- Regardless of the approach selected, you may need to scrutinize and review your data several times. It is not uncommon to repeat steps 2-4 a few times to produce a final list of categories. It is beneficial to take a thorough, back-and-forth approach among the working group/team that includes review, assessment, and comparison and consensus building.

- For example, some initially identified categories may prove to be too broad. Breaking those down further into more specific categories will make the story being told clearer.
- Conversely, you may find that some categories are too niche or specific and combining similar categories to make a new, broader category will ultimately help you tell a clearer story.
- Finally, some categories may need to be redefined as more data is reviewed.
- If the working group/team does not include one or more IPPW personnel or SMEs, the working group/team should consider consulting with higher echelon IPPW/SMEs to determine whether the final categories are sufficiently clear and comprehensive.
- It's suggested that categories should not be considered final until all the data has been read through and the labeling scrutinized at least twice. It is important that, by the end of this phase, the working group/team can clearly define what the themes/categories are and what they are not.

Step 5: Generate Conclusions

Build a story from the patterns and themes. Using your spreadsheet or identified text, read through all responses assigned to each category at least twice to get an understanding of scope and tone. For example, if you are reviewing comments pertaining to deployment, note how many participants discussed deployment and begin drawing conclusions. Review the sub-categories as individual categories of their own. It may help to begin by reviewing all text pertaining to the most common theme or tone to help you paint the fullest, most accurate picture of the survey responses.

Although it can be helpful to include counts (e.g., five of 10 respondents expressed a similar belief or perception), it is important to recognize that these numbers may not be representative of the entire unit/organization. That is, just because 50% of your focus group respondents shared a similar viewpoint does NOT mean that 50% of the unit/organization does.

Step 6: Report Findings

A common way to report SAQ findings is to organize them first by the overarching questions (i.e., the SAQs themselves), then by categories with the greatest number of responses, and finally any sub-categories. It may look like this:

1. **SAQ #1**
 - a. **Category 1** – Include overall findings of what participants had to say about this category.
 - i. **Sub-category a** – Include findings specific to this sub-category.
 - ii. **Sub-category b** [see above]
 - iii. **Sub-category c** [see above]
 - iv. **Category 1 conclusion** – Include a summary of this category’s findings, as well as any implications. Also note what other categories, if any, did this category overlap with? If there is overlap, are there many similarities or differences?
 - b. **Category 2** [see above]
 - i. **Sub-category a** [see above]
 - ii. **Sub-category b** [see above]
 - iii. **Category 2 conclusion** [see above]
 - c. **Category 3** [see above]
 - i. **Sub-category a** [see above]
 - ii. **Category 3 conclusion** [see above]
2. **SAQ #2**
3. ...

Here is an example based on the SAQ responses on page 8 and 9 of this document:

1. **SAQ #1**
 - a. **Mess Hall**
 - i. **Offerings** – Lack of various protein sources and the mess hall is short staffed which leads to long wait times.
 - ii. **Nutrition** – Serving sizes, calorie counts, and other nutritional facts are not posted.
 - iii. **Time/waits** – Mess Hall wait times and lines are long.
 - iv. **Miscellaneous** – Covid mitigation measures are not practiced in the mess hall.
 - v. **Conclusion** – The mess hall has long wait times for food, some feel there should be more diverse food options, individuals want nutrition information posted, and some are concerned about Covid guidelines.
2. **SAQ #2**
 - a. **Diversity & Inclusion**

- i.* **Gender** – There are conflicting views on gender and sexism. Some feel we have made progress while others feel we have not done enough.
- ii.* **Race/ethnicity** – There are conflicting views on racism at the command. Some feel we have made progress while others feel we have not done enough.
- iii.* **Sexual/gender identity** – LGBTQ+ individuals feel excluded and undervalued.
- iv.* **Conclusion** – While some feel we have made progress in addressing racism and sexism, others feel we still have a long way to go. LGBTQ+ individuals in particular feel as though they are being excluded and undervalued.

Though definitive terms and counts represented in charts are not recommended, there are ways to visually represent qualitative data to make it more digestible. These include:

- Concept or process mapping
- Callout boxes to highlight items of particulate interest
- Word clouds or phrase nets, where the size and color of the words can demonstrate broad frequency of the word/phrase

The most important aspect of reporting is to let the data dictate what will be included and, as mentioned previously, to take care that biases do not interfere with what findings are emphasized and presented.

Additional Steps

Now that you have analyzed your written comments, here are some additional actions you might pursue:

- Provide the findings to the commander.
- Collaborate with IPPW personnel for further action planning.
- Report the themes to the unit/command personnel.
- Consider incorporating this information into your DEOCS Unit/Organizational Debrief, DEOCS Commander's Supervisor Debrief, DEOCS Report BLUF Debrief and DEOCS Results Brochure.
- Collaborate with the prevention services to generate corrective measures.
- Incorporate these themes into the action planning process.