



Human Capital: Critical Skills and Competency Assessments Should Help Guide DOD Civilian Workforce Decisions

United States Government Accountability Office

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In fiscal year 2012, the Navy and the Air Force met their adjusted civilian workforce cap targets, but the Army did not. The Department of Defense (DOD) estimated the civilian workforce cap saved the department \$2.2 billion in fiscal year 2012 and would save a total of \$11.5 billion through 2016. At the time the cap was extended to the services, each was executing its fiscal year 2011 budgets with additional planned growth expected. Further, the services were granted departmentwide and service-specific exceptions to exceed their fiscal year 2010 levels by 13,001 full-time equivalents (FTE), or 3.7 percent. It is unclear the extent to which DOD considered departmentwide priorities for critical skills and competencies to achieve current and future missions when implementing the cap. DOD's decisions about which skills and competencies to maintain were not informed by competency gap assessments because DOD has not completed most of those assessments. In 2006, Congress mandated that DOD conduct competency gap assessments, as part of its strategic workforce planning efforts, which GAO reported in September 2012 was only completed for 8 of 22 mission critical occupations. Functional community managers are responsible for these assessments, but did not provide input to the services to help preserve critical skills and competencies. DOD is working toward completing its gap assessments by 2015. Skill and competency gaps undermine agencies' ability to meet vital missions. For example, GAO has reported that the shortage of trained acquisition personnel impedes DOD's capability to oversee and manage contracts. A fully developed workforce plan, with all completed gap assessments, would help DOD make informed decisions about reducing its workforce and develop strategies to mitigate skill shortages that impact on achieving the mission. Moreover, DOD did not document how it maintained critical skills and competencies when making decisions in implementing the cap, including decisions about exceptions to the cap. DOD granted exceptions to the cap which, officials stated, were to meet specific mission priorities. For example, DOD granted exceptions for the acquisition workforce in an effort to meet the department's goal of increasing its acquisition workforce by 10,000 full-time equivalent positions by fiscal year 2015. Internal control standards state that significant events need to be clearly documented. Without documenting the approach, GAO cannot determine the extent to which DOD maintained the department's critical skills and competencies.

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