



Highlights of [GAO-12-509T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS is the third largest cabinet-level agency in the federal government, employing more than 200,000 employees in a broad range of jobs. Since its creation in 2003, DHS has faced challenges implementing its human capital functions, and its employees have reported having low job satisfaction. GAO designated the implementation and transformation of DHS as high risk because it represented an enormous and complex undertaking that would require time to achieve in an effective and efficient manner. This testimony presents preliminary observations regarding: (1) how DHS's employees' workforce satisfaction compares with that of other federal government employees, and (2) the extent to which DHS is taking steps to improve employee job satisfaction. GAO's comments are based on ongoing work on DHS's employee job satisfaction survey results and its actions and plans to improve them, as well as reports issued from January 2003 through February 2012 on high-risk and morale issues in the federal government and at DHS. To conduct its ongoing work, GAO analyzed DHS and component planning documents, interviewed relevant DHS officials about employee morale, and analyzed 2011 federal employee job satisfaction survey results.

View [GAO-12-509T](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

March 22, 2012

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Preliminary Observations on DHS's Efforts to Improve Employee Morale

What GAO Found

Over time, federal surveys have consistently found that Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees are less satisfied with their jobs than the government-wide average. In the 2004 Office of Personnel Management's federal employee survey—a tool that measures employees' perceptions of whether and to what extent conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agency—56 percent of DHS employees responded that they were satisfied with their jobs, compared to 68 percent government-wide. In subsequent years, the disparity continued—ranging from a difference of 8 percentage points in 2006 to a 4 percentage point difference in 2008, 2010, and 2011. In 2011, DHS's percentage of positive responses was lower than the averages for the rest of the federal government. For example, slightly less than half of the DHS employees surveyed reported positive responses to the statement "My talents are used well in the workplace," nearly 12 percentage points less than the rest of the federal government average. In two areas, DHS's percentage of positive responses was nearly the same or higher than the rest of the federal government average. For example, DHS's percentage of positive responses to the statement "Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?" was not statistically different than the rest of the federal government average. Job satisfaction data for 2011 show that satisfaction levels vary across DHS components. For example, job satisfaction index results show the Transportation Security Administration as 11 percentage points below government-wide averages while other components, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection, posted above average results.

DHS has taken steps to identify where it has the most significant employee satisfaction problems and developed plans to address those problems, but has not yet improved DHS employee satisfaction survey results. For example, to determine root causes of job satisfaction department-wide, DHS conducted an evaluation of the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey results, according to DHS officials. In that analysis, DHS determined that the drivers of employee satisfaction across DHS included the DHS mission, senior leadership effectiveness, and supervisor support. According to DHS officials, DHS is working with a contractor on a new department-wide analysis of root causes of employee morale. As of March 2012, this analysis was not complete. DHS and its components are also taking steps to improve components' positive response rates to selected survey items. For example, DHS's Integrated Strategy for High Risk Management identified corrective actions to improve employee job satisfaction scores, such as the launch of the Employee Engagement Executive Steering Committee. GAO has previously reported on a variety of issues, including concerns about pay and a lack of trust in leadership that can lead to morale problems. This variation in potential issues that can result in morale problems underscores the importance of looking beyond survey scores to understand the root causes of those problems and developing plans to address them. Given the critical nature of DHS's mission to protect the security and economy of the United States, it is important that DHS employees are satisfied with their jobs so that DHS can attract and retain the talent required to complete its work. GAO will continue to assess DHS's efforts to address employee job satisfaction and expects to issue a report on its results in September 2012.