SCREENING OF PERSONNEL SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS[1]

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BACKGROUND

With the downsizing of the military departments, there is increasing pressure to reduce costs and eliminate non-value added and redundant activities. In the personnel security arena, this has translated into the adoption of a risk management philosophy. The cost of personnel security procedures must be balanced against the degree to which they reduce risk. The focus of this paper is empirically to examine whether the screening of personnel security investigations by the Defense Investigative Service (DIS) makes sense from a risk management perspective.

Under the current system, the Department of Defense (DoD) military departments and agencies forward a request for a background investigation to DIS. All investigative requirements are completed, a case analyst reviews the case to ensure that it is complete, and then the case is forwarded to the cognizant DoD facility for adjudication. There is potential for reducing the time and cost of clearance processing by having DIS screen favorable cases for the adjudication facilities. This could eliminate the duplication of effort associated with the current practice of having adjudicative personnel review cases which DIS case analysts have previously identified as clean or having minor derogatory information that would not affect the granting of a security clearance. There was, however, no definitive information available related to the potential cost savings of having DIS screen cases or the possible negative impacts of such screening on the adjudicative process.

PURPOSE

The primary aim of this study was to examine, from a risk management perspective, the feasibility of having DIS screen favorable cases. Of interest was whether the potential cost avoidance derived from a screening program would be outweighed by possible negative impacts on the personnel security determination process. The results were provided for consideration by policy makers in making a decision whether or not to adopt such screening procedures.

METHOD

A pilot test was conducted in the Spring of 1995 in which 12,212 field investigations completed by DIS over approximately a 1-month period were coded by DIS according to the amount of derogatory information. These investigations included Single Scope Background Investigations (SSBI) and Top Secret Periodic Investigations (TS/PR) for both Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) and security clearance determinations for military and government personnel. Secret Periodic Investigations (S/FR) were also included in the study.

The cases were coded by DIS case analysts using three categories:

Clean - investigations with no derogatory information (i.e., are totally clean).

Minor Derog- investigations containing derogatory information that is determined to be minor (i.e., information of limited significance that would never, in and of itself, result in a clearance denial or revocation).

Major Derog- investigations containing major derogatory information (i.e., information that requires careful review by an experienced adjudicator and could possibly lead to a denial or revocation).

Completed cases with a coding sheet attached to each case were then forwarded to the appropriate adjudication facility for a security clearance determination. Adjudicative personnel coded cases according to their assessment of the amount of derogatory information as well as providing the adjudicative outcome of the case. In addition, adjudicators identified cases which required additional information or had to be returned to DIS for more investigative work. Finally, the adjudicative facilities forwarded the completed coding sheets to PERSEREC where the data was analyzed.

Of primary interest was the degree of agreement between case analysts and adjudicators in classifying cases into

the clean and minor derogatory categories. Disagreement would indicate that a screening program could introduce more security risk. This would be especially true if cases coded clean or minor derogatory by case analysts ended up with adjudicators denying or revoking a clearance.

PERSEREC also gathered extensive personnel, procedural and cost data from the DoD adjudicative facilities. These data were used to determine how much it cost the facilities to process and adjudicate different types of cases (i.e., clean, minor derogatory, and major derogatory). The data were then used to project potential cost avoidance resulting from implementation of different DIS screening scenarios.

RESULTS

Screening of Cases

Table 1 presents a breakout of the 12,212 cases in the pilot test by level of derogatory information and type of investigation. As can be seen, the cases were about evenly distributed across case type with approximately one third of the total sample being SSBIs, TS/FRs, and SIPRs respectively. With regard to level of derogatory information, the most frequent category was minor derogatory (61%) while 24% of the cases were categorized as clean and 15% as having major derogatory information. SSBIs had the most derogatory information while S/PRs had the least.

Table 1

Breakout of Cases by Level of Derogatory Information and Type of Investigation

	Level of Derogatory Information			
Type of Investigation	**Clean**	**Minor**	**Major**	**Total**
SSBI	450 12%	2593 69%	734 19%	3777 31%
TS/PR	713 18%	2639 68%	520 14%	3872 32%
S/PR	1733 38%	2268 50%	562 12%	4563 37%
Total	2896 24%	7500 61%	1816 15%	12212 100%

Additional analyses were conducted on the 2896 cases rated as clean by the DIS case analysts. It was found that adjudicators also rated 2,572 (89%) of these cases as clean. In the 11% of the cases where there was a disagreement, the adjudicators felt that the cases either contained very minor derogatory information, had some questionable factors (i.e., had inconsistencies that suggested a potential problem), or required a waiver if SCI access was to be granted. Table 2 presents cases by type of investigation and adjudicative outcome.

Table 2

Breakout of Cases by Type of Adjudicative Outcome and Type of Investigation

	Type of Adjudicative Outcome					
Type of Investigation	**Favorable**	**Unfavorable**	**More Information**	**Returned to DIS**	**Other**	**Total**
SSBI	3477 92.0%	48 1.3%	147 3.9%	23 6%	82 2.2%	3777 30.9%
TS/PR	3570 92.2%	16 .4%	214 5.5%	11 .3%	61 1.6%	3872 31.7%
S/PR	4374 95.8%	35 .8%	101 2.2%	9 .2%	44 1.0%	4563 37.4%
Total	11421 93.5%	99 .8%	462 3.8%	43 .4%	187 1.5%	12212 100%

As can be seen, over 90% of the cases had a favorable outcome (i.e., had a security clearance granted) while less than 1% resulted in the denial or revocation of a clearance. In approximately 6% of the cases, an adjudicative decision could not be made because the case required more information to make a determination, had to be returned to DIS for more investigative work, was administratively closed, or required some other administrative action before the case could be adjudicated.

Table 3 presents a breakout of type of adjudicative outcome by level of derogatory information. The data from this table are critical to evaluating a potential DIS screening program because even if case analysts at DIS and adjudicators disagree on the level of derogatory information in a case, this difference is not as significant if the case is ultimately favorably adjudicated.

Table 3

Breakout of Cases by Adjudicative Outcomes and Level of Derogatory Information

	Type of Adjudicative Outcome					
Level of Derogatory Investigation	**Favorable**	**Unfavorable**	**More Information**	**Returned to DIS**	**Other**	**Total**
Clean	2866 98.97%	1 .03%	16 .55%	5 .17%	8 .28%	2896 23.7%
Minor	7168 95.58%	6 .08%	207 2.76%	23 .30	96 1.28%	7500 61.4%
Major	1387 76.37%	92 5.07%	239 13.16%	15 83%	83 4.57%	1816 14.9%
Total	11421 93.53%	99 .81%	462 3.78 %	43 .35%	187 1.53%	12212 100%

Approximately 99% of the cases that were identified as clean by the DIS case analysts were later favorably adjudicated. Twenty-nine out of 2896 clean cases required additional action before an adjudication could be made, while only one "clean" case was unfavorably adjudicated. Subsequent review of this case showed that the individual was rejected for access to SCI because he was married to a foreign national.

Over 95% of the minor derogatory cases were favorably adjudicated, while less than 1% (six cases) received an unfavorable adjudication. About 4% of these cases could not be adjudicated until additional action was

completed. Subsequent review of the six cases that were negatively adjudicated showed that most of them contained derogatory information. Of the major derogatory cases, approximately 76% received a favorable adjudication, 19% required additional action before an adjudication could be made, and 5% received a negative adjudication.

Cost Avoidance

Using personnel, procedural, and productivity data for the different adjudication facilities, analyses were conducted to determine the amount of cost avoidance that would result from an ongoing DIS screening program. An assessment was made for screening both clean and minor derogatory cases as well as for different types of investigations. The result of these analyses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Annual Cost Avoidance to DoD Adjudicative Facilities with implementation of a DIS Screening Program
($ in millions)

	Amount of Derogatory Information		
Type of Investigation	**Clean**	**Minor Derog**	**Total**
SSBI	.133	2.265	2.398
TS/PR	.257	2.216	2.473
S/PR	.124	0.959	1.083
Total	$.514	$5.440	$5.954

If all types of field investigations (i.e., SSBIs. TS/Rs, and S/PRs) were screened by DIS and those identified as clean or having minor derogatory information were not passed to the adjudication facilities, cost avoidance for these facilities would total approximately $6 million a year. As can be seen from Table 4, most of this cost avoidance come from minor derogatory cases rather than clean cases. The reason for this is that clean cases take far less time to adjudicate, thus reducing potential cost avoidance. Also, as shown earlier in Table 1, clean cases only comprise 24% of the total cases, whereas minor derogatory cases make up 61% of the cases.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

Based on the results of the pilot test and on the cost avoidance analyses, three implementation options were developed for policy makers to review. These options are presented below along with the advantages and disadvantages of each option. It should be noted that a disadvantage of all options is that a professional adjudicator will not review cases that are screened by DIS.

Option 1 - DIS Screens Clean Cases Only

Under this option, DIS would manually screen all clean cases and the adjudication facilities would only receive notification that the cases were devoid of derogatory information. The advantages of this option is that it could potentially result in cost avoidance up to $.5 million annually. The disadvantage is the disruption and system changes required to implement the option may outweigh the cost avoidance benefits.

Option 2 - DIS Screens Both Clean and Minor Derog Cases

With this option, DIS would manually screen all clean and minor derogatory cases and the adjudication facilities would only receive notification that the cases did not have major derogatory information. The advantage of this option is that it could result in cost avoidance of up to $6 million annually. In addition, it could reduce the time required to grant a security clearance (clearance turnaround time) for minor derogatory cases by eliminating the processing time at the adjudication facilities (clean cases are already processed quickly by the facilities).

Option 3 - DIS Screens Cases Electronically

Under this option, DIS would use the new automated case control management system (CCMS) that it is developing to screen cases that do no exceed a newly defined level of derogatory information. This level would be determined jointly by DIS and the adjudication facilities and would result from an attempt to balance risk and cost avoidance. The advantage of this option is that it could result in up to $7.2 million annually in cost avoidance by also including other types of investigations (e.g., National Agency Checks). It would also result in the greatest reduction in clearance turnaround time and allow for the electronic storage of information from minor derogatory cases. The disadvantage is that immediate action to begin a screening program would have to wait 2 years until DIS completes full implementation of the CCMS.

RECOMMENDATION

PERSEREC recommended to DoD policy makers that they implement Option 3. Even though this option would delay cost avoidance benefits, it still represents the best option in terms of ease of implementation and cost avoidance. From a risk management perspective, it offers benefits that offset any minor increases in risk. While Options 1 and 2 yield immediate benefits, implementation of either of these options would result in systems changes that would later have to be modified when CCMS was implemented. it also would allow adjudication facilities and DIS to work collaboratively to establish screening criteria. In the long run, our assessment is that Option 3 is the best for DoD.

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[1]The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Defense.

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INTERNET DOCUMENT INFORMATION FORM

A . Report Title: Screening of Personnel Security Investigations

B. DATE Report Downloaded From the Internet: 06/07/99

C. Report's Point of Contact: (Name, Organization, Address, Office Symbol, & Ph #): **Navy Advancement Center**
ATTN: Dr. Grover Diel (850) 452-1615
Pensacola, FL

D. Currently Applicable Classification Level: Unclassified

E. Distribution Statement A: Approved for Public Release

F. The foregoing information was compiled and provided by:
DTIC-OCA, Initials: __VM__ **Preparation Date 06/07/99**

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