Shaw Air Force Base

"What's being done isn't making the impact needed. Time to change and take this more seriously. Enough with all the PR crap." Aubrey Tony, Facebook

What are perceptions toward the stand-down at the Shaw Air Force Base?

Situation

In response to a significant increase in suicides – 78 so far this year at a rate of approximately one every three days - Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein ordered a servicewide stand-down, which includes all personnel and operations. ENODO examined online discussion in and around Shaw AFB to identify trending topics associated with the stand-down and measure their associated sentiment. Findings from the analysis illustrate the impact of the stand-down and provide insights to inform effective communications and engagement strategies that can be used to optimize future activities.

Key Findings

- Shaw AFB is a microcosm of the greater challenges faced by the Air Force (AF), which provides a window into the concerns / grievances held by AF personnel

- Stand-downs do not provide an effective solution to address AF suicides

    - No meaningful dialogue was generated between former and current Shaw AFB personnel and their leadership

    - Concerns regarding the impact of "op-tempo," created by the mandatory stand-down, dominated discussions

- There is general concern with the lack of "legitimate" discussions regarding mental health issues and awareness

Recommendations

- Create a clear, consistent communications strategy driven by the voices of personnel that establishes a "meaningful" dialog, which informs effective programmatic initiatives

    - Design a Slogan / Master Narratives (e.g. Never Quit) that is reinforced by three overarching themes / Sub-narratives

        - ❑ Purpose / Meaning, Healthy Relationships, Self-Discipline

    - Do not conduct stand-down days or other variations in the future

Data Analytics

ENODO conducted topic modeling and measured public sentiment concerning online discussions around Shaw Air Force Base. Analysts collected and analyzed 82,021 Twitter posts, 41,978 Facebook posts, 32,978 Instagram posts, 28,665 YouTube comments, 21,996 news websites, 18,798 RSS Feeds, and 2,645 blogs.

"If airman suicides continue at their current pace, this year's deaths by suicide in the service would far eclipse last year's." **Stars & Stripes**

Topic Modeling

Analysts employed a topic model to identify and classify the most relevant and discussed topics concerning the mandatory stand-down in and around Shaw AFB
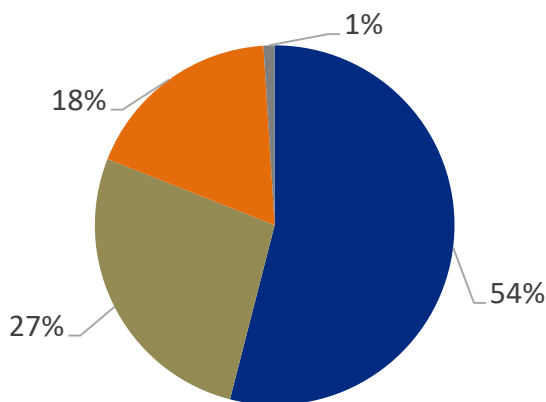
- **Op-Tempo:** 54% discussed increased op-tempo during the stand-down day and the additional work that will accrue when operations resume

- **Dialogue:** 27% mentioned social media engagements by Shaw AFB's leadership (i.e. Colonel Derek O'Malley)

- **Political Correctness:** 18% discussed the influence of political correctness
    - Not being able to discuss mental illness openly on social media
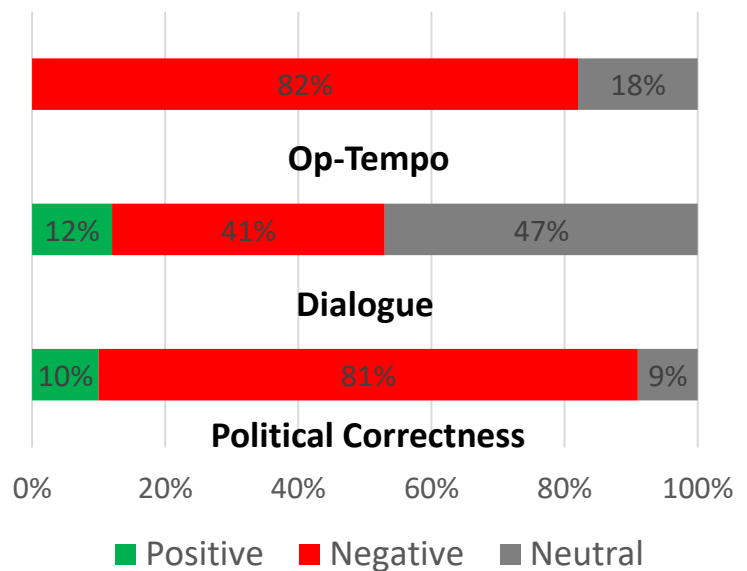
Sentiment Analysis

Measured public sentiment associated with stand-down trending topics:

- **Op-Tempo:** 82% negative sentiment clearly illustrates dissatisfaction toward the mandatory stand-down

- **Messaging:** Low positive (12%) combined with significant negative (41%) and neutral sentiment (47%) demonstrates how Shaw AFB's social media messaging is ineffective and fails to generate a meaningful dialog about suicides

- **Political Correctness:** 81% negative sentiment indicates frustration with the AF "PC Culture," specifically with "mental illness" topics

Stand Down Topics

- Op-Tempo: 54%
- Dialogue: 27%
- Political Correctness: 18%
- Other: 1%

Legend: Op-Tempo | Dialogue | Political Correctness | Other

Stand Down Sentiment

Op-Tempo: Negative 82%, Neutral 18%

Dialogue: Positive 12%, Negative 41%, Neutral 47%

Political Correctness: Positive 10%, Negative 81%, Neutral 9%

Legend: Positive | Negative | Neutral

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