Despite the diverse array of civil service occupations, all General Schedule (GS) personnel are paid according to a commonly structured pay table. Critics charge that this common pay table hampers personnel management flexibility in that managers cannot easily compete with the variety of external market opportunities that are available to civil service workers in different occupations. Furthermore, longevity increases are nearly automatic, and promotions can be vacancy driven and given only to eligible individuals, so civil service managers have few methods to provide financial incentives to attract, retain, and motivate higher-quality personnel. Consequently, the critics conclude that the civil service compensation and personnel systems do not adequately compensate superior performance or provide sufficient inducement for higher-quality personnel to stay.

One of the few tools potentially available to personnel managers to reward better performance is accelerated promotion, which results in pay growth. But whether promotion speed varies much across occupational areas and whether better-quality personnel are indeed promoted faster, are paid more, and stay longer are open questions.

The research presented in this report addresses these questions. It uses data on GS civil service workers in the Department of Defense (DoD) to describe career profiles (i.e., the promotion, pay, and retention profiles of groups of personnel) and to estimate whether higher-quality workers are promoted faster, are paid more, and remain longer in DoD civil service. It also provides some evidence on whether these profiles and results have changed in recent years since
the DoD drawdown changed the nature of civilian careers in the organization.

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