

Do Military Job Consolidations Affect Personnel Readiness?

Over the past several years, the military services have reduced their forces substantially; as a result, many military skill groups have been eliminated or consolidated. Job consolidations offer many potential benefits, including reduced costs associated with schoolhouse training and personnel management, as well as increased flexibility in assigning workload. However, as a result of visits to military units and anecdotal reports from the field, some members of Congress became concerned that the rapid pace of the military drawdown and accompanying skill consolidations might be eroding military readiness, particularly in the maintenance fields.

To address these concerns, the Office of the Secretary of Defense asked RAND researchers to determine the extent of the consolidations and their effects on readiness. The resulting study, *Military Occupational Specialties: Change and Consolidation*, assessed readiness effects in three key personnel areas: availability, experience, and qualification. The study found no adverse effects on readiness due to job consolidation in the services. Personnel in newly consolidated military occupational specialties were found to have levels of experience and availability comparable to those of other maintenance specialties. The data for qualification were more ambiguous. However, the services' procedures for making consolidations are thorough and clearly understood and are thus likely to help smooth the transitions.

MAINTENANCE SPECIALTIES IN THE ARMY AND THE MARINE CORPS ACCOUNTED FOR A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF CONSOLIDATIONS

From 1984 to 1997, the services experienced change both in terms of the total number of personnel employed and in the number and variety of job classifications. During this period, the number of military occupational specialties decreased by 20 percent for the Army, by 13 percent for the Marine Corps, and by 10 percent for the Air Force. Over

part of this period, the Navy saw a 34-percent increase in its number of occupational specialties, due largely to a Navy decision in 1993 to make each job classification more weapon-system specific. Since then, however, the number of Navy occupational specialties has decreased by 15 percent. The study used the generic term *Military Occupational Code* (MOC) to refer to Army and Marine Corps military operational specialties, Air Force specialty codes, and Navy enlisted classifications.

The analysis focused on skill eliminations and consolidations among enlisted personnel in maintenance fields in the Army and the Marine Corps, which are both services of concern. The elimination of a military occupational specialty can result from improvements in technology that render weapon systems obsolete. In a job consolidation, an occupational specialty might be transferred to one or several existing specialties, or, alternatively, one or many specialties might be transferred into a single new MOC. Of the 316 consolidations that took place in the Army from 1984 to 1997, maintenance specialties accounted for 54 percent of the total and represented over half the total number of job consolidations in many of the years studied. In the Marine Corps, maintenance specialty consolidations accounted for 41 percent of total consolidations from 1989 to 1997. During some years, maintenance consolidations accounted for most (or all) Marine Corps consolidations, while in other years, no maintenance consolidations occurred.

PERSONNEL AVAILABILITY AND EXPERIENCE SHOWED NO EFFECTS, WHILE QUALIFICATION DATA WERE MORE AMBIGUOUS

The researchers assessed the effects of skill eliminations and consolidations in terms of availability, experience, and qualification. *Availability* refers to the number of people who can be assigned to positions. *Experience* measures the time an individual has spent in a skill during

military service. *Qualification* measures training and capability in a duty skill. These measures were assessed before, during, and after each MOC consolidation, a transitional period that can last up to two years. Postconsolidation assessments were made after 6 months, 1 year, 18 months, and 2 years.

Availability. The study found that newly consolidated job specialties had high numbers of available personnel. While the fill rates for individual job specialties can vary, a comparison of all maintenance MOCs with the MOCs that had received members from discontinued specialties (“gainer MOCs”) showed that, two years after consolidation, gainer MOCs enjoyed higher fill percentages on average than other MOCs. It is likely that MOCs that have undergone consolidations have their authorizations carefully scrutinized and that their personnel management plans are carefully reviewed as part of the change process. These MOCs are therefore likely to receive special attention during implementation from recruiting, training, distribution, and assignment managers.

Experience. Newly consolidated MOCs were also found to have high numbers of experienced personnel. The study assessed experience according to three indicators: time in service, average pay grade, and time in grade. At the time of consolidation, Army personnel in gainer MOCs were found to have fewer years of service on average than all Army or all maintenance personnel. Over time, however, personnel in gainer MOCs became more experienced, and after 18 months, average years of service exceeded counterpart averages. Gainer MOCs also became progressively more senior, as measured both by rank and average time in pay grade. Compared to the Army and all maintenance MOCs, gainer MOCs were on average somewhat more highly graded 24 months after consolidation. By that point, gainer MOCs had exceeded times in grade when compared either to all Army MOCs or to maintenance MOCs. Time in grade likely increased because more senior people at higher grades entered the gainer MOC, and such people typically wait longer between promotions. Time in

grade could also have been extended because promotions slowed compared to all maintenance and all Army MOCs.

The story in the Marine Corps somewhat parallels that in the Army. While there was variation by MOC, the experience level overall was, on average, about the same as that of maintenance MOCs. However, average pay grade for gainer MOCs was lower than that for all maintenance MOCs, while time in grade was higher.

Qualification. To measure qualification levels, researchers examined data on training events before, during, and after consolidation. Few personnel took formal courses during the period studied. However, it is not clear whether the lack of formal training resulted in less-qualified personnel. Considerable on-the-job training may have occurred, or no training may have been necessary. It is possible that needed training was not given in some cases. A lack of formal training may have been disruptive at the unit level, but there was no way of quantifying the level of disturbance, if it existed.

CONCLUSION

Within the context of the readiness framework, the researchers did not find any negative effect on readiness from maintenance job consolidations in either the Army or the Marine Corps.

Both services have taken steps to reduce the friction involved in the process by developing detailed and carefully considered procedures for evaluating and implementing changes in occupational classifications. A serious effort is made at the beginning of the process to determine whether a proposed change fits the mission of the organization, existing structures, and other policies. Responsibilities for implementing changes are clearly laid out, tasks are assigned, and routine communication is established. The systems both services use make continuous adjustments. The procedures in place in the Army and the Marine Corps appear to be designed both to prevent adoption of undesirable changes and to minimize friction when change is needed.

RAND research briefs summarize research that has been more fully documented elsewhere. This research brief describes work done for the National Defense Research Institute; it is documented in Military Occupational Specialties: Change and Consolidation, by Mary E. Layne, Scott Naftel, Harry Thie, and Jennifer H. Kawata, MR-977-OSD, 1998, 70 pp., \$10.00, ISBN: 0-8330-2646-1, available from RAND Distribution Services (Telephone: 310-451-7002; toll free 877-584-8642; FAX: 310-451-6915; or email: order@rand.org). Abstracts of RAND documents may be viewed at www.rand.org. Publications are distributed to the trade by NBN. RAND® is a registered trademark. RAND is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis; its publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of its research sponsors.

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