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Maintaining the Balance Between Manpower, Skill Levels, and PERSTEMPO

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During the late 1990s and early 2000s, many U.S. Air Force organizations were finding that their manpower authorizations and the number of people assigned were inadequate to sustain both deployment and in-garrison missions with normal levels of military manpower availability. During deployments, nondeploying personnel assigned to many functional areas within the wings and commands were severely stressed and could not perform their normal home-base missions without working long hours. This problem stemmed in part from constrained military end strengths and other system constraints that restrict Air Force organizations from adequately adjusting military manpower and personnel levels to meet changing mission requirements. Moreover, both manning shortages and imbalances in skill levels further exacerbated the problem. To gain a greater understanding of the issues and policy implications, AF/A1M asked RAND PAF to undertake a detailed study and develop policy recommendations.

To execute this study, we

- collected historical manpower, personnel, and workload data and performed regression analyses to identify trends and patterns
- used Air Force manpower determinants, where available, to estimate manpower requirements for selected functions using planned workloads
- interviewed various Headquarters Air Force and major command manpower, personnel, and functional specialists
performed historical analyses of selected wings, functional areas, and specialties to identify specific trends and patterns in generating requirements, funding authorizations, and assigning personnel.

This process led us to broaden our focus beyond manpower requirements to address the cumulative effect of the Air Force human resource system on wing-level manpower, skill levels, and PERSTEMPO.

The monograph’s major findings are as follows:

- A comprehensive, systems-oriented human capital perspective is essential. Many of the issues identified during this study appear rooted in a lack of strategic direction compounded by fragmented approaches to human resource management. (See pp. 5–15.)
- The Air Force’s process for determining manpower requirements needs resuscitation. The data in Chapters Three and Four raise serious questions about the adequacy of published manpower determinants, especially given the expeditionary nature of today’s Air Force. (See pp. 19–61 and 66–69.)
- The Air Force needs one set of manpower books. Legacy computer systems resulted in the Air Force having at least three sets of manpower requirements. This contributed to discrepancies between the manpower authorized for wing-level missions and the actual number of people available. (See p. 78.)
- Skill-level imbalances affect productivity and contribute to workforce stress. If there are too many personnel in the lower three grades relative to the number of middle-grade trainers, the on-the-job training load can become a burden and can interfere with other mission activities. (See pp. 55–59.)
- Poor internal feedback between components of the human capital system impedes high system performance. During our interviews at both the Headquarters Air Force and major command levels, we found little evidence of feedback mechanisms between components of the human capital system. (See pp. 17–18.)
We recommend that the Air Force

- Implement an integrated manpower requirements architecture that considers workload, workforce sustainment, and workforce competencies. (See pp. 72–74.)
- Make greater use of dynamic simulation models to better understand the intersections of the manpower, personnel, and training subsystems. (See pp. 74–76.)
- Develop internal feedback loops between components of the human capital system that could be used to identify gaps in capabilities and/or misalignments between the manpower, personnel, and training activities. (See pp. 76–77.)
- Implement its Capability-Based Manpower Determination process as quickly as possible. (See pp. 77–78.)
- Field its Manpower Programming and Execution System as a means of eliminating multiple sets of books and explore ways to improve integration of MPES data into the personnel assignment and training systems. (See p. 78.)
- Establish and track metrics that compare planned against actual training burdens imposed on wing-level personnel. (See p. 79.)