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Air Force Enlisted Force Management

System Interactions and
Synchronization Strategies

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Summary

The purpose of this research is to help the Air Force better align its enlisted inventory and requirements by specialty and grade. The Air Force uses three major independently managed systems to determine strength by specialty and grade: the manpower system, the strength management system, and the enlisted promotion system. This independence persists because the current organizational structure lacks broad coordinating and control mechanisms. In turn, independence has spawned policies and procedures that occasionally work at cross-purposes.

To lay the foundation for a discussion of policy changes that would better synchronize these systems, we document salient features of each and discuss existing detrimental interactions. For example, we demonstrate that if strength managers successfully match the inventory to the funded manpower requirement for a specialty/grade combination, it is usually the case that they will be forced to retrain-in, to offer selective reenlistment bonuses, or to retrain-out to successfully meet the manpower target for the next-higher grade in that specialty (see p. 53). In part, this activity is driven by the promotion system policy of equal selection opportunity (ESO). Although ESO helps the Air Force achieve the Department of Defense (DoD) goal of ensuring a reasonably uniform application of the principle of equal pay for equal work, it also works counter to another DoD goal: satisfying authorizations for enlisted personnel by grade (see p. 43).

This monograph does not propose that the Air Force modify ESO. It does recommend that the Air Force pursue the DoDD 1304.20

(1984) goal of ensuring that requirements determination processes consider personnel management capabilities (see p. 71). Currently, there is a subset of manpower targets that strength managers cannot execute under any conditions. To the extent that strength managers do not recognize that some goals are unachievable, they may unnecessarily expend retraining and bonus resources, which would be counter to the DoD objective of supporting the most efficient allocation of resources. Under the changes we describe, each specialty would retain the same number of authorizations within each skill level, and the aggregate solution would maintain the same total number of enlisted authorizations by grade (see p. 59). To understand personnel management system capabilities better, we also recommend that the Air Force upgrade some of its personnel models (see p. 72). For example, the Air Force needs a maintainable, steady-state enlisted model with both grade and year-of-service dimensions.

To better synchronize the promotion system, we recommend that the Air Force investigate the benefits of standardizing test scores in its Weighted Airman Promotion System (see p. 72). We believe that the current practice of not standardizing scores means that some AFSCs produce fewer E7s, E8s, and E9s per 1,000 accessions (see p. 44). In turn, this may adversely affect senior NCO manning. We also believe that the Air Force should periodically assess whether the equity benefits of ESO justify its costs (see p. 74). ESO is an integral part of the Air Force enlisted culture. However, ESO carries a price. Manning deviations that affect the mission, the need to retrain about 4,000 enlisted members per year, and a reenlistment bonus budget of \$200 million per year are the major costs associated with providing promotion equity.

We believe that the Air Force should manage the enlisted force toward common goals (see p. 73). Because some focus on AFSC/grade and others on AFSC/skill level and others on total AFSC manning, management actions are not as well synchronized as they might be. From a broader perspective, this leads to another recommendation to develop an overarching control structure (see p. 73). Critical players currently reside in the AF/A1 staffs, the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC), the Air Force Manpower Agency (AFMA), and Air Educa-

tion and Training Command (Recruiting Service). At times, these groups work toward conflicting objectives.

Finally, in the long-term, we recommend that the Air Force explore productivity trade-offs (see p. 74). If the Air Force understood the relationships among productivity and experience, training, and aptitude, it could determine the least-cost objective force, as required by DoDD 1304.20.