



Alleviating Air Force Workforce Shortages with an Overall Force Management Approach

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The U.S. Air Force faces a manpower shortage in many critical career fields. At the end of the Cold War, all of the U.S. military services downsized their forces in response to a new international security environment free of superpower conflict. But the recent increase in deployments (for operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, for example), the competition for workers posed by a healthy economy, and other factors have been blamed for chronic understrength conditions in some career fields. The Air Force is concerned about having enough people with the right mix of skills for the technologically complex task of generating and projecting aerospace power in the 21st century.

RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) examined the causes of the shortages in the active-duty, non-rated line officer force, a broad set of diverse career fields that make up almost 50 percent of the officer corps. PAF found that many aspects of the problem may be due to a lack of high-level workforce coordination and planning. Workforce management occurs at three levels: tactical, operational, and strategic. Most management concentrates on short-term tactical problems, which are both challenging and time-consuming and divert attention away from the strong, centralized planning that would help the Air Force diagnose workforce problems and implement solutions across the entire force. PAF made recommendations in each of the three management areas, with special emphasis on operational and strategic management.

- **Tactical** management determines the next assignments for individual officers and manages their careers. Air Force personnel management has recently introduced development teams to help with the tasks of defining longer-term career goals for individual officers and reviewing each officer's records regularly. **The Air Force should provide the development teams with clear operational- and strategic-level guidance that will allow the management of individual careers to be informed by the overall needs of the force.**
- **Operational** management is concerned with individual career fields or a set of closely related fields. The manager responsible for a particular career field—the career field manager (CFM)—should have substantive knowledge of the career field being managed and access to analytic capability that can address complex personnel issues and model the evolution of the workforce under different policies. **PAF recommends that each CFM position be full-time for a senior officer and that CFMs be provided with dedicated analytic support that includes more-sophisticated modeling capabilities than are currently available.**
- **Strategic** management considers the total Air Force workforce, including overall size and mix (active duty, Guard/Reserve, civil service, and contractors). The strategic management job is the most difficult and most important for the long-term health of the force. It is at this level that financial and other resources are allocated so that the Air Force has the balanced force it needs. **The Air Force should establish a senior decisionmaking body with authority to make personnel decisions and provide it with a full-time staff and access to analytic support that is integrated with operational-level analytic support.** ■

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