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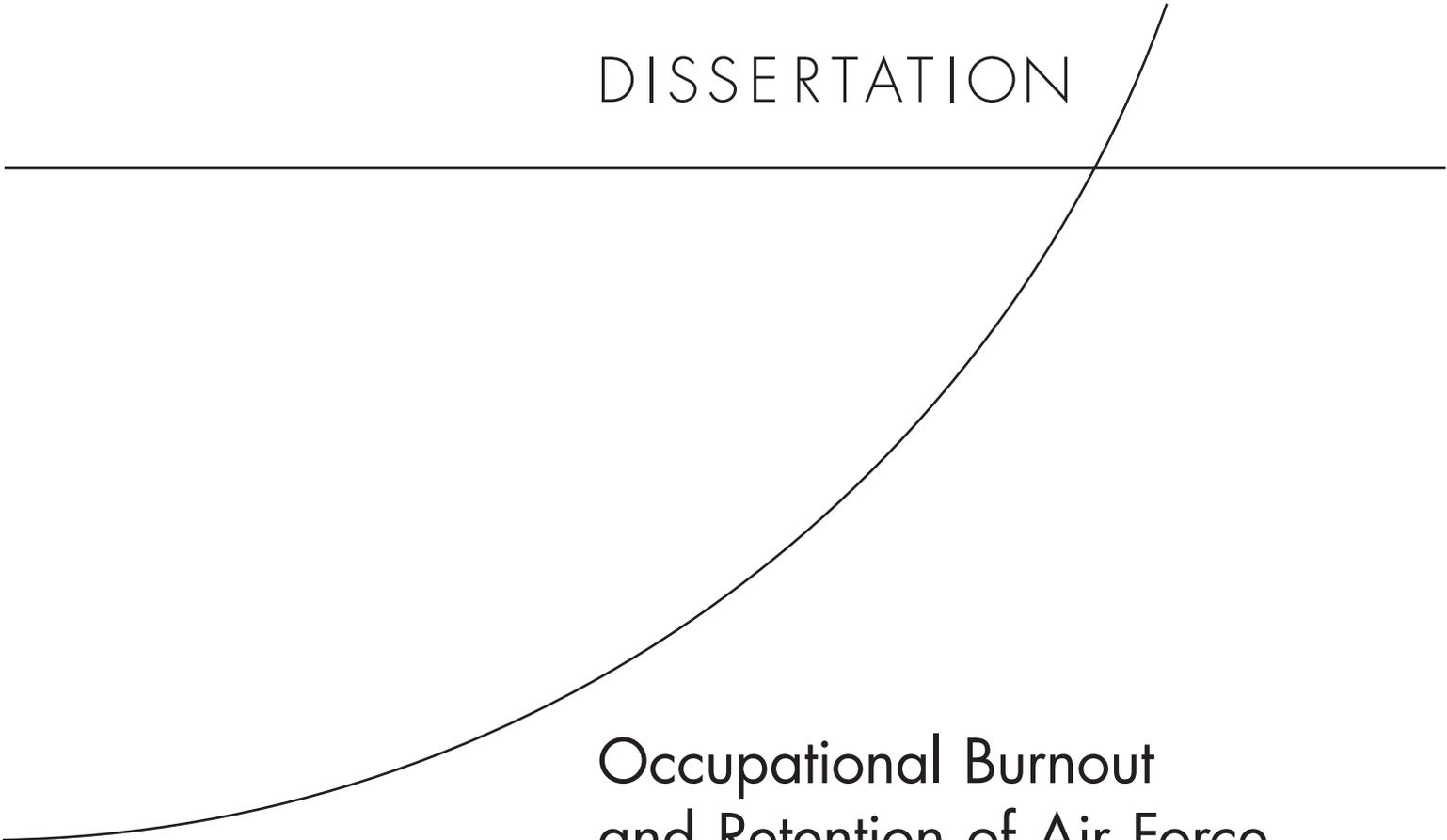
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DISSERTATION



Occupational Burnout
and Retention of Air Force
Distributed Common
Ground System (DCGS)
Intelligence Personnel

John K. Langley

This document was submitted as a dissertation in September 2012 in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the doctoral degree in public policy analysis at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. The faculty committee that supervised and approved the dissertation consisted of Lisa Meredith (Chair), Larry Hanser, and Wayne Chappelle.



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Summary

This dissertation sought to answer two policy questions for Air Force leadership and mental health providers. First: is there sufficient reason to be concerned about occupational burnout among DCGS intelligence personnel? Second: to the extent that these issues exist, what can be done to mitigate occupational burnout and attrition of DCGS intelligence personnel?

Chapter 1 reviewed the literature on occupational burnout to determine whether DCGS intelligence personnel might be at increased risk of experiencing high levels of exhaustion, high levels of cynicism, and low levels of professional efficacy – the three facets of burnout. Risk factors were organized into five categories relevant to the DCGS context: operational, organizational, combat-related, deployed in garrison, and demographic. In describing the crucial role played by the DCGS in modern U.S. military operations, Chapter 1 made the case that the adverse consequences of burnout (including negative health outcomes, reduced performance and reduced retention) are serious enough to justify the research effort.

Chapter 2 described how USAFSAM surveyed a major stateside DCGS location and what types of data were collected. Measures included a number of potential risk factors for burnout, scores for the three facets of burnout, and consequences of burnout in terms of turnover intentions. A pile sort technique was employed to analyze the self-reported sources of occupational stress affecting performance, and basic descriptive statistics analyzed the differences between intelligence personnel and support personnel at the same location. Ordinary Least Squares regression modeling was conducted to determine which variables were associated with increased burnout, and whether burnout was associated with turnover intentions.

Chapter 3 reported that intelligence personnel reported issues concerning shift work and long hours affected their performance more than any other source of occupational stress. Additionally, they report leadership management concerns and training/mentorship issues much more frequently than personnel who are not in intelligence-related career fields. Intelligence personnel also reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and a greater percentage met cutoffs for experiencing significantly high levels of these two facets of burnout. The factors with the strongest association with increased burnout (in any facet) were working an abnormal shift and working more than 50 hours per week. Being 25 or younger and being on the job for less than 12 months were associated with decreased levels of burnout. Despite some elevated levels of exhaustion and cynicism, most airmen responding to the survey indicated generally high levels of professional efficacy. No facet of burnout appeared to play a meaningful role in intentions to reenlist.

In light of these findings and the aforementioned policy objectives, Chapter 4 made the following recommendations:

1. Reduce the need for extended hours and abnormal shifts.
2. Actively promote a sense of professional efficacy.
3. Determine what other burnout risk factors may be impacted by policy.
4. Prioritize retention of trained intelligence analysts.
5. Leverage unit medical personnel for monitoring and treatment of burnout.

This chapter also advocated several related categories of research for the future, including automating technologies to reduce PED manpower requirements, evaluation of DCGS analytic capacity in a changing operational environment, longitudinal studies of burnout and subsequent retention behavior, and cost-benefit analysis of incentive pay for retaining experienced analysts.

Despite some limitations to the research, this dissertation should be of interest to current DCGS commanders and, more broadly, other organizations concerned about burnout or attrition of their workforces. In the former case, these findings concern a current, relevant policy issue in a critical mission area for the Air Force.
