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TECHNICAL REPORT

Improving Development and Utilization of U.S. Air Force Intelligence Officers

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Prepared for the United States Air Force

PROJECT AIR FORCE

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Summary

The U.S. Air Force intelligence career field (14N) incorporates a broad set of operational functions. Nine former subdivisions have been melded into a single Air Force specialty code (AFSC), reflecting Air Force policy at the time to develop "broadened specialists" with an understanding of intelligence beyond a specific technical area. Intelligence officers are expected to gain proficiency in four core competencies: (1) targeting, (2) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance battle planning, (3) unit and air operations center, and (4) aerospace intelligence preparation of the battlespace and predictive battlespace analysis.

A mismatch in the late 1990s between the qualifications needed for key general officer positions and the available candidates' background and experience stimulated an extensive Air Force effort to improve the development of future senior leaders. The effort evolved into a force-development initiative—managed by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel; advised by a force management and development council (chaired by the Vice Chief of Staff); and primarily in the hands of career field managers, functional development teams, and the Air Force Personnel Center's (AFPC's) officer assignment teams. The initiative concentrates on the development of officers in grades below colonel and is aimed at developing enough officers with specified types of background and experience to provide multiple qualified candidates for future requirements (see pp. 3–4).

In 2005, an article in the *C4ISR Journal* asserted that colonels in the intelligence career field were at a disadvantage for promotion to the general officer ranks. This article, along with reports from the 9/11 Commission[1] and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission[2] calling for reform in the intelligence community, spurred the Air Force to ask RAND to recommend ways to improve the development and utilization of intelligence officers at the grades of major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel (see pp. 2–3).

Defining Required Background and Experience for Intelligence Officer Jobs (Demand)

To obtain the information needed for this analysis, we called upon subject-matter experts (primarily colonels) to identify the experience, education, and training needed for intelligence

[1] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company, July 2004.

[2] The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction: Report to the President of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 31, 2005.

jobs—i.e., the qualifications that the jobs demand. The experts rated the types of background and experience needed for 1,100 O-4 to O-6 14N jobs,[3] along with other associated jobs, using a rating sheet listing more than 100 different types of missions and specialties (prefixes) and functional, organizational, leadership, academic, and training experience. Each type of experience was rated as "critical," "important," "useful," or "not needed" for each job (or for job groups the experts regarded as similar). The resulting information represents consistently written requisitions for personnel (see pp. 8–10).

Not only did jobs at higher grades have more requirements, but also the criticality of each job requirement increased as the grade increased. Raters determined that, on average, 4.1 experience requirements were critical for colonels, 2.6 were critical for lieutenant colonels, and only 2.3 were critical for majors (see p. 12).

The list of specific job requirements for all field-grade intelligence jobs should be useful for managers who are writing job requisitions, assignment officers who need to fill vacant positions, and intelligence officers who are eligible for reassignment. A list of requirements ranked as "critical," "important," or "useful" is much easier to use than narrative descriptions of requirements (see p. 17).

Identifying Officers' Qualifications (Supply)

Using historical personnel records from AFPC, we identified the experience, education, and training that current intelligence officers had accumulated since entering the force—i.e., qualifications that the officers supply (see pp. 21–22).

Our study found that the types of experience needed for 14N jobs are far fewer than the types of experience accumulated. For example, there are on average only 10.8 job requirements for 14N colonels, but over their careers 14N colonels acquire an average of 35 types of experience. This number suggests that much greater depth is possible: Intelligence officers could spend more time in each job, thus acquiring greater depth in fewer areas (see p. 25).

Access to officer career histories would allow methodical identification of the education, training, and job experience that 14N officers gain as they progress in grade from major through colonel. Further, this acquired background and experience can be expressed in the same terms that characterize job requirements. However, there are some limitations. Standards for acquiring requirements should be set, and officers records should indicate when those requirements have been met (see p. 29).

There are far fewer job requirements than there are skills acquired, suggesting that 14N officers are being trained too broadly. Rather than requiring officers with more limited experience in many different intelligence areas, the jobs require personnel with more focused experience. The positive perspective of the current situation is that breadth of experience increases the number of candidates whom assignment officers can consider for job openings that occur. In addition, not all qualified officers are available for assignment. However, keeping officers in jobs longer or in "back-to-back" assignments in the same or similar job categories would give officers more depth (see p. 29).

[3] O-4 is the symbol for a major; O-5, lieutenant colonel; and O-6, colonel.

Assess Gaps Between Supply and Demand

A gap analysis compared the experience needed for intelligence jobs with the cumulative experience of the 14N officers holding those jobs. We compared the requirements of the jobs at each grade with the background and experience of officers holding these jobs as of, but not including, the job they were holding in 2005. This analysis covered five categories of experience: organizational, operational, functional, command, and AFSC prefix, by grade level and criticality of experience (see pp. 31–43).

Overall, there is about a 40-percent match between officer experience and job requirements; there is about a 50-percent match for critical elements, a 42-percent match for important elements, and a 30-percent match for useful elements (see p. 39).

The shortfalls identified may be the result of both career development gaps and imperfect allocation of officers to jobs. This assessment is quantitative; it assesses whether the officers had developed the experience needed for the jobs, but it does not address the qualitative question of whether the officers were proficient at the tasks needed for performing those jobs (see p. 31).

The current assignment of intelligence officers could be improved. The assignment system lacks systematic assessments of the requirements for various jobs and the experience acquired by individual officers. Good matches occur either by chance or by unstructured interactions among assignment officers, the individuals being assigned, and the gaining commanders or their representatives. In these cases, there may be tacit criteria that are important to the personnel decision but that are not available in either the assignment data describing the position or the personnel record. It may also be that the system has not had sufficient time to recognize evolving requirements (see p. 44).

The designation "critical," "important," or "useful" for each type of experience for many intelligence jobs needs refinement by officers holding those jobs and their supervisors. Adding deployment data would increase information on each type of experience acquired. When career field managers meet to assign force development vectors, they could review the job requirements and consider the recommendations of supervisors, Air Force assignment officers, and personnel holding the jobs (see pp. 44–45).

Recommendations

Improve available information on job requirements. Currently, a unit with an unfilled job sends AFPC a description of the job's functions and a list of the qualifications that candidates should have. These descriptions and qualifications vary from minimal (or none) to elaborate and overwhelming. Most Air Force job requisitions include detailed job descriptions, but few include specifics about the background, experience, or training needed to do the job (see pp. 47–49).

Improve available information on officer skills and experience. It will be much easier to match officer experience and training with job needs when more officers have special experience identifiers (SEIs) and more jobs identify required SEIs. The "rules" and histories in our supply data provide an independent basis for making SEI assignments for all field-grade intelligence officers. Our data may provide most of the SEI assignments needed if this information is initially input in personnel records. Individuals would need to provide additional information only when they felt that the method missed one or more SEIs to which they should be entitled (see p. 49).

Use flow analysis to assess the implications of alternative futures. In flow analysis, a simulation model optimizes the flow of officers through jobs within and across grades. Such a model has been used to understand the effects of different mixes of experience, education, and training at each career stage or policies that favor depth versus breadth of experience.[4] Technology and national priorities, for example, could change the nature and/or mix of future 14N jobs, as could shifts of intelligence work to or from other services, government agencies, enlisted personnel, civilians, or the reserve components. Flow analysis can readily indicate whether notional strategies are feasible and how they would affect the career paths recommended for 14N officers. A new report from the Defense Science Board Advisory Group on defense intelligence highlights the usefulness of such operations research models for decisionmaking (see pp. 49–50).[5]

Conclusions

There is much work still to be done to translate the results of these modeling excursions into career development strategies and then to measure the effect on organizational performance.[6] Even though empirical evidence is relatively slim relating experience to organizational performance, most placement systems in the military, government, and the private sector accept supervisors' declarations of the experience, education, training, or other attributes desired in candidates for specific positions (see p. 51).

The approach described in this technical report simply aims to make such processes considerably more systematic and effective for the Air Force's intelligence officer workforce to

- identify and prioritize positions' needs consistently by using a list of qualifications (these may change over time, but relatively slowly)
- trace officers' accumulation of those qualifications as their careers progress
- routinely assess any gaps between the positions' needs and the officers' qualifications
- develop plans that would deliberately develop officers so that, collectively, their qualifications will meet the requirements of future positions
- develop aids for the assignment process to help match individual officers with positions for which they are well qualified and thus, insofar as possible, enhance their readiness for future assignments
- create a more strategic view for an intelligence career within an evolving national security environment.

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[4] Two RAND publications contain more discussion of flow analysis and its applications. See S. Craig Moore and Marygail Brauner, *Advancing the U.S. Air Force's Force-Development Initiative,* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-545-AF, 2007; and Georges, S. Vernez, Craig Moore, Steven Martino, and Jeffrey Yuen, *Improving the Development and Utilization of Air Force Space and Missile Officers,* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-382-AF, 2006.

[5] U.S. Department of Defense, *Report of the Defense Science Board Advisory Group on Defense Intelligence: Operations Research Applications for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR),* Washington, D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, January 2009.

[6] The current career field manager for Air Force Intelligence officers, Col Theresa Meyer, read the draft manuscript for this document. She noted, "There have been minor changes in our force management process since this was written, but I believe they will contribute to better synchronization of personnel capabilities with positions requirements and improve deliberate development."