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TECHNICAL REPORT

Air Force Officer Specialty Structure

Reviewing the Fundamentals

Raymond E. Conley, Albert A. Robbert

Prepared for the United States Air Force

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

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Summary

Since its inception over 50 years ago, the Air Force specialty-classification structure has had only one major overhaul—in 1993. Yet, the Air Force has changed dramatically. It is smaller. Its people are more educated and experienced. Its missions have continued to evolve. Given the evolving missions, changing workforce, and changing nature of work, several senior Air Force leaders are asking whether the existing specialty codes provide the correct blend or combination (*natural clusters*) of specialties.

Several representatives from RAND Project AIR FORCE were asked to serve as members of an Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) Reengineering Working Group assembled by the Air Force to assess the clustering of specialty codes. In addition, PAF was asked to determine whether other classification changes might be warranted. This technical report presents those results by examining the current officer-classification structure while seeking to determine whether more fundamental changes are needed.

The research began with an analysis of historical major changes in the classification structure. Later, the RAND team conducted interviews with Air Staff, major command (MAJCOM), and Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) specialty-classification personnel and users of the system, such as functional managers, assignment managers, and occupation analysis specialists. Additional information was obtained during briefings given by functional managers to the AFSC Reengineering Working Group. Historical documents, as well manpower and personnel data obtained primarily from Air Force manpower and personnel databases, were used to verify information received during interviews and briefings and to identify potential issues and extant patterns for comparative analyses.

The research offers four conclusions and seven recommendations. The conclusions are as follows:

- The framework for officer specialty classification is fundamentally sound: It helps match military jobs and personnel for Air Force purposes and facilitates a common occupational language between information systems. Given its current use and operating environment, major modifications to the structure are not required (pp. 10–12, 23–25).
- Specialty-classification components need continuous maintenance (i.e., adjustments for changes in characteristics of the work and/or workers) and periodic upgrades to capitalize on best practices and improved technology (pp. 13–17).
- Major changes are occurring in the Air Force, Department of Defense (DoD), the nature of work, and the nature of modern warfare. They will lead to significant changes in the specialty-classification structure (pp. 14–21, 28–38).
- Observations made about the officer structure may have relevant correlates in the enlisted specialty-classification structure (pp. 25–26).

The recommendations are as follows:

- Expand the continuous process improvement initiatives, Air Force Smart Operations 21 (AFSO21), to include reducing the overall cycle time for specialty-classification changes.
- Revise the current classification tenets—many of which are administrative guidelines—to reflect best practices from human capital management.
- Add a column to unit manpower documents (UMDs) for secondary specialties. Let the increased visibility and normal refinement processes improve the accuracy of those requirements.
- Use the migration to the Defense Integrated Military Human Resources System (DIMHRS) as an opportunity to (1) eliminate data elements that add little value or duplicate information derived elsewhere and (2) add variants for codes that specify broad groups of specialties (jobs for which specific backgrounds are not required—"any officer" codes).
- Increase discipline in the officer special-experience identifier (SEI) system by establishing relationships and edits[1] between the SEI codes and applicable AFSCs.
- Increase the granularity of officer Intelligence specialties by using suffixes if it is not possible to put discipline in the SEI system.
- Initiate research to assess the potential effects of the changing nature of work and warfare on the specialty-classification structure.

[1] *Edits* reflect the relationship between the AFSC and the SEI code.