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Introduction

A fundamental goal of the Air Force personnel system is to ensure that the inventory, by Air Force specialty code (AFSC) and grade, matches requirements. However, there are structural obstacles that impede achieving this goal. To remove one of those obstacles, we propose a methodology that would marginally modify grade authorizations within skill levels in order to make it possible to better achieve manpower targets.

One of our main messages is that force management is a complex task that is best accomplished from a systems perspective. Three primary systems affect the strength of the enlisted force by grade and AFSC:

- the manpower system, which sets requirements for each grade and AFSC combination
- the strength management system, which establishes targets for overall strength, recruiting, retraining, and bonuses
- the enlisted promotion system, which determines the annual number of promotions for each grade in the aggregate¹ and in each AFSC.

These systems, with few exceptions, currently tend to function in isolation. Consequently, actions taken to control one system often adversely impact another. Hence, strength managers have often not

¹ In this monograph, *aggregate* means all AFSCs considered as a group.

realized their objectives because the overarching personnel system lacks broad coordinating and control mechanisms.²

Organization of the Monograph

Chapter Two discusses the overall objectives of enlisted strength management, including those set forth in the governing DoD directive. Chapter Three discusses the system for managing aggregate strength, and Chapter Four outlines the system the Air Forces uses to manage disaggregate³ strengths. Chapter Five discusses pertinent aspects of the enlisted promotion system. Chapter Six covers the manpower system. Chapter Seven offers strategies for better synchronizing the manpower, strength management, and enlisted promotion systems. Chapter Eight offers seven near-term and long-term recommendations.

² Galway et al. (2005, pp. 65–73) drew a similar conclusion about officer management.

³ *Disaggregate* means at the AFSC level of detail.