PREVENTING THE POACHING OF PERSONNEL: BOLSTERING
THE RETENTION OF THE AIR FORCE’S MOST VALUED
ASSETS

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PREFACE

This topic is a point of concern throughout the military as funding declines and requirements increase. Fewer personnel and compounding missions, tasks, and primary duties increase the burden on Air Force personnel and causes a reduction in commitment to service. I took an interest in this problem due to its complexity and psychological element regarding leading people. To understand why someone commits to an organization being constantly downgraded by a growing technological society and healthy economy is important in the pursuit for a sustainable force. This research would not have been possible without the support of my family, fellow classmates, and professor.
ABSTRACT

This paper takes aim at the retention problem in the Air Force exploring the primarily pilots, but also cyberwarriors. As the Air Force adapts to societal influences, knowing how leaders affect commitment to service is key to retaining people in critically manned positions. Bolstering the US Air Forces ability to identify the key components that drive an individual to forego their commitment to service will allow Air Force leaders to counter their impact. This paper used an evaluation method to determine how to improve organizational commitment. Throughout this paper the analysis highlighted intrinsic investments as the most powerful anchors to organizational commitment. This paper also explored the varying impacts of leadership styles on generational differences and how they influence individuals. This paper resulted in a recommendation for a culture shift in how leader career paths are managed in relation to their primary AFSC and the use of graduated benefits over time.
INTRODUCTION

As the Air Force adapts to societal influences, knowing how leaders affect commitment to service is key to retaining people in critically manned positions. There are a great many variables outside the military’s span of control that influence a person’s decision to serve. A person joins the military for many reasons, ranging from educational aspirations to a general sense of patriotism. Knowing why any one person chooses to stay or leave after their initial commitment is a moving target that changes with the person’s perception of their situation. A chance to improve one’s situation or lifestyle is why military recruiting tools, like free education and benefits, work so well. Many of the services benefit from highly developed and advanced training programs. Most of these programs are technology based which require a considerable amount of costly training. The allure of service can be enhanced by promises of this type of education. This is a double-edged sword for the military as it has also made military personnel more of a target for technology-based companies that want to benefit from work oriented, disciplined, and well-trained personnel. The Air Force is a technology driven military arm and has consistently had to overcome this reality. The focus of this paper will be on two of the Air Forces most critically impacted areas, pilots and cyberspace. Bolstering a person’s commitment to the organization and overcoming extrinsic lures requires leaders to understand individual expectations and apply a leadership style that reinforces investments which build on those expectations.

There are several Air Force Specialty Codes that deal with this exact problem. For simplicity, a concentration on pilots and cyberspace will allow a model to be developed that can be provided for all AFSCs as a reference. A more specific analysis of external factors for other
AFSCs can be applied to the framework this paper outlines as each AFSC has unique intrinsic and extrinsic values.

This paper will utilize varying theoretical models needed to identify internal and external factors, narrow an understanding of commitment, and apply select criteria culminating in whether to remain in service or separate in pursuit of other opportunities. A general understanding of internal factors, referred to as intrinsic motivators, may not cover every aspect of a person’s decision matrix, but a sampling of major components to this matrix can be provided by examining surveys accomplished in the past.¹

Many of these types of motivating factors can be manipulated by leadership, but not always completely changed. A person’s moral center is derived from years of development within their youth environment.² This moral center is consulted with every decision and is almost instinctual. Intrinsic motivators only provide a piece of the puzzle as extrinsic factors also shape the environment that aid in developing or degrading commitment to the organization and overall service to the country. Extrinsic factors, also known as hygiene factors, impact how a person lives based on requirements beyond the individual’s direct influence.³ When a leader addresses these extrinsic factors and influences intrinsic factors an organizational climate begins to take shape.

This organizational climate is a direct result of a leader’s interpretation of senior directives, such as Air Force Instructions (AFI), and the style of leadership implemented by the commander and those tasked with command impacting decisions.⁴ With this in mind, an examination of leadership theory will provide insight into the most beneficial style of leadership and its impact on personnel’s perception of their continued service. This paper is not intended to
provide a single leadership style or course of action to retain personnel as each individual is
different and may require a level of interaction befitting their personality or general expectations.

To understand such an impact this paper will compare four pieces of criteria with possible alternatives. The criteria utilized in this paper reflect a study done by the Purdue University Military Family Research Institute in 2002. This study put forth a framework by which future research can be contrasted against in order to determine probable factors and solutions to personnel retention and organizational commitment. This framework will provide the standard by which alternatives will be judged while the alternatives answer what leaders can do to improve the organizational climate.

These alternatives account for a shift toward different leadership styles. Additional variances in population demographics must also be addressed. Introducing accepted differences across generational divides will provide further insight into how the world is interpreted by the two primary target generations with respect to the generations of leaders before them. Generational differences are important to understand as a person’s perception of the world is often shaped by the environment in which they develop. A generation of leaders that was raised in a time of developing technologies which required a more personal touch on socializing stands before a younger generation which developed in a world of instant information and access. This newer generation has also demonstrated an affinity for expedience and social alternatives.

This paper will utilize the evaluation method to ultimately provide a perspective on beneficial leadership styles coupled with possible courses of action that may fortify the commitment of Air Force Airmen to the Oath they took and the country they serve.
BACKGROUND

During the Cold War, the military enjoyed its largest population of military members since 1945. Around 3.5 million were in service with 904,850 personnel serving in the US Air Force in 1968. After the Cold War ended a drawdown of personnel was driven by the reduced threat anticipated worldwide and the major advances in technology at the time. In the 1990s an increase in troop utilization required increased recruitment numbers to support the war in the Middle East. September 11th 2001 provoked another surge in personnel to combat global terrorism. During this time, new technologies were coming online that made pilots more lethal against targets. Increased Air Superiority introduced more pilots flying jets with improved technology, such as the F-22 Raptor. Heavy Aircraft were getting upgrades to their navigation computers and glass cockpits were becoming more prevalent throughout the community. The average stick and rudder pilot has garnered enough experience to be sought after by the airlines. For a person who enjoys flying the friendly skies, the reduction in allotted flying hours has made the choice to move to the airlines more alluring. Training to be a pilot can range from $10,000 for a private pilot’s license to $75,995 for a fully accredited professional airline pilots course according to Aerosim Flight Academy. The Air Force spends $2.6 million to train a fighter pilot and $600,000 to train a heavy pilot. Simulators have helped reduce this cost and increase non-standard environments in which pilots may never be exposed to throughout their flying career. Having a fully trained and disciplined pilot with experience would allow airlines to expedite their in-house training requirements and put pilots to work faster. Like pilots, the cyberwarfare community faces similar circumstances.

Cyberwarfare has more than doubled its budget in 2014. An omnibus appropriations bill increased Cyber Command’s funding from $191 million in 2013 to $447 million in 2014. This
has been an ongoing reaction to the threat of cyber-attack sense the 2008 incident that exposed military networks to malware from a foreign intelligence agency. The military has not been the only target as corporations and infrastructure are also under similar attacks aimed at crippling the United States economy and way of life. The Department of Labor has projected the Information Security field will increase employment 18% from 2014 to 2024.\textsuperscript{14} Cyberwarriors will fill this void in the free market if not given a reason to defend the country. This field will prove even harder to retain personnel as the average pay if $92,000 a year and increasing will continue to syphon personnel from the military. This is due to the cutting-edge training and technology needed in defending the nation’s cyber network as well as the real-world experience gained in the military that you do not get from college graduates.

**LOSING CRITICAL PERSONNEL**

Retention numbers have begun to dwindle in the face of budget cuts in training and manpower which increases the work load, but not necessarily the flying time for pilots. Additionally, the Remote Piloted Aircraft (RPA) programs have been reaching into the other AFSCs for personnel to man the controls which takes these pilots out of the air for a period of time, if not for good. Taking these factors together presents a real problem for Air Force retention when the reason people joined the Air Force is slowly corroded away. There is an added degradation in the RPA community as it has become the most lucrative technology in the aviation world. This increase in demand requires an increase in a supply of pilots of which is easily found in the US Air Force or the US Navy. Protecting these platforms requires a robust cyberspace defense as the majority of RPAs are computer based drones that can be electronically attacked.
A new battle field was forming in the cyber world which required tech savvy individuals to specialize in cyber warfare. This field gave troops access to skills that would eventually be highly sought after in civilian technology businesses. The problem is further compounded by increases in government contracts to support the technical requirements of the military which drives contractors to hire personnel whom are familiar with the systems and already carry the proper clearances. This is made all the more attractive to contractors as time and money that would normally be invested in training is saved and the extensive time background investigations take is no longer required. These two career fields have specific factors that drive commitment to service, however, there are similarities in military commitment throughout the Air Force that can be analyzed alone side these specific factors in order to better understand a person’s intentions. These factors can be broken down into external and internal factors.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

External factors are factors that impact the individual of which are beyond the control of the individual. Growth of the economy feeds into a person’s decision in the form of opportunity. Alternative lifestyles outside the military that provide a better opportunity to the individual may trigger self-assessment. Economic growth stimulates job market growth and increased salaries that may lure an individual away from the military if their commitment to service becomes less of a priority to salary and lifestyle change. Even the prospect of being afforded the opportunity to purchase a family home at reasonable rates in a generous economy may drive a person to put down roots and move away from the military lifestyle.

Short of an internal desire to serve the country, a member of the armed forces during peacetime may choose to separate based on political views, family values, or religious practices if war is declared. The reverse may also be true if a person joins the military to actively defend
the country and is never given the opportunity. As seen with US Air Force flying hours reduced across the military, pilots fall victim to budget constraints. Secondary effects can occur in manning shortages increasing workloads in non-flying duties and opportunities to perform career broadening assignments, which may impact promotions.

Commanders should also be aware of introducing societal issues into the unit. Even though the military is a microcosm of American society, it should not be mistaken for society in general. The process of getting selected for this all volunteer force and accomplishing the basic training required to serve produces a well disciplined and functional corps of personnel. Although there are issues that may arise due to human nature a reaction to societal issues creates compounding requirements for personnel beyond their required duties. This ever-growing burden has been recognized by the Air Force who has order a top down review of additional duties and requirements. Some education is good to establish a cultural norm within the Air Force as the personnel in the military in general hail from different parts of the country which have differing cultures and perspectives on acceptable behavior. However, some extraneous requirements add to an already strained workload and may cause some individuals to find an alternative more befitting their expectations. Much of the reaction to external factors are forged by internal factors.

**INTERNAL FACTORS**

Internal factors range from a person’s perspective of what they control to factors directly impacted by the commander and the unit’s chain of command.\(^{16}\) Fair compensation is the basis for services provided in a cost-benefit analysis of job satisfaction. A person may address this in a financial manner or base it on benefits that are not provided beyond the military. Furthermore, an individual may identify their time as the valued commodity in this transaction vice the
financial compensation. The military is one of the few organizations that provide its personnel with ample personal time if the ops tempo allows. A deployment schedule may overwhelm a career field which creates short lived careers, as seen in EOD personnel on a 3-1 month rotation cycle. After returning home from a deployment the daily operations schedule, training, and exercises may strain an already encumbered schedule if not appropriately handled.

Organizational climate is molded by a combination of the commander, the mission, and the personnel in relation to the ops tempo and working conditions. The working conditions can have a huge impact on a person’s drive and motivation. Drive and motivation has a direct correlation to commitment to the job, the unit, and eventually their service. The style of leadership can motivate or disenfranchise an individual. The level of commitment a person holds may affect the style of leadership needed to motivate that individual. An example of this may be seen in an individual solely motivated by monetary solutions or fair compensation needing transactional type leadership vice being guided by a leader using the transformational style. This will be explored in further detailed later.

THEORETICAL MODELS OF COMMITMENT

Finally, there are many theories that have been explored in order to explain how an individual will respond to factors affecting commitment. It is an important first step to understand how a person arrives at the decision to remain in their current job or embrace new opportunities. These theories build on each other as the human psyche is better understood and become more complex. The majority of these theories point to a balance of requirements needed for job satisfaction. The theories that will be used in this paper are built on these job satisfaction models in order to address commitment specifically.
Rational theories are defined as models of intentional decision-making processes which address cognitive processes that lead to a conscious decision. These models assume a person is rational in their decision-making process. Rational theory models account for job satisfaction as the primary concern based on a person’s expectations of the job. The most developed rational model includes alternatives as a factor vice earlier models that only accounted for inputs made by the individual and expected outputs being fair compensation for the effort as seen in the Organizational Equilibrium model. The Turnover Process Model expands the formula for decision making by determining whether opportunities can play a part in an individual quitting. Below the model is written as a formula:

\[ Satisfaction < Expectation + Alternatives = Quitting \]

Multiple Path theories postulate there is more than just a linear path to a decision. These models begin to acknowledge that internal factors are affected by external influence and extend to areas outside the immediate work environment. These areas range from economic conditions to lifestyle changes (i.e. having a baby). The Unfolding model suggests a person either consistently evaluates their job or is shocked into evaluation by an event. The trigger can be internal or external in nature. The formula begins to evolve as the Multi-route model infuses the Turnover and Unfolding theories into the following:

\[ Expectations < Trigger Event (i.e. economic conditions) = Intent to Leave + Alternative Withdrawal (opportunity) = Turnover \]

This model identifies a trigger event that when combined with lowered expectations in the workplace causes a turnover when an alternative for withdrawal presents itself. The model demonstrates that if an Airmen’s expectations of the job are not met, whether financially or otherwise, a trigger event such as a missed promotion may create an environment ripe for departure. With an opportunity presented due to thriving economic conditions turnover or
resigning will occur. Organizational Adaptation theories suggest that the decision matrix is even less linear due to commitment to the organization creating an atmosphere of either constant scrutiny of the job to determine turnover or a shock event that triggers an evaluation of the job.\textsuperscript{23} The Cusp Catastrophe model explains the shock event as a trigger outside the normative activities or expectations of the job.\textsuperscript{24} Massive layoffs, a turnover in management, extended hours, and more may trigger the evaluation of the inputs to outputs ratio and fair compensation thereof. In order to reach a deeper understanding of what holds a person to their job an understanding of the commitment to one’s work must be accounted for.

Theories of Organizational Commitment take the variables that are used by the previously mentioned models and add an intrinsic value. Commitment, also known as faithfulness, allegiance, or loyalty, is a value that is hard to gauge. In order to understand this emotional attachment to the job two models will be referenced throughout this paper, commitment and investment models. These two models explain the push and pull of commitment. Also, these models explore commitment as targeting the organization and not the job. This is important to understand as the Air Force as a larger organization needs to ensure people are more than their job. First, the Commitment model refers to three forms of commitment; affective, continuance, and normative.\textsuperscript{25} These are a form of pushing commitment to the organization. Affective commitment is seen throughout the military as it draws on the individual’s willingness to exert effort on behave of the organization, accept its values, and show a strong desire to remain a part of the organization.\textsuperscript{26} This commitment is the strongest out of the three because it is of the individual’s free will. Continuance and normative commitment are born from a sense of cost or obligation to the organization.\textsuperscript{27} Both of which are tied to observed factors and not starting from within the individual. Taking these external factors further a person
may anchor themselves to the organization if they are invested in its success. The Investment model explains why an Airmen stays for retirement or for medical and family benefits. The model simply states an individual remains with the organization due to assets that are tied to the job would become lost if the individual quits. This is a simple premise that will be shown as a key component to retention in an all-volunteer force alongside commitment.

The models presented here develop an understanding of how the individual starts to entertain the possibility of change. Further development of this idea highlights alternatives and an eventual analysis of the cost of quitting weighted against those alternatives. Most of the earlier models fail to account for concepts of patriotism or a need to be a part of something greater. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs explains this behavior as aspiring for higher needs. Basically, when elementary needs, such as food and shelter, are met a person can focus on more advanced needs such as becoming part of something more than one’s self. A general understanding that you don’t join the service for the pay highlights organizational commitment. This may be the strongest anchor, but it can also be the easiest to destroy if not fostered appropriately. This is where leadership can do the most good or the most harm.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

To ensure a thorough analysis of the problem this paper will examine the specific factors affecting pilots and cyberspace personnel. These factors will be broken into categories reflecting the nature of the factor, intrinsic or extrinsic. Once this is determined an evaluation of the leader’s sphere of influence over these factors will be assessed. This analysis will help determine where each evaluated leadership style will fall in the developed model or if a more progressive leadership theory should be explored. After ascertaining the most effective leadership styles the variable found in generational drift, leadership and followership across
many generations, will be evaluated to highlight deviations in behavior. Finally, a formula for commitment will be utilized to determine possible recommendations to help combat retention issues. The formula is intended to identify areas of focus for a leader’s direct interaction or an Air Force level change.

VARIABLES OF INFLUENCE

Based on the models previously discussed an understanding of why a person makes decisions regarding quitting or remaining with the organization is established. A breakdown of the factors directly effecting this decision can be identified and categorized based on the Herzberg Motivation-Hygiene Theory. Also known as the Two-Factor Theory, the Motivation-Hygiene Theory identifies factors that play into a person’s decision to leave or trigger an evaluation of one’s situation and separates them into two categories; motivators and hygiene factors.

MOTIVATORS AND FACTORS

Motivators are intrinsic in nature which stem from a person’s self-worth. These motivators induce the employee to react a certain way. Personal recognition, whether in the form of advancement or achievement, are motivators which encourage a person to value their position in the organization and have something to strive for. This positive reaction to the organization, as reflected in the Commitment Model, demonstrates a way to reinforce affective commitment. A person feeling valued in their position and being part of a greater whole evokes a greater sense of value for the organization, which is a strengthening of a person’s investments in the organization. Other motivators can be the job itself, responsibility, or professional development opportunities. In relation to pilots, flying is a key motivator. A young officer looking to lead in the Air Force may be motivated by responsibility or professional
development opportunities. A leader must also be aware the reverse can be true where a motivator may be a detractor if it does not align with a person’s goals or desires.

Hygiene Factors are extrinsic as these factors impact an individual and do not originate from within the individual. Working conditions are a good example of a factor that is affected by the organization and impacts the individual’s expectations (norms) of the job. Policies at work, whether restrictive or permissive, can steer and individual toward evaluating their position. Other provided factors can be salary, benefits, job security, rank, or type of supervision. Many of these factors can be considered trigger events if changed, leading to the Cusp Catastrophe model’s shock event motivating an evaluation of position. Factors, whether internal or external, are affected by the interaction of the leader.

HOW “LEADERSHIP” INFLUENCES VARIABLES

There are numerous leadership styles in practice throughout the military. Currently, the Air Force recognized the Full-Range Leadership model (FRLM) as a basis for training Air Force Leaders. This theory addresses three primary styles of leadership; transformational, transactional, and passive. The Air Force has determined that a leader must understand the elements of leadership in order to comprehend the differences and impacts of each style. One of the more effective and accepted forms of leadership is the transformational style which is based on the Multidimensional Theory. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration are all aimed at the intrinsic factors of an individual. Through this method, a person’s intrinsic investments are directly impacted. The commander down to the first line supervisor use this method to inspire and motivate individuals.

Another form of leadership is the transactional style, also known as the “carrot and stick” method. Rewards are provided for good work and punishments are provided for poor work
under this style. On a larger scale, this is the method used by the Air Force through bonuses, benefits, salary, and time off; the carrot. The commander can take any of these away for extreme forms of punishment or a “not recommended for retention”, the stick. The final style in the FRLM is the passive or laisse faire.\textsuperscript{40} This is a completely hands-off approach to leadership. This would normally be considered a poor form of leadership; however, the situational leadership theory suggests that interaction between the leader and follower is required to assess the best choice of leadership style which can range from inspirational to nonexistent.\textsuperscript{41} The variance can be found in the need for an individual to be accepted or recognized (transformational), compensated (transactional), or independent (passive). These three traits are emphasized differently across varying generations.

\textit{Table 1 Leadership's Impact on Extrinsic Factors}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commander’s Impact</th>
<th>SQ Policies</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Job Security</th>
<th>Rank/Status</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>Direct Influence</td>
<td>Little Influence</td>
<td>No Influence</td>
<td>Little Influence</td>
<td>Little Influence</td>
<td>Direct Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Style</td>
<td>Owns Squadron Policies</td>
<td>Subjective based on performance recommendations</td>
<td>Air Force/DOD Programs</td>
<td>Subjective based on performance recommendations</td>
<td>Owns manning decisions in the squadron</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Personnel Recognition</th>
<th>The Job/Organization</th>
<th>Responsibility/Obligation</th>
<th>Professional Development Opportunities</th>
<th>Patriotism/Sense of Duty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>Direct Influence</td>
<td>Direct Influence</td>
<td>Direct Influence</td>
<td>Direct Influence</td>
<td>Direct Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Style</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>Transformation/Transactional</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
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\textit{Table 2 Leadership's Impact on Intrinsic Factors}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commander’s Impact</th>
<th>Personnel Recognition</th>
<th>The Job/Organization</th>
<th>Responsibility/Obligation</th>
<th>Professional Development Opportunities</th>
<th>Patriotism/Sense of Duty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>Owns Squadron awards program</td>
<td>Affected by policies and leadership style</td>
<td>Provided to individual by leadership</td>
<td>Responsibility of squadron commander to develop personnel</td>
<td>Mentorship and motivation is derived from unit leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Style</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>Transformational/Transactional</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
</tr>
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Table 1 and 2 highlight a very important aspect of leadership as applied to internal and external factors. The majority of external factors are highly influenced by transactional leadership. More importantly, internal factors, which are more impactful on individual decisions, are influenced by transformational leadership. This means commanders and front-line leadership has the most impact on an individual’s decision process. However, the level of impact is also driven by the perspectives and expectations of each generation.

**ACCOUNTING FOR GENERATIONAL DRIFT**

When leading across a complex organization, such as the military, differences in perceptions, values (intrinsic and extrinsic), and ethics can be gleaned across the generational divides. For a leader to identify and adjust leadership styles the concept of generational drift within one’s leadership style must be understood. How a leader can pivot from one leadership style to another, while remaining aligned with commander’s intent, is key to ensuring a progressive organizational climate. Overall, a progressive organizational climate can support job satisfaction. For a leader to be able to adjust appropriately, insight into the differences between generations is required. The Generational Leadership model (Figure 1) visually depicts the divides between the three generations being addressed in this paper. With Generation X on top the pyramid reflecting the commanders, or equally impactful leaders within the military, leading across generational divides demonstrates how leadership styles will have to account for such transition, labeled generational drift.
Generation X makes up the majority of leadership in the USAF. They are typically field grade officers born between 1961 and 1981. Understanding their perspective is important in understanding how other generations are measured in their response to varying leadership styles. This makes up the bulk of management level supervisors and command level leaders throughout the military. Strauss and Howe describe this generation as reactive in nature.

Millennials are the first line supervisors of the Air Force as generation Xers move onto higher management positions. They fall within the 1980-1999 timeframe and make up 70 million of the population. Millennials fall into general stereotypes such as entitled, needy, casual, and disloyal. The majority of Millennials are seen as entitled based on positive reinforcement, attention, and sheltering by parents. This has created a neediness about this generation which causes a craving for attention and praise. This has led the military to create different ways to identify personnel beyond the standard awarding of ribbons and medals. The Millennial generation is also seen as fractured due to the recession in 2008. Later Millennials entered the work force in declining economic conditions which caused a change in values and an increase in piety and thrift. This fragmentation from the mainstream Millennials would have more interest in stability and increased commitment. Overall, the Millennial generation becomes
more empowered with less supervision as it demonstrates accomplishment on their part.\textsuperscript{48} Additionally, this perspective drives less of a desire to maintain an hourly schedule at work or the need for a formal work place.

Generation Z has taken a different view of the world, and it is the world of cyberspace. This “netcentric” generation has grown up with a screen in front of them which has led to a stereotype of being socially inept netizens.\textsuperscript{49} This has been identified as a general misconception. Zers are looking to maintain a perfect image on social media, filtering their flaws that they see as having plagued the Millennial generation. In doing this and growing up in a technology driven age with instant access, this generation has developed a conscious filter to reduce information flow as they scan through all the data at their fingertips. This eight second filter also causes an extremely short attention span that must be identified by leaders in order to overcome and hold their attention.\textsuperscript{50} This means increasing their personal interest in organizational values through more personable interaction. In other words, a leader showing interest in the wellbeing of their people will better understand their intentions and know how best to motivate an individual. This is a generalization aimed at the self-invested and dedicated population of personnel who makes up the majority of the military and doesn’t apply to every person.

Understanding the interaction desired by each generation is a key component to the overall understanding of how to reach people. Once a leader has acquired the attention and commitment of each generation a development of their vested interests in the organization, personal success, and other anchors can improve a person’s desire to remain with the organization. The right circumstances must be cultivated by the leader.
A FORMULA FOR COMMITMENT

Analyzing the commitment models and understanding the theories behind an individual’s decision matrix has led the Purdue University Military Family Research Institute to develop a framework to answer the question of why a person chooses to leave the military or remain in service. This framework addresses the primary parts to the decision-making process; satisfaction, alternatives, investments, and norms. The framework has been put into a target chart format (table 3) to demonstrate from the center out how this model is applied to the decision process.

![Diagram of Factors of Commitment]

**Figure 2 Factors of Commitment, Data Derived from the Purdue University Military Family Research Institute**

**JOB SATISFACTION**

The framework put forth by the Military Family Research Institute discusses the criteria from satisfaction and alternatives to investments and then norms. Satisfaction is described as a balance between the benefits and rewards achieved with the costs incurred for the job. Job satisfaction has been seen as a determinant to relationship continuance, but the Investment model...
holds commitment as the proximal determinant and job satisfaction as one of the many variables that help an individual reach the decision to continue one’s commitment or dissolve it for alternative opportunities.\textsuperscript{54}

**ALTERNATIVES**

Alternatives are opportunities that present themselves which may trigger an evaluation of job satisfaction if the enticement of the opportunity becomes a shock event, as explained in the Cusp catastrophe model.\textsuperscript{55} The reverse can also be said if job satisfaction is low which leads to a search for alternatives. Job satisfaction and alternatives can give rise to each other though one is an internal factor and the other an external one. Job alternatives can be a direct result of economic health which means a strong economy will create personnel shortages due to job availability.\textsuperscript{56} This factor allows an individual to evaluate their current circumstance and compare it to what could be based on the available jobs in the market.

**INVESTMENTS**

Investments are the irretrievable ties that may be lost upon quitting a job or career.\textsuperscript{57} In the military, this could mean a loss of retirement, benefits, or position. Many investments can be internal factors as they border what is considered norms. Investments anchor a person to their commitment which can develop from obligations born out of self-induced needs to accomplish. Other investments can be more tangible in the form of services or benefits for family. The key to good investments is the ability of the military to provide unique investments that are not easily provided in the civilian sector. Many civilian opportunities may provide education, medical, dental, retirement and other services, but not all at once. The military can very easily take these investments and make them seem like norms where the private sector is more at the mercy of the economy.
NORMS

Norms are based on expectations, what a person expects from an organization in the realm of organizational climate, work place conditions, policies, standards, and the structure. They are the beliefs of an individual in what is known and accepted. An abrupt change in the norms will trigger discomfort as many are averse to change and what it may mean. The change itself may not be the center of contention as the fallout from the change or the unknown is what causes people to shy away from change. Norms share the realm of job satisfaction, but unlike the relationship between satisfaction and alternatives, norms may not trigger a dissatisfaction in the job nor the reverse if disrupted. Norms provide stability and counters the unknown of the alternatives that may be present in the civilian work force. All four of these pieces of criteria have been developed to address a way to determine factors that lead to a decision to leave or stay.

THE ENHANCED COMMITMENT MODEL: EVALUATION RESULTS

The framework discusses the processes of getting to a decision, but fails to provide the impacts of factors, such as leadership and generational drift, on the direction a decision can sway a person to perceive their position in the organization. There are many variables that affect the outcome of a person’s decision. To give leaders a better understanding of the impacts of their influence the Enhanced Commitment model has been developed (Figure 3) through the combination of multiple data sources on the various factors. The Enhanced Commitment model is a cross between a target graph and a circle graph. The target elements demonstrate the relationship of the four primary pieces of criteria and the influence of leadership styles. The target starts with investments or anchors at the center that keep a person committed to the
organization regardless of the other factors. The position in this graph shows an internal or intrinsic nature to the investment, which is the strongest of the four criteria.

As investments weaken the person moves away from the center to the next ring which demonstrates a need for job satisfaction or expected norms. A person establishes the strength of these pieces of criteria as related to their interaction with the organization. This means a person passes through the organizational climate as established by the commander and other leaders when determining their place in the greater organization and not just the job. If these leadership styles are misapplied or misinterpreted negatively by a different generation then the individual will look to alternatives in order to satisfy personal needs. A caveat to this model is a person solely motivated by transactional leadership. Someone who has no intrinsic investments and whose behavior is not modified by personal interaction will continually evaluate their circumstances and always look for alternatives that improve their status, personal time, or other forms of compensation. Such a person would continually ask “what is in it for them” which does not align with the core values of the military as a whole and of whom would not normally volunteer for service unless as a means to an end.

The circle graph element of the Enhanced Commitment model demonstrates the relationship between the established criteria for commitment and the effective leadership style with the different generations. Air Force leaders, Generation X, grew up with the values they shared with Baby Boomers. Aside from what is already known about this generation a great amount of weight must be given to the fact that they are still in service and approaching retirement eligible if not already. The investments they hold with the Air Force are great and will motivate completion of service through 20 years. Leadership at their level has been exposed to much education in the art of commanding people, from BDE to SDE.
This has honed their leadership style, but also allowed them to accept a transformational style of leadership from their seniors. As they approach the end of a long career a more situational approach should be anticipated as their view of services rendered may lead to a more transactional style being more motivational in relation to personal time. For these reasons placement of the Generation X circle across transformational, situational, and a large piece of investments demonstrates the most effective area for interaction with this generation.

Early Millennials have demonstrated a need to prove themselves without direction. Little motivation to accomplish the task is required though some inspiration and pride may go a long
way. There is a serious lack of investments for Early Millennials as retirement is far out of reach, benefits are not as enticing, and the opportunities maybe more appealing. This is the reason the Early Millennial circle is closer to job satisfaction and further from investments. After initial interaction with Early Millennials a transition to a more passive style feeds their need to prove themselves. The Late Millennials are similar but look at investments as a larger part of their decision matrix.

Generation Z is a newborn in the work force having been born from 1999 to present. Little can be drawn from such a short time, but extrapolations of the direction Generation Z will take points to a situational leadership style with an emphasis on job satisfaction. Realize that this more connected generation is constantly scrutinizing large amounts of data and filtering for what interests them. This means constantly comparing their job to other alternatives. Until a point of reference for life can be established within this generation it will continue to act as it has throughout its early development.

One factor that must be addressed in this analysis is found at the heart of investments and allows the interaction of any leadership style on the Enhanced Commitment model. A sense of patriotism, whether inherent or triggered by an event, is one of the strongest anchors to military service. It can stem from family ties to the military, an inherent need to defend others, being part of something greater than oneself, or the sight of two towers falling from the sky. Such an investment will keep a person anchored in commitment to serve regardless of any other factor addressed in any model. For this reason, it is not a factor that needs further discussion beyond sparking such emotion in those underwhelmed by the thought.
ASSUMPTIONS

Air Force leadership concentrates on mission and people. In doing so a generous amount of effort is given to ensuring people are taken care of and motivated to perform. The art of leadership is a combination of giving direction where there is no guidance and inspiring people to follow that direction because they believe it is what is best for them and their values. In order to be effective in influencing personnel a leader must understand their general sphere of influence. This paper assumes that every leader has direct influence in specific areas of command or some form thereof.

INSIDE THE LEADER’S SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

In addressing the four pieces of criteria and comparing the various leadership styles there are three critical areas of influence addressed by this paper. The first is organizational climate. The application of leadership has a large role in shaping the climate of the organization which has a direct impact on each individual in the unit. A laissez faire or a transformational leadership style can create massive differences in behavior through unit policy application and mentorship. Additionally, home station mission tempo directly influences a person’s perspective regarding the cost to personal time.

Second, is the influence a commander has over locally generated opportunities for Airmen. Providing increased responsibilities, professional enhancement opportunities, or other career path improvement events may help strengthen job satisfaction overall.

Third, extra-military factors, such as living conditions and family support, can be critical to an individual’s basic needs. If properly addressed by the commander and a sense of caring is given to the individual, the person may feel secure in the norms provided by the military, as a valued member of the team, and a possible sense of obligation to the military as explained in the
Commitment model as normative commitment. These assumed areas of influence are just one piece to understanding the extent of the commander’s influence.

OUTSIDE THE LEADER’S SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The second piece accounts for areas that cannot be influenced by the commander and thus will only be discussed in areas that can be affected by the Air Force. These factors are held at the Air Force level or higher, to include congressional influence. The deployment of troops can be forecasted or unexpected depending on the need for armed force. The commander can only ensure the unit is fully mission capable during times of possible or predicted movement. Air Force Instructions and policies are also beyond the commander. Salary is not influenced by the commander, with the exception of withholding pay or advancement recommendations. Benefits, other than personal time, are also at the Air Force and congressional levels.

Understanding what a commander can and cannot affect is critical in the negotiation of commitment from the individual. This paper looks at some of these critical areas in survey data taken through the Air Force Personnel Center’s Survey System. It is acknowledged that survey data is a general snapshot of a person’s perspective at a single point in time and not the consensus of the culmination of a career.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Some solutions to the problem would be to increase norms, strengthen investments, and provide internal opportunities that counter the external alternatives. There are two entities addressed in this paper that can affect these factors, the commander and the Air Force. This paper is focused on the direct interaction of leaders and followers. As such, it will address one commander oriented and two shared solutions between the commander and the Air Force.
Additional Air Force leadership ideas are recommended for further research at the end of this section. Focusing on the commander a few solutions that are within his or her sphere of influence include transparency, personnel management, and intrinsic motivation.

**SHIFT THE PARADIGM (MANAGEMENT)**

Increasing the transparency of a person’s military service and reducing unknown factors to the maximum extent possible can increase the sense of normalcy within the organization. Initial feedback sessions and career progression models have come a long way in improving a person’s understanding of their future within the organization. The Airmen Development Plan has helped commanders understand the expectations of their people and better tailor future plans in an effort to improve the expectations of personnel. Improving transparency in an organization built for constant readiness for the unknown is a great challenge. Relating this to the two career fields this paper is focusing on, a difference in ops tempo provides two different perspectives.

For pilots, the question of “in what capacity do you want to serve” could help commanders develop a clear career path for aviators. Do you just want to fly or lead in this Air Force? This question can be formatted for many different career fields and what the answer provides is a cadre of personnel that do not need to forecast a career or groom to lead, but just do what they love and fly without the additional duty requirements. Similar in nature to what the US Army uses their warrant officers for in their AFSC core competency vice career broadening to develop leaders. This would allow a large pool of individuals to serve without the detractors of leadership, as it may not interest them. Through this program an increase in job satisfaction would be noticed in both avenues of advancement. Based on the analysis, a reduction in cost to meet the current benefit may increase job satisfaction vice continually attempting to increase benefits to counter the increasing costs to the individual. Career fliers do not have to engage in
administrative entanglements and career officers have a smaller pool of competing candidates for leadership positions. This would be extremely beneficial in a top-heavy organization with limited leadership opportunities. The consistency of flying and reduction of other requirements may outweigh possible alternatives if the investment is intrinsic for sitting in a fighter jet. This alternative can also stabilize the environment for a pilot as expectations would be almost concrete with flying being the only real expectation. An Air Force pilot is generally active in a flying billet for 12 years before moving to a three-year staff tour after which they take on more of a leadership role. This means getting a pilot to remain in service for at least twelve years would maintain the current construct and allowing them to go to twenty years as a front-line flier would counter the pilot shortage with added personnel from recruitment. A two-track system that allows for technical service (pilot) or a professional one (leader) can be extended to varying AFSCs in different formats.

Table 3 Two-Track System Weighted Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>TWO-TRACK SYSTEM</th>
<th>Job Satisfaction</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Investments</th>
<th>Norms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career Pilot</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career Officer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current Construct</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 (Negative Impact) ↔ 3 (Neutral) ↔ 5 (Positive)

Table 3 applies a weighted value to the two-track system and the current construct ranging from 1 to 5. A rating of 5 represents a positive impact on the criteria reflecting an increased impact on the individuals weight in this criterion. Note that a positive impact in Alternatives is detrimental to retention. A rating of 3 represents a neutral impact on the criteria and a rating of 1 represents a negative impact on the criteria. A rating of 2 or 4 is less impactful, but accounts for some effect on the criterion. Based on the criteria defined in the evaluation analysis the three career paths are determined to have a negative, positive, neutral, or in between
impact on a person’s perspective in these areas. This analysis yields to “choice” being a positive influence. Job satisfaction is based on costs in and compensation out. The current construct requires more time from an officer’s desired capacity to serve and with little choice in order to remain promotable, giving it a lessor score. Alternatives have less of a negative impact in the two-track system as job satisfaction reduces alternative enticements. Investments are increased as those chasing the challenge of leadership and those wanting nothing more than to fly become anchored to their aspirations. Norms become more prevalent in the two-track system as expectations are established throughout the Air Force for each track and are easier to observe.

For cyber personnel, the dynamic changes as the military doesn’t corner the market on cyberspace like it does with fighter jets. An increased move toward investments has been the answer for this career field as bonuses attempt to entice personnel to remain in service. Other investments are needed to increase Millennial interest in their commitment to the military for cyber warriors. Transparency may still improve job satisfaction if given the opportunity to progress through a career path of their choosing. Such a move in any career field can be led by commanders, but would need to be accepted Air Force wide in the form of promotion and assignment opportunities for either career path, technical or professional.

**INTRINSIC INVESTMENTS (LEADERSHIP)**

Throughout this research the consistency of investments as being the primary anchor for a person’s commitment points to a need for commanders to address them as a first line defense against retention issues. Most investments are intrinsic in nature, but are affected by external forces, such as the organizational climate, commander’s leadership style, and working conditions. Some investments can be external in nature but have great meaning for an individual. Take retirement, for example. It is an opportunity provided by the military, but
intrinsically means freedom after 20 years of service. It means stability and security. The military is beginning to move toward the blended retirement system that allows for employer matching in a 401K type account instead of a pension. This can be used to the individual’s and Air Force’s advantage. By offering increased percentages on investment matching for specific career fields in exchange for extended service commitments a clear understanding of what can be gained by the individual may drive a higher commitment. Another possibility is to offer incremental separation pay that increases with each year of service. After four years a cyberspace Staff Sergeant would have earned $4,000 with an option to increase the amount for each year of extended service. The longer the service commitment, the more money the individual can earn. Other possibilities that should be further researched are locked in promotion rates, percentage of dependent schooling paid for based on time in service, and increasing benefits over time. Though these investments are determined by higher levels of leadership the commander can implement other impactful solutions of which reside in his or her sphere of influence.

A person’s self-worth is one of the most common factors addressed by commanders in the form of accolades and position. Increasing this intrinsic investment should extend to the organization supporting each individual’s quest to become a stronger, more productive member of the unit. A sense of accomplishment adds to the overall experience and job satisfaction. If a commander can normalize this behavior throughout the organization the commander may successfully counter any thoughts of separation. Increasing one’s sense of obligation through consistent reinforcement of a person’s importance to something more than a job would create stronger intrinsic values. The most effective intrinsic value that should be harnessed and cultivated is the patriot factor. A sense of patriotism is the one intrinsic value that trumps any
alternative, satisfaction, norm, or any other investment. This sense of duty allows a person to bypass personal gain for a cause greater than themselves. For commanders to tap into this behavioral state they must go beyond the job, task, and even career. The individual must feel they are part of a legacy and will add to this legacy. They must know how they will leave their mark on the legacy of defending freedom, democracy, and those who cannot defend themselves. The greater good is a powerful tool to invoke patriotism in troops. In turn, they will deal with any hardship to accomplish the mission.

Of course, these are only a few alternatives that can affect a person’s decision to remain or separate from the military. The commander must find different avenues to approach an individual and hold their commitment, even in times of economic prosperity. That being said, further research should be accomplished in Air Force level areas that give control of career progression to the individual, ensuring job satisfaction and norms are solidified. Additionally, increased incentives that were discussed earlier in regards to increasing percentages for benefits and investment matching or a separation fund should also be addressed. Finally, a reduction in military turnover through homestead options would also increase norms, help families put down roots, increase local expertise, and increase transparency. All of these Air Force level initiatives would engage on different points of the enhanced commitment model.

**CONCLUSION**

Bolstering a person’s commitment to the organization and overcoming extrinsic lures requires leaders to understand individual expectations and apply a leadership style that reinforces investments which build on those expectations. A person’s expectations are built on norms which enhance job satisfaction. These expectations can be either reinforced by a leader after the
fact or molded by the leader through transformational leadership prior to a person establishing any expectations. The former is reactive and means addressing each individual’s interpretation of what they deem satisfactory or the norm. This doesn’t effectively bolster investments. A preemptive approach to bringing people to the same general expectations in line with what they believe to be aligned with their own values allows a leader to give direction to the organization and increase “affective commitment.”

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The analysis looked at pilots and cyberspace personnel as a sample of the retention problem being addressed in the Air Force. Pilots are enticed by a prosperous economy with many opportunities. Cyberspace is enduring a high demand for tech savvy personnel in the civilian market with better pay. The military in general cannot go head to head with the free market so a more invested approach to retention is needed. With an understanding of the decision matrix employed by individuals, based on the enhanced commitment model, a leader can better pinpoint the area of focus in order to understand the generational differences and apply an appropriate leadership style. This paper incorporated assumptions of a person having a rational desire for job satisfaction, expectations, a need for extrinsic and intrinsic investments, as well as an attraction to better alternatives. Two main points were determined to be the primary area of focus for a commander, how people are managed and how to increase intrinsic investments related to the organization.

Managing people effectively must go beyond what is best for the military and has to address a balance between the military and the individual. The current paradigm for managing people provides a methodical approach to broad experience building at the expense of expertise and job satisfaction. The constant movement from one job to another, permanent change of
station, and extra-military training has been shown to increase unnecessary stress on the individual and families while preventing the development of experts or continuity. Air Force level alternatives that are recommended for further research in this area is homestead options, two-track system separating technical experts and leaders, and an overall reduction in requirements unrelated to the primary job. Homestead options would save money due to fewer PCSs, establish local experts, and increase continuity. The two-track system offers freedom from additional duties, a more focused leadership pool, and increased job satisfaction. Reducing overall requirements unrelated to the job can free up man hours, allow for increased expertise through more task focused personnel, and eliminate inefficiencies in overstimulated training systems.

For commanders, addressing the desires of the individual over the needs of the individual’s career may not position them for continued promotion for higher leadership opportunities after 15 years, but it will allow the Air Force to retain personnel beyond their initial service commitment by meeting the expectations of the individual and increasing job satisfaction. This front-line utilization of personnel beyond 15 years of service is rare as such personnel normally fill a leadership or staff role. In light of this fact, it is recommended commanders put less emphasis on additional duties, leadership opportunities, extra-military activities, and other career building opportunities for those who identify as “not interested” in a leadership oriented career. Some are content to serve without seeking further responsibility or stress in their job. In regards to the airline pilot, they fly. An Air Force pilot gets paid less and is required to fly, put their life on the line in combat, write reports, maintain requirements, manage, and lead. The same applies to the cyber career field as the tech market will pay more for
individuals to do less than what the Air Force requires of them. It is also important to recognize the need to shore up individual investments in the organization.

A commander must identify how transformational leadership can motivate and inspire an individual initially, but must be reinforced by the leadership style that each generation is most receptive too. Seeing each generation from their perspective and understanding what is important to them as well as what drives them will allow a leader to affect behavior in a manner that is cohesive to the Air Force core values and the mission. With this in mind, it is recommended that commanders first inspire patriotism in a personable way to the individual by sharing what they mean to the Air Force. Explain why they are important to the mission while incorporating how this will benefit the individual and build a legacy, not a job. A transition to a more laisse faire leadership style, in the case of millennials, would then allow their nature of standing on their own be supplemented by their inclusion as a valued member in the Air Force team. Developing a rapport and increasing investments through policies, position or status, and normative commitment through obligation will help maintain a motivate individuals to continue serving.

SUMMARY

This paper utilized an evaluation framework to address the personnel retention issues in the Air Force. Multiple commitment models were analyzed which culminated in the Enhanced Commitment model being created to account for the four pieces of criteria, effective leadership style, and the relationship of different generations. The criteria used to determine relevance of each alternative was derived from a study done by the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University. The criteria encompassed job satisfaction, alternatives, investment, and norms which was determined to be the primary elements of an individual’s decision matrix and
key to this studies research. Overall, a culture change is needed in the Air Force with the understanding that not everyone needs, nor wants, to go above and beyond as it will drive people to alternatives. Managing people needs to evolve into finding the best fit for the individual as well as the Air Force without negative implications against an early career. This may reduce retention issues, but not completely solve it without implementing extended service requirements or reserve requirements beyond the normal eight-year period. Increasing intrinsic investments are at the heart of leading the next generation of Airmen into the future. Finding the patriotism within each person is the anchor each leader can use ensure the longevity of hard earned careers.
Endnotes

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