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Warrant Officer Program, Why Not?

Lt Col Eric Schmidt/Seminar 13

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Abstract

This paper explores the feasibility of the United States Air Force (USAF) bringing back the Warrant Officer Program. The USAF is currently faced with high turnover and retention challenges in Career Special Re-enlistment Bonus (CSRB) Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) career fields. Furthermore, the USAF is exploring using enlisted members to supplement the Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) force structure. Rather, the USAF should convert all 1136 RPA pilots to warrant officers (WO) and utilize the overage of WO's, assuming a 1 officer to 1.6 warrant officer conversion rate to supplement CSRB AFSC's by bringing back the Warrant Officer Program. This paper will argue that bringing back the WO corps to the USAF can ease their retention, turnover and RPA challenges while providing vertical job opportunities for some enlisted personnel who currently either separate from the USAF or join another sister service that offer WO opportunities. Bringing back the WO in the USAF will also allow pilots to remain in their desired airframe without having to serve an RPA tour, something that historically has led to pilots separating from the USAF. The USAF would be well served by converting all current RPA and vacant junior officer positions to WO's, expanding the current Officer Training School class size to allow enlisted members to earn their warrant commission and distribute all of the remaining WO positions across the CSRB career fields to ease turnover and retention issues.

Currently, there are approximately 16,000 WO's who are serving across the entire Department of Defense (DoD) compared to 1.1 million enlisted and 200,000 officers.ⁱ These proven leaders are rock-solid technical and managerial personnel that are being utilized by all of the branches in the DoD except the USAF. Given current fiscal challenges and manning constraints, the time has come for the USAF to consider bringing back the warrant officer corps. The USAF is faced with many strategic challenges such as shrinking budgets, mandatory manpower reductions, sustained world-wide contingency operations, critically manned career fields and retention issues just to name a few. Over the next five years, the USAF is expected to face reductions in their end-strength numbers from 330,700 to 310,700 a loss of 20,000 military personnel in order to achieve mandated reduction initiatives.ⁱⁱ Despite the mandatory manpower reductions, the USAF is still expected to bring the same level of technical expertise to complete their mission and sustain worldwide operational tempo. During calendar year 2014 the USAF filled 90,000 deployment requirements at over 600 locations.ⁱⁱⁱ Bringing back the warrant officers corps is the solution that enables the USAF to retain its high technical expertise, solve some retention issues, and meet current Combatant Commander operational requirements. If the USAF converts all 1136 RPA and hard to fill CSRB junior officer (0-1 – 0-4) positions in CSRB career fields to WO's, the USAF would gain approximately 1817 WO's (1.6 x 1136) for no additional cost to the USAF.^{iv} The estimated overage of 681 WO's could be spread throughout CSRB career fields in order of precedent and enable the USAF to address turnover and retention issues that those career fields are currently facing. More importantly, the conversion to WO's will enable the USAF to retain its technical corps while meeting mandatory budget reductions.^v In sister services, WO's are the valuable subject matter experts that provide valuable insight between the enlisted force and officer corps and fill a wide array of skilled positions. If the

USAF brings back the warrant officer corps, they could potentially fill current manpower gaps in CSRB career fields, fill junior officer positions that historically remain vacant and solve retention challenges currently existing within the USAF.

Thesis

This paper will explore, discuss, and formulate an argument that the USAF's retention, fiscal, and manpower challenges can be eased by implementing one or all three direct-select, early-select, and mid-select WO models by bringing back the warrant officer corps. The USAF should convert all RPA positions and hard to fill junior officer (O-1 to O-4) positions in CSRB career fields to WO's. This action will cement the USAF's ability to retain a highly technical and operationally ready force capable of supporting Combatant Commander needs worldwide while enabling the USAF to meet mandated manpower reductions and ease retention and turnover rates. The Turnover and Productivity model that will be discussed later, legitimizes the need for a warrant officer corps in the USAF in order to reduce turnover and retention challenges.

Fiscal and Manpower Concerns

Currently, the USAF end strength and budget are decreasing and both are forecasted to be reduced further by FY19. The USAF's end strength in FY15 was 311,000 and is forecasted to decrease further to 308,000 by FY19.^{vi} Furthermore, USAF personnel costs are projected to be trimmed from \$28.9B to \$26.1B in FY19.^{vii} Exasperating the personnel and budget cuts is that the USAF is a top heavy service with approximately 19.7% of Active Duty members being officers.^{viii} One of the disadvantages of a top heavy branch is that 19% of the current USAF manpower for pay and allowances accounts for 30% of the total pay for the USAF.^{ix} Meaning

that by reducing the officer corps from its high levels, the USAF can reduce costs while retaining its highly technical force. The USAF officer corps strain can be felt when comparing just a 1% annual pay raise. In 2012, a 1% pay raise cost the DoD \$600 million dollars.^x Therefore, if the USAF takes the lead from its sister services and converts all RPA positions and junior officer positions in CSRB career fields to WO's, while also implementing any combination of an early-select, mid-select or direct-select hire model, the USAF would be able to offset budget, personnel reduction and retention impacts while maintaining a highly technical corps with no cost to the USAF. Additionally, there are other financial cost savings the USAF may be able to take advantage of through a conversion associated with converting all RPA positions and junior officer positions in CSRB career fields to WO's. The USAF can realize a direct cost savings of approximately \$400,000 per service member over a 20-year career by converting 0-1 to 0-4 billets to WO billets and by initiating any of the warrant officer models.^{xi} Meaning that if a college student was selected for a WO track instead of an officer track the USAF would save approximately \$400,000 for each member over a 20-year career. Currently, the USAF chooses its enlisted members through a selection process and then those individuals attend the 16-week Officer Training School (OTS). With minimal cost, the USAF could expand the available slots in OTS and utilize the same selection board process for WO's. The program would be very similar to the US Army's WO school that is located at Fort Rucker Alabama which is 7-weeks long. Another benefit would be that the USAF would not lose their top enlisted members expertise to sister-services who currently have WO's. Lastly, if the USAF brings back the WO corps, they could meet their FY17 end strength numbers while not losing capabilities. The USAF should explore the conversion of all RPA positions and junior officer positions in CSRB career fields that would yield approximately 1.6 WO's for every 1 officer positions.

Warrant Officer History

The United States Navy (USN) was the first to implement a WO program in 1775^{xii}. By 1918 the Army (USA) and the Marine Corps (USMC) had adopted WO's into their services with the USAF (Army Air Corps) around 1947.^{xiii} Originally, WO's were created to differentiate between officers that were warranted and officers that were commissioned into service. However, in 1954 the Warrant Officer Personnel Act standardized the grades among the services with W-1 for warrant officers and CW2 to CW4, for commissioned WO's that used the titles of Chief Warrant Officer (CW).^{xiv} In 1986 the Defense Authorization Act required appointments of all CW's to hold commissions (USN and USMC had already implemented this).^{xv} The last warrant officer grade adopted was the CW5. CW5 was created by incorporating the Warrant Officer Management Act into the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1992 and each service can only place no more than 5 percent of its warrant officers in the grade of CW5.^{xvi} Since CW grade personnel carry a commission, their status drives DoD officer end strength numbers and could potentially explain why the USAF decided to eliminate the WO corps. Bringing them back has faced such strong opposition from senior officers and enlisted members throughout the years. For over 100 years the other branches of the United States Armed Services have utilized the WO program in order to meet service needs, provide leadership, and bring technical expertise to their branches.

Sister Service Utilization of Warrant Officers

The United States Navy (USN) utilizes their WO's to provide technical expertise relatively constant to that of officers.^{xvii} They select their WO's late in their enlisted careers via the Late-Career Model, and require nominees to be an E-7.^{xviii} The Late-Career Model ensures that USN WO's are highly technical and competent managers, similar to junior officer and senior enlisted ranks in the USAF (E-7 through E-9 and O1 through O-4). The Late-Career Model also promotes longevity as USN warrants tend to have longer careers than warrants in other branches.^{xix} USN warrants have a typical experience level of 14-20 years of enlisted experience prior to commissioning.^{xx} WO's are vital to the success of the USN and relied upon heavily in port and at sea. Mirroring current jobs offered in the USAF, WO's in the USN fill positions such as operators, communications, engineers, explosive ordinance disposal, aviation, administration and staff officers, to name a few.^{xxi} In the Department of the Navy, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) also enjoys a warrant officer corps that brings value to their branch.

The USMC utilizes WO's to perform duties that require extensive knowledge, training and experience within their respective career fields.^{xxii} The USMC uses a Mid-Career Select Model who are mostly E-6's and have completed 10-15 years of enlisted service.^{xxiii} USMC warrant officers function in a capacity in-between the SNCO ranks and the officer corps. For instance, WO's also provide experience and stability in those USMC officer positions that historically are hard to fill. Warrant officers in the USMC fill positions such as Personnel Officer, Intelligence Officer, Ground Radar Maintenance Officer, Avionics Officer, Ground Supply Officer and Utilities Officer (Engineer), all career fields that currently are offered within the USAF.^{xxiv} The USMC warrant officers are technical experts who have proven themselves in

the enlisted ranks and are capable of meeting those required operational tasks while filling a managerial level position versus enlisted members who have a limited scope of responsibility.

The United States Army (USA) has the largest warrant officer corps with approximately 15,470 warrant officers.^{xxv} The USA uses their WO's as technical experts, combat leaders, trainers and advisors. Like the USMC the USA warrant officers who are not aviators, are selected under the Mid-Career Select Model, in the grade of E-6 and have completed 10-15 years of enlisted service.^{xxvi} USA warrant officers serve in 17 branches and 67 warrant officer specialties.^{xxvii} The USA also employs an Early Select Model to acquire primarily helicopter pilots and some fixed-wing pilots from the enlisted personnel in their first or second term (6-8 years).^{xxviii} The remainder of USA aviators are selected via a direct accessions model and account for approximately one-quarter of the USA aviator corps.^{xxix} The USA employs their non-flyers positions as Commanders, USA bands, Engineers, Administrators, Intelligence Officers, Scientists and other professional positions.^{xxx} Like the USN and USMC, these jobs mirror one's currently in the USAF. These technical experts and proven leaders are counted on by their respective services to provide leadership and management in their AFSC's in garrison and down range. In 2008, the Army sent five warrant officers to the Command General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, a course normally reserved for Majors, validating their faith in the WO corps.^{xxxi} The USAF can adopt the USA model and bring back WO's and utilize this proven force. Lastly, the USA model proves that WO's can effectively complete the RPA mission and thereby validating that converting all RPA positions and junior level officers in CSRB career fields should be considered to ease retention, turnover and RPA challenges.

Historically, like the other branches of the military, the USAF had utilized WO's in its branch. However, when the National Security Act passed in 1947, and the USAF was created as

a separate branch of the military, the USAF began a movement to develop E-8 and E-9 positions as SNCO leaders. By 1958, the approval and implementation of the E-8 and E-9 enlisted ranks paved the way for the end of the USAF's WO program. Interestingly, during that time period there was a study conducted on the feasibility of the warrant officer corps. Its conclusion recommended to the USAF that the WO program be suspended until it could be determined the impact of the new E-8 and E-9 positions.^{xxxii} Despite the studies recommendation to hold off the decision to stand down the warrant officer corps and despite the successful track record of WO's in command of aircraft and performance across multiple career fields where they provided exceptional leadership and technical expertise, the USAF never reinvigorated the program and the last active duty WO was retired from the USAF in 1980. From that time and still today, the USAF has determined that flying operations would be accomplished by commissioned officers and that the enlisted ranks training, leadership and expertise eliminated the need for the warrant officer corps. However, current fiscal, retention, and manpower constraints should validate the need for the USAF to explore resuscitating the warrant officer program in some career fields.

Models as a Solution

Warrant officers are the solution to current problems the USAF is confronted with while allowing the USAF to maintain a highly skilled and elite force. The USAF should convert all RPA positions and hard to fill junior officer (0-1 to 0-4) positions in CSRB career fields to WO positions and adopt the direct-select, early select or mid-select model program. USAF retention issues may be able to be minimized by examining the Turnover Productivity Model (Figure 1) explains and illustrates why bringing back WO may be a solution. If the USAF brings back the WO program it could ease some of its retention issues. Warrant officers receive higher pay and a

greater status than their enlisted counterparts. The average WO makes 23 percent more in base pay than junior enlisted (E-3 to E-6) personnel and 16 percent more than SNCO's (E-7 to E-9). Furthermore, if the USAF chose to bring back the WO program, enlisted career fields that historically lose stellar Airmen to the civilian sector or sister services would consider remaining in the USAF because becoming a WO would provide those Airmen with upward mobility, status and monetary gains. Therefore, the USAF could ease the loss of those enlisted personnel to other service or the civilian sector. The Turnover-Productivity model that will be discussed later in this paper, argues that enlisted members who aspire to achieve a bachelor's degree or higher, can bring valuable skill sets to the warrant officer corps, which reduces training costs for the USAF at the same time. Those enlisted members choosing the WO path would not require training in their specialty and be able to lead effectively at that given grade.^{xxxiii} According to a congressional study, the USAF should look at Career Special Re-enlistment Bonuses (CSRB) career fields such as Maintenance Officers, Contracting Officers, Computer and Electronics Officers, along with RPA pilots and any other career fields that require extensive training and experience.^{xxxiv} Because the legislation governing WO's gives the services so much flexibility, the USAF can rather effectively establish manpower requirements through their Major Commands (MAJCOM) and garner approval from the Air Staff. This flexibility would enable the USAF to bring back the WO program in order to help retention and recruitment challenges while easing into the warrant officer arena. MAJCOM's can query Combatant Commanders and ask them to identify their historically hard to fill vacant junior officer positions in CSRB career fields. Once those positions have been identified, the USAF would be able to work through the Air Staff to bring back WO's. Currently, the Air Staff uses three approaches when evaluating conversions (job descriptions, comparing duties, and classifying results). MAJCOM's will

validate the need for WO's in the USAF, the Air Staff will confirm those needs and thereby provide a viable solution to the USAF to address retention and fiscal challenges in the future. The three WO ascension models will enable the USAF to have a vehicle to retain enlisted personnel and possibly recruit some high school and college students.

Retention

Retention has historically been challenging for the USAF. Currently, there are 117 career fields that the USAF offers CSRB's.^{xxxv} In 2015 there were 40 CSRB career fields. However, in 2016 that number has ballooned to 117, validating the need for the USAF to address retention challenges now. Over the years, when the USAF has offered CSRB's, it has been somewhat effective with 26% of those enlisted folks re-enlisting for the money.^{xxxvi} However, if the USAF converted all of their RPA and hard to fill CSRB career field junior officer positions into WO's it may ease some retention issues while maintaining a highly skilled and motivated force. The Turnover and Productivity model should be considered by the USAF when considering whether or not to bring back the WO corps because it explains and illustrates why individuals will seek to find job opportunities that offer increased pay, responsibilities and status. Furthermore, another retention concern for the USAF is that they regularly lose some of their best and brightest enlisted personnel annually to their sister services or the civilian sector by not offering a WO program.^{xxxvii} The average enlisted person costs the USAF approximately \$100,000 per year in training, pay and benefits.^{xxxviii} Over a 10-year career, the USAF has invested approximately \$1 million dollars into a member, who at that time is considered a Subject Matter Expert (SME) in their respective career field. If that member decides to transition to a sister-service warrant officer program, the sister service gains a SME that needs no training and is a proven expert and

leader. Meanwhile, the USAF is left with a hole in their mission capabilities. The focus for the USAF should be to keep those proven enlisted personnel in the USAF by converting all RPA and CSRB career field junior officers to WO's. The USAF could employ one of the earlier discussed models across some CSRB, vacant, and hard to retain career fields. The Turnover and Productivity model could be a guide for the USAF through the implementation of a warrant officer program to increase productivity and retention.

Turnover Productivity Model

The Turnover Productivity model discusses turnover and the reasons why individuals decide to remain or look for work elsewhere. There are two types of turnover, voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary is defined as when a member decides to seek work elsewhere. Involuntary is where a member may be asked to leave the military or other sector. The military uses voluntary reductions and Reduction in Force (RIF) boards in order to achieve the mandated congressional end strength numbers. When RIF is utilized those are times when USAF members are involuntarily asked to leave the USAF. For the purpose of this paper, only voluntary turnover and the correlation to bringing back the warrant officer corps, will be argued as a tool to retain the USAF's best and brightest and recruit college graduates. The Turnover and Productivity model highlights two predictors of turnover. They are job satisfaction and embeddedness.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from appraisal of one's job or job experience.^{xxxix} When an employee is highly satisfied with

their job and believes that they have the opportunity to advance, the likelihood of retaining that member increases by 25%.^{xl} There are multiple predictors of job satisfaction such as skill, autonomy, recognition and advancement.^{xli} Once USAF members become satisfied with their jobs, there will be a much higher rate of retention and less turnover rates. Research has indicated that enlisted members lack of upward mobility contribute to their desire to pursue alternate opportunities.^{xlii} Confirming this current shortfall in the USAF that contributes to turnover challenges, Sgt. Donnis McWilliams in a recent interview stated when asked about bringing WO's back to the USAF "The re-establishment of WO in the USAF will not only assist in filling junior officer billets but also offer enlisted Airmen another avenue for career advancement".^{xliii} Therefore, bringing back the WO program will provide enlisted members with upward mobility opportunities within their respective career fields, which will provide them their desired upward mobility opportunities and enable the USAF to retain their best and brightest. Furthermore, WO positions will provide higher wages, inevitably, this will close the gap with civilian sector jobs and more than likely ease voluntary turnover challenges. The increased responsibility, chances for upward mobility, and pay will incentivize enlisted members to remain in the USAF and could prove to be very attractive to college students searching for employment. Job embeddedness is the second trait to be considered in the Productivity and Turnover model.

Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness can be defined as a multi-dimensional combination of organizational and community influences that affect a person's decision to stay with his or her organization.^{xliv} In other words, the more a person feels that they are part of something that their continued participation will matter to the overall unit's effectiveness, the more it will strengthen that

person's loyalty to that organization and decrease the likelihood of them voluntarily leaving. The model argues that individuals achieve embeddedness when they feel a close bond to their organization, are a valuable member to the team, and if they were to leave, the organization will suffer.^{xlv} A current Active Duty USAF SMSgt Randall James confirms the WO value when asked about how they function in the other branches he says: "WO's could pay big dividends to the USAF as they are highly specialized, single-track superstars with proven track records".^{xlvi} Additionally, the model also suggests that people who are embedded in their organizations will feel like they have a lot to lose if they leave their organization because of the relationships, community and family connections that organizations provides them.^{xlvii} Therefore, the assumption is that if the USAF converts all RPA and junior officer positions in CSRB career fields to WO's, the opportunity to become a WO will increase the member's organizational bond and feeling of responsibility to their organization. When employees get promoted, they gain more responsibility and that creates a desire to take on that organizations success and failures.^{xlviii} This bond will also define the role of the WO and help the individual know how they fit into the organizational structure. Retaining the USAF's best enlisted members by offering a WO track and recruiting college graduates and converting those RPA and junior officer positions to WO's, the USAF will be investing in human capital.

Human Capital

Human capital is defined as a unit's composition of employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities.^{xlix} Human capital investment by an organization will strengthen that organizations competitive advantage.¹ Human capital will inevitably create a competitive advantage for the organization, and is arguably an organizations most valuable asset. If an organization has highly

motivated employees that feel a bond to that organization, those employees will be more productive, be loyal, and more than likely remain with the organization.^{li} If the USAF adopts the warrant officer program, the Turnover and Productivity model makes a strong argument to achieve a lower turnover rate among those career fields that are critically manned and have an increase in productivity as well.

Early-Select Model

Enlisted members who are selected for the Early-Select model will earn substantially more than they would had they remained in the enlisted corps. This correlates with the Turnover Productivity model due to the higher pay and the opportunity for highly motivated enlisted personnel to have an opportunity to advance. The majority of these enlisted members all have strong technical experience and will have served in the enlisted corps for 3-12 years. Another factor for consideration that may ease the transition for enlisted to warrant is that today the education levels in the enlisted corps personnel has increased dramatically over the past 20-years with over half earning an associate's degree.^{lii} The all-volunteer force has resulted in luring a much higher quality member to the force. For example, in 2013, 95 percent of new recruits were high school graduates and 72 percent scored above average on enlisted aptitude tests.^{liii} As enlisted qualifications have grown, so has their technical expertise. If the USAF adopts the Early-Career Model, those enlisted personnel who have completed 2+ years of college could be inducted into the WO corps with an expectation to complete their four year degree by the end of their first term (4-6 years). Lastly, if enlisted members are given the opportunity to become warrant officers, they will realize a 16% pay raise in base pay over if they had stayed and made E-8.^{liiv} Therefore, bringing back the WO's and enabling enlisted members the

opportunity to earn a warrant commission through the Early-Career Model those outstanding enlisted members would likely remain in the USAF, solve some retention concerns and enable a highly skilled person to immediately contribute at a high level while not degrading the USAF technical competence.

Mid-Career Model

The Mid-Career model may be a way for the USAF to solve some aviator and RPA challenges. USAF MSgt Bill Brokman states in an interview “I suggest using WO’s exactly like the USA does as pilots and RPA drivers. There has been concern for years that many USAF pilots leave because they are tasked to fly RPA’s, get WO’s to fill that role”.^{lv} The USA and USN have proven that warrant officers selected through their Early-Select Model is effective. However, the Mid-Career model may be a better approach for the USAF in order to ease their mid-level aviator and RPA retention and turnover challenges. Currently, the USA employs WO’s as pilots or operators in 10 airframes to include OH-58D, AH-64A, AH-64D, Rotary Wing Aviator, UH-60, UH-60M, CH-47D, Fixed Wing Aviator, C-12, and Jet Aircraft Pilot, along with all UAS platforms.^{lvi} Validating that the WO corps can expertly perform duties that are currently filled by officers in the USAF. In 2009, the USN introduced a program that allowed WO’s to fly the P-3 aircraft, thereby, following the USA lead in exploring transitioning previously held junior officer jobs to WO’s.^{lvii} Therefore, given these successes in the USA and USN, the USAF may be able to utilize the Mid-Career Model to convert all RPA and CSRB junior officer positions to warrants, in order to ease retention challenges.

The USAF could also use a combination of the Early-Career and Mid-Career models to fill RPA positions. This would ease some costs and retention challenges. The USA and USN

use WO's to fly aircraft and RPA platforms. Some of the other financial benefits the USAF could enjoy along with lower personnel pay are lower training costs and technical expertise of the officer corps. Currently, there are approximately 1136 RPA training slots a year that have historically been filled by officers.^{lviii} If those 1136 positions were to be converted to warrant officers, the USAF would realize a \$400,000 dollar savings per converted position over a 20 year career, and, a \$500,000 annual dollar training cost as well, for an approximate \$126M dollar annual saving for the USAF that could be used towards Operation and Maintenance or other significant expenses the USAF needs due to current fiscal cuts.^{lix} This would allow the USAF to not only save limited dollars, but, allow no degradation in the skills required to fly the RPA platforms. Furthermore, those 1136 positions are currently being filled by officers, who must leave their current airframes, be re-trained into the RPA community and will therefore require re-training when their RPA tour is complete. The USAF would be well served to convert all RPA pilots to WO's and offset retention and turnover challenges by bringing back the WO corps.

Direct-Entry Model

The USAF could implement Direct-Entry model to some high school and college graduates. Currently, sister-services who have WO's view them as proven technical experts and leaders. If the USAF chose to implement a Direct-Entry Model there would undoubtedly be some loss of technical expertise. However, the Direct-Entry Model could be implemented in CSRB and those career fields that historically have low retention rates and/or are vacant. This can be accomplished by the USAF at some potential cost savings as well. If the USAF created a lower entry WO pay scale for individuals who have no prior enlisted experience. The USAF would be able to attract highly educated personnel at a savings. Due to the flexibility with the

warrant officer program, the USAF should strongly consider this approach. It would enable the USAF to potentially realize cost savings and fill historically vacant positions with high school or college graduates.

Arguments against bringing back the warrant officer corps

Though the warrant officer corps would benefit the USAF for reasons such as retention, recruitment and cost savings there has been strong opposition from some senior USAF personnel. The opposition to bringing back WO's is mainly based on a belief that WO's would not add any value to the current force structure. There has been a long history of opposition in the USAF to bringing back the WO program from the highest enlisted ranks. In 2003, Chief Master Sergeant (CMSgt) of the Air Force Gerald Murray said "he has looked at how sister-services use WO's and even how the USAF has used them in the past and he does not see a use for them in today's USAF".^{lx} In 2005, CMSgt of the USAF Jim Finch said "bringing back the WO program to the USAF will create more problems than it can solve".^{lxi} CMSgt Finch also went onto say "if it's a money thing, we can work that without creating a new ranks, and if it's advancement, we don't want someone to only be a technical expert".^{lxii} These past CMSgt's are missing the mark, it is about advancement and money, and that is why the USAF loses these stellar Airmen to the civilian sector and sister-services that do have a WO track. Today, the opposition from the senior USAF enlisted positions continues.

Current, CMSgt of the USAF James Cody at an all-call meeting, was asked whether or he thought there was any value to bringing back WO's, or if it was even being considered. Chief Cody's response was "no".^{lxiii} The chief went onto say "At the end of the day, I don't necessarily think it would be any different if it was a WO performing any specific duties".^{lxiv}

Again, exactly in-line with his predecessors Chief Cody states “it’s just about money” and that alone is not a strong enough justification. CMSgt Cody went on to say that “the USAF would be paying the same people more money for doing the same job that they have been doing”.^{lxv}

However, this thought process is flawed and perpetuates the retention issues.

The fact is that the RPA’s are flown by officers who make substantially more than enlisted members that Chief Cody would like to fill those positions with. This line of thought is what the Turnover and Productivity model formulates retention issues around. If individuals do not feel there is an opportunity to advance, they will voluntarily seek employment elsewhere, which could help explain why the USAF CSRB career fields ballooned from 40 in 2015 to 117 in 2016. If Chief Cody is comfortable with enlisted members performing as RPA pilots who have historically been officers, retention issues will more than likely remain challenging. The Turnover and Productivity model validates that members will not remain in a position if they feel there is no opportunity for career advancement. Transitioning enlisted members to the RPA pilot role is arguably a step backwards for enlisted members based on pay while increasing their responsibilities. That approach by Chief Cody will inevitably be counterproductive because enlisted personnel will likely decide to leave the USAF due to the inability to advance their careers, earn more money and have a higher status. Therefore, those Airmen will likely pursue jobs in the civilian sector or sister services that offer WO opportunities. Furthermore, when asked about this during the all-call, Chief Cody’s solution is to take enlisted folks who are being paid as much as 23% less than their officer counterparts is flawed. The logic to transition to enlisted members is off the mark, despite the fact that today’s enlisted corps is highly technical and with over 50% having at least an associate’s degree.^{lxvi} Enlisted members want to advance, not stay at the same status level. It’s unfortunate that Chief Cody says “There is no doubt in my

mind that this program with enlisted will be successful".^{lxvii} He attempts to validate his reasoning based on the facts RPA's have been around for a while and their training plans are solid. Clearly, it's acceptable to Chief Cody for enlisted members to perform traditional officer jobs for a fraction of the pay. It would be much more acceptable if the USAF would convert the officer RPA positions to warrants, promote enlisted members through one of the previously discussed models and therefore pay those enlisted members comparable salaries. This would satisfy the Turnover and Productivity model that creates an opportunity for individuals to advance their career and feel important to the organization. Vice, taking enlisted personnel who are junior in rank and having them perform duties previously accomplished by rated officers. Lastly, despite the CMSgt of the Air Force's lack of support one could argue that more warrant officers would not be more expensive and actually lead to substantial cost savings for the USAF. According to a CBO that was completed in 2002, across the USAF, about one in five positions being held by the top four enlisted grades could be converted to warrants for about only a five percent pay raise.^{lxviii} Therefore, the USAF convert all RPA and CSRB junior officer positions to WO's in order to help maximize USAF dollars and offset retention and turnover challenges.

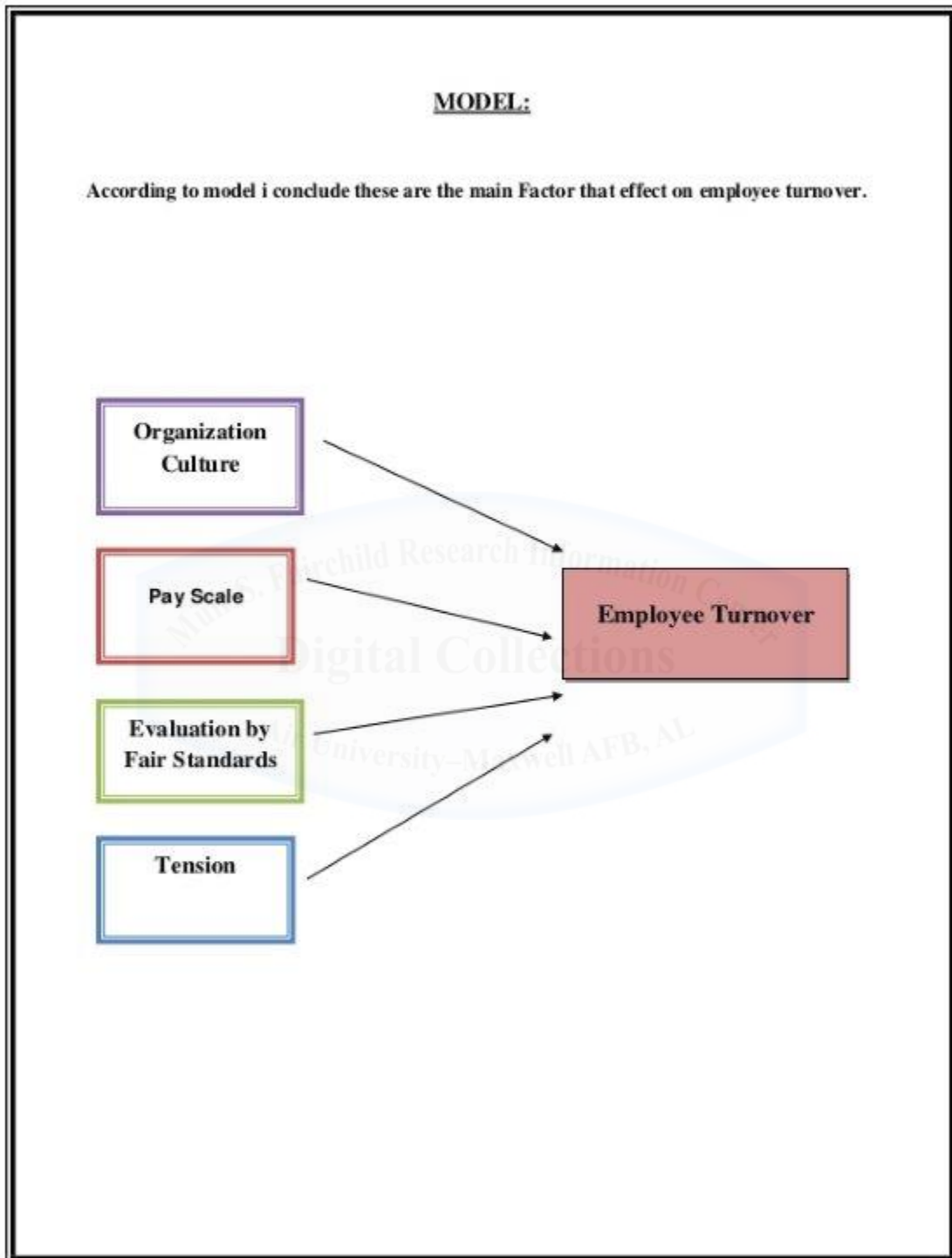
Conclusion

The USAF will be able to realize cost saving, ease retention issues and maintain a highly technical force ready to meet Combatant Commander requirements by bringing back the warrant officer corps. The long successful history of over 100 years by their sister services, along with the current uses today of the warrant officer corps has proven its worth. If the USAF attempts to utilize the effects of the Turnover and Productivity model by bringing back the warrant officer corps enlisted personnel will consider remaining in the USAF because WO's promotions offer

higher status, career progression, and salaries in-line with their duties. There are three models the USAF should consider implementing in order to ease the current challenges. The Early-Select Model that would focus on proven enlisted members who have served 3-10 years. Those chosen under the Early-Select Model will earn approximately a 23% pay raise, and feel embeddedness towards the USAF and decide to stay in the USAF. Finally, the Mid-Select Model which should be utilized to replace all RPA pilots with WO's and focused on enlisted members who have served from 6-14 years. As proven by the USN model, those individuals selected are likely to remain in the military and thereby would increase USAF retention levels. Lastly, the USAF could employ a Direct-Select Model that would drive the possible creation of a lower paying warrant officer pay grade. The Direct-Select Model will help the USAF recruit personnel into historically hard to fill positions with High School and College graduates, while increasing the USAF ability to recruit highly talented people. Given the flexibility accorded under the warrant officer programs, the USAF could also apply a combination of all three models based on needs. The USAF should bring back the warrant officer program to offset CSRB, fiscal, retention and hard to fill challenges.



Figure 1



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- ⁱⁱ Rick Maze, Senate Panel Pushes Warrants for Air Force, Lawmakers say recruiting retention would gain, Air Force Times – June 2016, p 2.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 2.
- ^{iv} USAF AFPC website., Def Manpower Data Center, 2016 statistical numbers
- ^v USAF AFPC website., Def Manpower Data Center, 2016 statistical numbers
- ^{vi} USAF Budget FY 17
- ^{vii} USAF Budget FY 17
- ^{viii} Jeremy C. Conrad, Maj USAF., Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft Warrant Officers: Meeting Requirements while reducing costs, USMC Command and Staff College, p. 2.
- ^{ix} Conrad, Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft Warrant Officers, p. 3.
Conrad, Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft Warrant Officers, p. 3.
- ^{xi} Conrad, Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft Warrant Officers, p. 15.
- ^{xii} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xiii} Wikipedia., *Warrant Officer* (United States), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_United_States.
- ^{xiv} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xv} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xvi} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xvii} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xviii} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to The Military*”, February 2002, p 21.
- ^{xix} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military*”, February 2002, p 25.
- ^{xx} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xxi} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xxii} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xxiii} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military*”, February 2002, p 30.
- ^{xxiv} Warrant Officer Program of other services, “WO Historical Foundation”., <https://warrantofficerhistory.org>
- ^{xxv} Wikipedia., *Warrant Officer* (United States), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_United_States.
- ^{xxvi} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military*”, February 2002, p 40.
- ^{xxvii} Wikipedia., *Warrant Officer* (United States), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_United_States.
- ^{xxviii} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military*”, February 2002, p 19.
- ^{xxix} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military*”, February 2002, p 28.
- ^{xxx} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military*”, February 2002, p 22.
- ^{xxxi} Congress Budget Office, “*The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military*”, February 2002, p 22.
- ^{xxxii} Major Jeremy C. Coonrad, “*Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft Warrant Officers*”, April 2012, p 9.
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- ^{xxxiv} Hafemeister, “*Does the Air Force need Warrant Officers*”, *Air Force Times*, 10 June 2002.
- ^{xxxv} Maze, “*Senate Panel pushed warrants for the Air Force*”, *Air Force Times*, 16 June 2003.
- ^{xxxvi} Manpower Data Center
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- ^{xxxviii} Pay and Benefits Article
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- ^{xl} Locke, 2004
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- ^{xliv} Mitchell, 2001
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- ^{xlvi} Hafemeister, “*Does the Air Force need Warrant Officers*”, *Air Force Times*, 10 June 2002.
- ^{xlvii} Mitchell, 2001
- ^{xlviii} Hassel, 2005
- ^{xliv} Polyhart, Iddekinge and Mackenzie, 2011

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- ⁱ Polyhart, Iddekinge and Mackenzie, 2011
- ⁱⁱ Hassel, 2005
- ⁱⁱⁱ RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, *Options for Filling Vacant Officer Positions*, 2010, p xii.
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- ^{lv} Congress Budget Office, *"The Warrant Officer Ranks, adding flexibility to the Military"*, February 2002, p 22.
- ^{lv} Hafemeister, *"Does the Air Force need Warrant Officers"*, *Air Force Times*, 10 June 2002
- ^{lvi} Go Army.com <http://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/current-and-prior-service/advance-your-career/warrant-officer/flight-warrant-officers.html>
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- ^{lviii} Coonrad, *"Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft Warrant Officers"*, April 2012, p 17.
- ^{lix} Coonrad, *"Air Force Remotely Piloted Aircraft Warrant Officers"*, April 2012, p 17.
- ^{lx} Rick Maze, *"Senate Panel pushed warrants for the Air Force"*, *Air Force Times*, 16 June 2003.
- ^{lxi} Maze, *"Senate Panel pushed warrants for the Air Force"*, *Air Force Times*, 16 June 2003.
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- ^{lxviii} Rod Hafemeister, *"Does the Air Force need Warrant Officers"*, *Air Force Times*, 10 June 2002.

