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A REVIEW OF AIR FORCE READINESS: A FOCUS ON HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

December 2023

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**A REVIEW OF AIR FORCE READINESS:
A FOCUS ON HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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This report is a review of Air Force Readiness with a focus on human capital management and individual needs and desires. We define what Air Force Readiness is and identify tensions between meeting mission requirements and supporting the needs of individuals. This report compares the Air Force and industry approaches to readiness. We investigated these topics by reviewing academic research, interviewing Air Force and industry leaders, and hosting a focus group with Air Force MBA students. Our data collection process offered several major findings regarding Air Force Readiness.

First, there are issues with how readiness is understood by personnel based on their level of experience and longevity. Readiness culture in the Air Force is fragmented, with its personnel not adopting a warfighter mindset. We found that many seem to lack resiliency, tactical competence, and physical and mental fitness. We learned that the industry equivalent to readiness is organizational agility, their ability to respond to problems and priorities, and meeting organizational objectives effectively. These terminologies and practices are not foreign to the Air Force, but what differs is how we implement and understand them, which creates constraints in adopting industry best practices. These major findings were used to develop three courses of actions—Minimum Viable Products (MVPs)—as potential solutions to limiting factors affecting Air Force Readiness.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A1	Air Force Manpower and Personnel Directorate
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ACE	Agile Combat Employment
AFFORGEN	Air Force Force Generation
AFPC	Air Force Personnel Center
AFRS	Air Force Recruiting Services
AFSC	Air Force Specialty Code
API	Application Programming Interface
ARR	Annual Recurring Revenue
BMT	Basic Military Training
C2V	Certification, Verification and Validation
CFM	Career Field Manager
ChatGPT	Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer
CMSAF	Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force
DOD	Department of Defense
DRRS	Defense Readiness Reporting System
EVP	Employee Value Proposition
H4D	Hacking for Defense
HAF	Headquarters Air Force
HC	Human Capital
HCM	Human Capital Management
HCMS	Human Capital Management System
HR	Human Resources
IN&D	Individual Needs and Desires
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LIMFAC	Limiting Factor
LLM	Large Language Model
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MCA	Multi-Capable Airmen
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty

MS	Microsoft
MVP	Minimum Viable Product
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
NMS	National Military Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
PME	Professional Military Education
PES	Professional Enhancement Seminar
RAT	Ready Airman Training
SSG	Strategic Studies Group
TDY	Temporary Duty
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
UTC	Unit Type Code
VCSAF	Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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First Lieutenant Andrew Stoneberger: I would like to thank our Lord, Jesus Christ, for sending me my wife Mandi, blessing me with a beautiful family, and guiding me down this path of service to my country. To my wife Mandi, without her patience and support, I would not have been able to pursue this opportunity; thank you so much, Love. Now we both have MBAs! To my children: Daddy loves you; thank you for giving me motivation to succeed!

Senior Master Sergeant Kade Forrester: I would like to thank my family for being my “why.” Thank you for staying resilient through all the uncertainties, constant changes, long days, and late nights. Thank you for holding down the fort, giving me peace of mind to better the world's greatest Air Force. Most importantly, thank you for putting up with my shenanigans!

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I. INTRODUCTION

Readiness is a topic that is often misunderstood, misrepresented, and incorrectly defined within the Department of Defense (DOD). Depending on the level of experience and longevity a person has in the military, their perspective of readiness will vary resulting in a variety of interpretations. This ambiguity and variability emphasize the motivation and necessity of this research, while at the same time representing the difficulty of the task at hand—defining readiness within the Air Force and analyzing the relationship with the individual needs and desires (IN&D) of its personnel. Currently, the DOD is actively rebranding readiness to include stratifying its definition into ten new dimensions for better understanding and application (Jackson, 2022).

With the broad scope of readiness in mind, we decided to first define what Air Force Readiness is—by asking our interviewees—and then identify if there are any strengths and areas for improvement. We then focused on readiness from a personnel management perspective to identify if there are any existing tensions or conflict between meeting mission requirements and supporting personnel needs and desires. Next, we identified the industry equivalent of readiness as well as best practices in managing the relationship between readiness and individual needs. Finally, we researched areas where the Air Force could implement these best practices and if any limiting factors (LIMFACS) exist in doing so.

A. PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate Air Force Readiness with the objective of providing a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) to resolve apparent tensions between readiness and IN&D, as well as bridge the gap between industry best practices and Air Force Human Capital Management (HCM). HCM is the practice of maximizing the value of Human Capital (HC) through managing all aspects of the employee life cycle and converting traditional Human Resource (HR) functions into efficiency and revenue opportunities (Danao & Main, 2022). Talent Management is another term often affiliated with HCM, which the Air Force considers as the ability to recruit, train, and educate the

force, directly impacting the way we fight and win wars (Air Force, 1 Nov 21). To fully investigate Air Force Readiness, first we must properly define what readiness means to the Air Force and the DOD at large. As such, a key objective is to define Air Force Readiness as well as the industry equivalent. We also determined if and how the Air Force can meet mission requirements while also meeting the needs and desires of its personnel as the Air Force strives to become the employer of choice in the modern workforce.

B. RESEARCH BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS

This research project was initiated by the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force's Strategic Study Group. Due to the elevated level of this sponsor the results of this report stand to have a far-reaching effect on the Air Force. In addition, this report will be distributed to the Office of the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF), the senior enlisted member in the Air Force, to share the potential benefits of our results. However, this report was not conducted to pursue a specific initiative, and this may limit its reception by policy makers.

1. Benefits

This research stands to benefit the VCSAF Strategic Studies Group as they formulate recommendations for implementation by the VCSAF and the Air Force Manpower and Personnel Directorate (A1) to benefit Air Force civilians, military members, contractors, and families. This research provides a first-of-its-kind comparison of strengths and limitations between Air Force Readiness and industry equivalents. In addition, this research provides validated MVPs that can be rapidly tested for deployment.

2. Limitations

This research was conducted in an academic environment with limited resources and Institutional Review Boards (IRB) constraints. All interviewees were sought and secured by student researchers. The student researchers relied on their limited individual knowledge of specific Air Force offices and processes related to readiness and human capital management. A listing of key Air Force Readiness functions and stakeholders would have helped steer the direction of the project for who to contact. Access to key Air

Force and industry leaders would have provided more robust data collection and concept formulation. Student researchers relied on personal connections, referrals from other interviewees, and cold-emailing leaders throughout the Air Force. Having an initial call sheet or introduction to key leaders could have enabled expedited data collection. Data used in this research was limited to interviews, a focus group, and academic research.

Furthermore, the methods used in analyzing the interview transcripts, specifically ingestion into a Large Language Model (LLM)—such as Open AI’s ChatGPT—are in their infancy and their successes are not well documented or proven long-term. One such case showed the analysis from ChatGPT 3.5 was highly correlated to human researcher findings in the context of thematic analysis and overall summary of research subject interactions (Tabone & de Winter, 2023). GPT 4.0, the most recent version from OpenAI, outperforms all previous versions by nearly five times, providing more capability and a more sophisticated data-to-text LLM (Griffith, 2023; OpenAI, n.d.; Popli, 2023). This indicates that tools such as ChatGPT are valid for qualitative analysis, albeit requiring human validation and reasoning. In our research, using ChatGPT 4.0 versus 3.5 proved even more valuable, as we were not limited in character count and could upload multiple documents to the chat session. This allowed us to analyze multiple transcripts and interview notes within the same session, preventing the need to re-prompt ChatGPT for each interview. In our analysis process, we manually validated key findings and outliers in the qualitative data.

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II. BACKGROUND

It is a common adage within the DOD that industry “does it better.” However, what is not common is an analysis of why the Air Force cannot adopt industry best practices. Such is the case with Air Force Readiness. During a project out-briefing with the fortieth VCSAF, General David W. Allvin, he emphasized that he is consistently told what industry does better but is never provided data on why industry does it better and, more importantly, why the Air Force cannot follow suit (D. Allvin, personal communication, January 20, 2023). Thus, our project directive was born—analyze Air Force Readiness from an HCM perspective and compare it to industry. What can be learned? What can be adopted? What, if any, constraints exist to prevent the adoption of best practices?

A. ORIGINAL PROBLEM STATEMENT

We first approached this research project using Lean Startup principles and the H4D methodology before our VCSAF out brief. Our problem statement evolved through an iterative process, informed by what we learned from our research throughout the Naval Postgraduate School Enterprise Innovation Design course that utilizes the H4D curriculum. This project evolved over two phases during our time at Naval Postgraduate School. The first phase involved a four-person team working on the original problem statement as part of H4D. The second phase consisted of the two authors of this paper continuing the project post-course based on the direct request of the VCSAF. Our collected interview data, problem statement, and MVP evolutions are solely from the second phase and presented in this report.

During H4D, students are charged to work with stakeholders to take an original problem statement and confirm or refine it based on stakeholder feedback and research. Once they have validated their problem statement, teams develop an MVP to solve that problem. In this iteration of the H4D process, we did not receive a specific problem statement. Instead, we were given our problem topic from the VCSAF Strategic Studies Group (SSG). After conversations with our sponsor, we developed an initial version of the

problem statement—Version 1. We reformulated our problem statement to align with our findings as we conducted interviews and the project progressed.

(1) Version 1

The Air Force needs to improve how it handles HCM. It needs to balance readiness with appealing to the needs and desires of its personnel.

(2) Version 2

The Air Force has a problem with how its personnel define readiness and has room for HCM improvements by changing the culture, educating, and balancing the needs of organizational readiness while meeting the needs and desires of its personnel.

After beginning our interviews, we soon learned that there is a disparity in how Air Force Readiness is understood. The experience, rank, and position the interviewee holds or has held throughout their career attributes to this variance in understanding. Additionally, this project discovered that the culture within the Air Force, particularly with junior members, is influenced by a peace-state mentality. Interviewees highlighted that some junior members lack a warfighter mindset and have become comfortable operating in peacetime for many years. Many lack true understanding of what Air Force Readiness is. Depending on the experience and longevity of our junior members, readiness is simply a matter of being green—ready for deployment—or red—the member has overdue items or issues preventing them from being deployable in Air Force Readiness tracking systems. As such, we updated our problem statement to reflect new knowledge surrounding Air Force Readiness and the need to change the culture and education provided to our members within the readiness sphere.

B. VALIDATED PROBLEM STATEMENT

Through interviews with 38 stakeholders, including DOD, Air Force, and industry leaders, we realized our problem was more than balancing readiness and HCM. We found that it delved deeper into the basic understanding of readiness. To this end, based on our

key findings and thematic responses during the interview process—our final, validated problem statement:

The Air Force has a problem with how readiness is understood by the force. There is room for improvement in how the Air Force manages Human Capital to achieve readiness by changing the culture, educating personnel on readiness, and managing capability versus capacity.

We learned that there is not only a problem with how the force understands readiness, but there exists a problem with how it is understood depending on the experience and the longevity of any individual. The way interviewees defined readiness varied based on where they have worked or their duration in the Air Force. Our final version of the problem statement included a focus on capacity versus capability. We learned that though we may have the required number of personnel (capacity) for a mission, those personnel may not have the needed skills or experience (capability) to meet mission objectives. These findings were prominent enough to warrant adjusting our problem statement accordingly.

C. SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDERS

This section provides an abbreviated list of some of the stakeholders for this continuation project. While some overlap exists with our previous H4D iteration, this list focuses on our current endeavor. This list takes a top-level approach and is not all-inclusive. Instead, it highlights some key offices that this report will affect, benefit, or would have a significant role in implementing any proposed changes.

1. VCSAF Strategic Studies Group

Our problem sponsor, the VCSAF SSG, presented this project to us. The SSG serves as a catalyst for VCSAF initiatives while providing assessments of proposed strategic actions. It is also an incubator for innovation and new ideas and a focal point for interaction with research communities. They work hand-in-hand with sister services and allies to share approaches, connect initiatives, and combine resources (Air Force, 2007; Osborn, 2022).

2. Headquarters Air Force – Air Force Manpower and Personnel Directorate

Headquarters Air Force Air Force Manpower and Personnel Directorate (HAF/A1) falls under the Air Force Personnel Center. It is responsible for the comprehensive plans and policies that affect all Air Force personnel at every stage of their professional career and personal lives. The Directorate is responsible for all matters related to manpower, military, and civilian personnel management. Focus areas include resource allocation, end-strength management, education, training for both military and civilians (Kelly, 2018; Wagner, 2022).

3. Air Force Personnel Center

The Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) manages personnel programs and carries out personnel policies. It is the focal point for Air Force personnel programs, including Human Capital Management Systems (HCMS), personnel pay, and the life cycle of personnel from recruitment to retirement (Air Force, n.d.-b). More importantly, it is responsible for ensuring that commanders are provided with skilled personnel to conduct Air Force and joint missions. Duties include managing accession, growth development, readiness, and retirements (Air Force, n.d.-a).

4. Air Force Recruiting Services

Air Force Recruiting Services (AFRS) is a key component of Air Force Education and Training Command with the vital mission of inspiring, engaging, and recruiting the next generation of Airmen and Guardians. Their mission is to provide a steady flow of new recruits, which is essential to maintaining the required manpower and a distribution of skillsets for the Air Force and Space Force. On an annual basis, they assess more than forty-five thousand individuals interested in serving. From this pool, they fill one hundred percent of the Air and Space Forces' enlisted force, 100% of chaplains, 90% of health profession officers, and 16% of line officers (Air Force Recruiting Service, 2023).

5. Air Force Career Field Managers

An Air Force Career Field Manager (CFM) is an individual appointed and charged with the overall management of a career field and training for an Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) or group of specialty codes (Omari, 2000). An AFSC is the Air Force equivalent of a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) in the Army and Marine Corps and a job series in the civilian sector. A CFM oversees training and development of a particular career field. They play an integral role in organizing, equipping, assessing, and maintaining the career field's end strength while ensuring personnel meet readiness requirements.

6. Air Force Service Members

We cannot stress enough the importance of our Air Force brothers and sisters. Without them, we would not have the greatest Air Force in the world. We kept this in mind throughout our research—there is a possibility our research could affect the daily lives of those we serve with. Our MVPs were developed with the greatest care and the intent of bettering the professional and personal lives of our Air Force service members while enhancing our state of readiness and organizational capability.

D. SUMMARY OF ORIGINAL H4D REPORT

This project is a continuation of our Hacking for Defense (H4D) report conducted in the course MN3307, Enterprise Innovation Design, at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). The report, titled Air Force Intrapreneur Development, was completed by four Air Force Contract Management students attending NPS in the pursuit of a Master of Business Administration degree in Contract Management. The goal was to investigate how the Air Force handles human capital development. At the end of the course, the team provided the project's sponsor, the VCSAF SSG, with an MVP in the form of a qualitative, comprehensive report, synthesizing data from multiple interviews.

A key finding was a clear linkage between Human Capital Management Systems (HCMS) and IN&D. Specifically, HCMS employment and execution can significantly impact the needs and desires of the personnel they manage—positive or negative. Early into our interviews, we learned that HCMS are critical to managing Air Force Readiness

successfully. Additionally, we further discovered that there is also a direct linkage between Air Force Readiness and IN&D. In short, there is a synergistic relationship between Air Force Readiness, HCMS, and meeting the needs and desires of individuals in our Air Force. This understanding began our project's transition from the H4D course to our post-H4D capstone where we were tasked with investigating readiness in the Air Force and industry and how readiness relates to IN&D. To fully understand this relationship, we conducted a literature review to explore the topics of job satisfaction and HCMS as they relate to the Air Force meeting readiness objectives.

III. POST-H4D METHODOLOGY

We used a mixed-methods approach for this project. First, we performed a literature review to help establish the prior research on this topic and to assist in developing our interview questions. Our review included Air Force and DOD doctrines as well as regulations to further establish our interview questions. We set our ground-level understanding from members within the government ecosystem in addition to a traditional scholarly understanding of readiness and human capital management. We identified Air Force and DOD leaders who operate within the readiness and human capital management realm to collect our qualitative data via interviews. Finally, we reached out to industry leaders to establish an industry perspective. We sought to understand the industry equivalent of readiness and industry best practices in the context of readiness and human capital management.

A. SUMMARY OF METHODS

1. Literature Review

We conducted an extensive literature review to synthesize prior research regarding readiness in the DOD, job satisfaction—specifically person-job, person-organization, and person-environment fit theories—and human capital management systems. We chose these topics for their relevance to readiness and human capital management. Our review of the DOD examined definitions and understanding of readiness. We also explored the application of readiness in pursuit of strategic objectives. Research on job satisfaction examined the match between employee personality, values, and abilities to their job duties, supervisor, workgroup, work environment, and organization. Further exploration revealed the benefits of strong person-fit, including higher job satisfaction, performance, and retention. The literature review finished with research on human capital management. In summary, this literature review discusses the evolution, attributes, implementation challenges, and the critical role of these systems in recruiting, developing, and managing talent.

The keywords and search terms used to identify literature included “readiness,” “Air Force Readiness,” “military readiness,” “person-job fit,” “person-organization fit,” “human capital management systems,” “human resources,” “readiness,” “retention,” and “job satisfaction.” Secondary searches found another key term, “person-environment fit.” Readiness, Job Satisfaction, and Human Capital Management Systems became our three article categories. This comprehensive literature review provided background context on our research topics. It guided the development of research questions and instruments for further primary data collection, including interviews and surveys. The synthesis of a wide range of literature informed our overall study.

2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen Air Force and DOD officials and 11 industry leaders for this post-H4D project. Interviews were scheduled for one hour, but ranged from fifty to ninety minutes, based on the conversation flow and participants’ availability. One student facilitated the conversation while the other recorded notes and interjected, when necessary, to ask follow-up questions or provide additional clarification. We leveraged the recording and transcription function within Microsoft (MS) Teams as our primary notetaking medium, with individual notetaking as a secondary. Phone calls were used as a backup—for transcription reasons—if an interviewee could not use MS Teams due to security reasons or technology gaps.

Participants were selected based on their stated profession and levels of expertise. We also used snowball sampling during our interviews, which took participant referrals. Convenience sampling through professional connections and networks, cold calling and e-mailing, personal contacts from our advisor team, and a CMSAF referral started our initial interviews. Participants referred additional interviewees based on their relevant experience and the perceived value they could add to our research. We recruited industry participants using professional connections and posts on the social media sites LinkedIn and Facebook.

We developed two sets of open-ended interview questions. The first set was tailored to Air Force and DOD personnel within the readiness and HCM spheres. The second was developed for industry leaders with similar expertise. Questions explored perspectives on

balancing readiness, mission demands, and service member well-being. We submitted the sets of questions for Institutional Review Board’s approval prior to the interview process. Conversations covered the core research questions but remained flexible and organic, following relevant tangents raised by interviewees. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for future analysis.

In addition to the interview questions, we presented several supplemental documents and graphics to foster discussion. These included a draft DOD instruction on strategic readiness and original models, examining the dynamics between readiness, mission demands, and service member needs. We gathered feedback on our original materials and models. Furthermore, some participants provided additional supplemental materials to assist in our research. By interviewing Air Force, DOD, and industry personnel, we collected a diversity of perspectives through these semi-structured discussions. The interviews added critical primary data to complement the literature review. The qualitative data underwent AI natural language analysis using Open AI ChatGPT 4.0 to identify key themes, patterns, and summaries across interviews. Manual validation confirmed our AI analysis and thematic responses. Using a Large Language Model (LLM) and natural language processing techniques proved insightful and added value to our research. ChatGPT 4.0 analyzed both government and industry interview groups, as well as our focus group.

3. Focus Group: NPS Graduate Students

In addition to the interviews, we hosted a focus group with 11 Air Force Officers and Enlisted personnel attending the Naval Postgraduate School. All members of the focus group were pursuing a master’s degree. We conducted the focus group over MS Teams to leverage the recording and transcription capabilities. One student facilitated the focus group, with the other taking notes and interjecting when needed. We provided the participants with the list of interview questions for Air Force and DOD personnel in advance and displayed the questions during the meeting for reference. We also presented our initial MVPs for feedback.

We established a protocol at the beginning of the session to maintain an efficient flow of communication. Participants were informed that the objective was to solicit open-ended answers on the subject matter. Participants were directed to use the “raise hand” button in MS Teams to alert the facilitator that they have something of value to add to the conversation. Participants were informed that they were not required to respond to all questions. Due to the natural flow of the conversation, not all questions were asked. A select few provided useful feedback on our interview findings.

The primary objective of the focus group was to generate feedback on the MVPs we had developed up to this point. Our secondary objective was to gain perspectives and insights on our research findings thus far. The MVPs we developed were not products but solutions—or courses of action—to improve Air Force Readiness. We used the feedback to refine the MVPs and validate what we have learned throughout the interview process.

B. LARGE LANGUAGE MODEL ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

We analyzed interview transcripts using the LLM ChatGPT 4.0 from Open AI for this research capstone. Following the methodology laid out in Tabone and de Winter on human-computer interaction, we successfully analyzed our transcription data to pull out key findings and thematic responses (2023). We separated the interviews into government and industry groups to enable targeted analysis relevant to each sector’s nuances. When conducting interviews, MS Teams automatically transcribed the interview recording in real time. After manually validating the transcript—and only needing to correct minor mistakes—we decided to continue using this method instead of other transcription techniques.

We grouped our interviews into subgroups based on interview order of occurrence. The twelve government interviews were grouped into six subgroups with the 11 industry interviews grouped into seven subgroups. The first two interviews, for both government and industry, were grouped together and named Subgroup 1, the next two, Subgroup 2, and so forth. Some interviews included as many as three people, so we analyzed those as its own subgroup. This method of breaking out interviews into subgroups enabled a comparative approach to discern trends or perspective shifts over the course of our

interview process. This is because we wanted to see how our findings evolved over time. The extracted key themes from the first subgroup were used as a baseline for the interviews that followed. We then analyzed each subsequent subgroup to look for new themes in their responses to interview questions to identify thematic response overlap. Once our temporal subgroups resulted in no new thematic responses, we considered our data to have reached saturation and did not conduct any further interviews.

Our goal was to stop interviews once we reached saturation in the context of thematic responses and key findings. We decided to analyze our interviews in chronological order to see our findings develop and evolve over time. If we did not discover new themes or unique responses in the proceeding interviews, we claimed saturation. We conducted this analysis sequentially, applying consistent criteria and questions to the Large Language Model. After several attempts to prompt ChatGPT to attain the information we were looking for, we discovered useful prompts that gave us our valuable insights. Our prompts focused on extracting thematic responses and providing summarizations for each interview. ChatGPT 4.0 was instrumental in identifying key themes and compiling comprehensive summaries per interviewee. Each interview was initially analyzed by itself, as laid out in Tabone and de Winter (2023). After prompting ChatGPT, we generated two to three paragraph summaries of each interview and all thematic responses. We asked the AI to format the thematic responses with supporting details and relevant quotes to support the theme. After we analyzed all interviews individually—including the focus group—we proceeded with subgroup analysis.

The first government subgroup, Government Subgroup 1, contained two interviews, Interview 1, and Interview 2. We uploaded each individual interview summary and thematic responses from our earlier analysis to ChatGPT in two text files, one for each interview. Once uploaded, we prompted the AI to synthesize the two summaries into a subgroup analysis. Afterward, we asked for it to identify any overlapping themes between the two interviews. Our intent was to identify the themes each interview touched on and any themes that were consistently discussed. We continued this process for the remaining government and industry interviews. Once the subgroup analyses were complete, we synthesized the data again using ChatGPT to identify commonalities and distinctive

insights across the government and industry groups, including the focus group. We first uploaded all government subgroup analyses and asked the AI to generate an overall executive summary, including any overlapping thematic responses. We aimed to understand all our government interviewees' generalized perspectives and responses. The analysis painted a picture of our government perspective on readiness and human capital management. We did the same for our industry subgroups. Additionally, we had ChatGPT map our thematic responses to the interview questions that fostered the identified response. Manual verification of the transcripts showed that the mapping technique was accurate. These questions are included with our responses, including relevant quotes from our interviewees.

ChatGPT has the ability to synthesize multiple concepts rapidly and successfully (Eapen et al., 2023). This synthesis was critical in ensuring that the collective data was not just a compilation of discrete parts but a coherent whole that accurately reflected the breadth of perspectives captured in the interviews. Although AI significantly accelerated data analysis, we performed manual verification to ensure accuracy and address any AI-generated inaccuracies or 'hallucinations.' Instances where the AI misidentified proprietary material or confused interviewee identities highlighted the need for human oversight in the AI analysis process.

In summary, we used an LLM to analyze interview transcripts for this research process. We took initial analyses and further distilled them, using ChatGPT 4.0 to gain insights laid out in chapter five. This approach represents a methodology that merges AI-driven efficiency with the depth of human insight, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of military readiness and human capital management as perceived by government and industry professionals. Though these AIs are in their infancy phase and rapidly improving, studies have supported the benefits of using them for data analysis. In many cases, the use of AI amplified the quality of the analysis (Zhang et al., 2023). Another highlighted the superiority of human-authored analysis but, at the same time, emphasized that AI can be used for thematic analysis in academic environments, and is being increasingly acknowledged for its supporting role (Perkins & Roe, 2023).

C. INTERVIEWS HELD

Air Force and DOD personnel were interviewed first. These members are listed in Table 1. The objective was to learn how the force understands readiness and how it is defined. After meeting this objective, we then focused on learning what the industry equivalent to Air Force Readiness is and how the industry conceptualizes it. That is, whether it is a specific terminology or a set of competencies encompassing the same ideas and goals as Air Force Readiness. During our industry interviews, we also led a focus group. Participants of this focus group are listed in Table 2. We generated a list of 22 industry interviewees but only interviewed 11 personnel. We stopped at 11 interviewees after reaching thematic saturation. These members are listed in Table 3.

Table 1. Table 1. Air Force and DOD Interviews

Organization	Role
OUSD Personnel & Readiness	Principal Director, Force Readiness
HAF/A1	38F Career Field Manager
AFSOC UDM	Air Force Special Operations Command's Unit Deployment Manager
AFDW A3	Operations, Plans & Requirements Division
AFPC/DP3	AFFORGEN Lead
AFPC/DP3	AFFORGEN Lead
AFPC/DP3	AFFORGEN Lead
HAF/A1H	Chief, Talent Management Innovation
AETC/AU	Command Chief Master Sergeant
AETC/A3X	Designing Ready Airmen Training
HAF/A1	HAF/A1 Senior Enlisted Leader
HAF/A4	Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Engineering & Force Protection
HAF/A3	HAF/A3 Senior Enlisted Leader
SAF/MR	Command Chief to the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, Manpower & Reserve Affairs
HAF/MRM	Force Management Integration
HAF/MRM	Force Management Integration

*Shaded rows indicate members were in the same interview call and all participated

Table 2. Focus Group

Organization	Role
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective
NPS MBA Student	Academic/Active-Duty Perspective

*All members were in the same focus group

Table 3. Industry Interviewees

Organization	Role
Cognovi Government Services (CGS)	President / lead on USAF Project Refuel Program
Cognovi Government Services (CGS)	Chief Science Officer
Potawatomi Business Development Corporation	Director & Project Manager
Delaware Emergency Management Agency	Recovery Planner
Delaware Emergency Management Agency	Deputy Director
Delaware Emergency Management Agency	Deputy Director
Stryker Corp	Senior Director of Government Contracts
Resilinc Corp	President, Government/Defense/Aero Division, Resilinc Corp
USAF Reserves 442d FW/IG	Former HR Business Partner
Tandem Group, Inc.	Senior Manager and Federal Practice Lead
Tandem Group, Inc.	Chief Executive Officer and Founder

*Shaded rows indicate members were in the same interview call and all participated

As we noticed similar findings, indicating that we had reached thematic saturation on interviewees' responses to the questions, we conducted seven more interviews to test our findings. The additional interviews increased our confidence in data adequacy and belief that continued interviews would not result in more significant data. Data adequacy is what Janice Morse defines as saturation, which authors Guest et al. argue is an indication that researchers have accomplished enough qualitative interviews (Guest et al., 2020; Morse, 1995). As such, we did not see value in pursuing any further interviews with industry leaders as it would not result in any further learning.

D. QUESTION DEVELOPMENT

Feedback from our advisors was crucial in developing open-ended questions that would foster dynamic conversations with our participants. After receiving approval from our sponsors, we submitted an IRB determination to ensure we did not need to meet an IRB board for human subject testing. We only chose questions related to a participant's relevant professional experience and expertise. We did not select questions about our participants' feelings or personal experiences. It was essential to delineate the experiences and expertise between these two vastly different sectors. Within our Air Force/DOD question set, two sections emerged. One section is for personnel with generalized readiness experience who are not explicitly employed to operate in a readiness or HCM capacity. We tailored our second section for personnel in positions surrounding readiness and HCM. Below are these questions:

1. AIR FORCE/DOD QUESTIONS

1. What is "Readiness" within the Air Force?
2. Who and/or what controls/directs readiness for the Air Force?
 - a. Policy changes?
 - b. Implementation and oversight of changes?
3. How does human capital factor into Air Force readiness?

4. How does readiness impact the Air Force's ability to achieve mission objectives and goals?
5. Are there limiting factors (LIMFACs) for implementation of Air Force readiness processes and meeting readiness goals?
6. Are there LIMFACs for making changes in Air Force readiness in terms of policy and/or strategy?
 - a. If so, what are the causes of those LIMFACs?
7. What are the strengths of Air Force readiness?
8. Does the Air Force strive to meet the desires and needs of the individual? How?
9. Tell me how the Air Force balances its needs with the needs of the individual employee.
10. If you were king/queen for a day, what would you change regarding readiness?

2. AIR FORCE/DOD READINESS PERSONNEL SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

1. What is your role in Air Force readiness?
2. How is readiness understood by Air Force personnel?
3. In what areas can the Air Force improve its readiness practices? Are there barriers to improvement?
4. Are there readiness practices you are aware of that Industry does better or more efficiently than the Air Force?
5. If Industry does certain readiness practices better, can the Air Force adopt those readiness practices? Why or why not?

6. Are there any challenges within Air Force readiness?
7. What are the strengths of Air Force readiness (Best Practices)?
8. How does the Air Force balance the needs/desires of personnel with the needs of the Air Force as a whole?

We customized our second set of questions for industry leaders. One of our goals with this set of questions was to determine the industry equivalent of “readiness,” as this term is not widely known or used within industry competencies, as confirmed in our interviews. To determine what this equivalent was, we first needed to present our definition of Air Force Readiness. Unfortunately, an official definition was not readily available. Our government interviews indicated that Air Force Readiness as a concept had yet to have a widely known or agreed-upon definition. Understanding that the DOD is soon to release a new instruction that would define readiness as “strategic readiness” and all its dimensions, we decided to use this definition as our primer to remain consistent with all our participants. From there, we would solicit answers to the industry’s equivalent of readiness. Other questions were similar to our previous set in which we asked who controls policies surrounding this equivalent and industry balances achieving it while meeting the needs and desires of their employees. Below are our industry questions:

3. INDUSTRY READINESS QUESTIONS

1. What is your role in your organization?

The original definition of “readiness” within the DOD is how we organize, train, and equip our forces. A newer term, coined “strategic readiness,” has the following definition:

“Strategic Readiness is the ability to build, maintain, and balance warfighting capabilities and competitive advantages that ensure the Department of Defense can achieve strategic objectives across threats and time horizons.”

2. Is there a terminology or competencies within your industry that is equivalent or similar to the definition of either “readiness” or “strategic readiness?”

3. What areas does your industry/organization track and evaluate to determine its state of readiness? (medical status, training, certifications, etc.)
4. How does your organization hire, train, organize, and equip its workforce to achieve organizational objectives?
5. Who controls/directs policies or actions affecting readiness?
 - a. Are there any limiting factors to making changes to these policies?
6. How does human capital management factor into your organization's ability to readily achieve objectives?
7. Are there any ways your organization can improve its "readiness" practices? Are there barriers to improvement?
8. What practices does your organization excel at in terms of "readiness" or human capital management?
9. What do the employees in your organization most value? (pay, healthcare, autonomy, telework, development opportunities, etc.)
 - a. How does your organization balance its needs with the needs of the individual employee in question 9.
10. How does your organization discover, track, and match individual talents and skills to your firm's goals and objectives? For example, an employee in one area of the business who has previously trained skills or self-taught skills that could benefit other areas of the business.
11. If you were the King/Queen for a day, what one thing would you change in your organization to make it more effective and efficient?

Interview responses laid the foundation for our critical findings. ChatGPT analyzed our interview transcripts to discover thematic responses and synthesize summaries. We performed manual validation as a quality assurance measure. We paid particular attention

to outlier responses and suspected hallucinations to ensure accuracy. This method proved to be a valuable way to analyze qualitative data, paralleling the study by Tabone and de Winter (2023). These thematic responses forged our understanding of Air Force Readiness and the industry equivalent—agility. We collected and analyzed the responses and used the information gained to form our MVPs and test our assumptions.

E. ROADMAP TO CRITICAL FINDINGS

We based our roadmap for this project on the build-measure-learn process created by Eric Ries. Figure 1 depicts our iteration of this process. It is an iterative feedback loop focused on turning ideas into products, measuring how customers respond to them, and learning if it is an effective solution or if pivoting is warranted (Ries, 2011). We started in the discovery phase. Here, we identified our problem, doing a deep dive into determining what it truly is by breaking it down. Through the “learn” phase, we aimed to understand our identified problem—Air Force Readiness. The emphasis in the learn phase was the understanding of the topic. A vital component of the learn phase is determining if we are looking at the right problem and whether solving it adds value to the organization. In this phase, we did our first pivot as we quickly learned that readiness is extraordinarily complicated and encompasses many dimensions.

We pivoted to focus on the HCM dimension of readiness. Since readiness as a concept is so ambiguous, we narrowed our scope to HCM. We spent most of the project in the learn phase conducting academic research and interviews. The information gathered from the interviews fueled the transition to the next iteration of the build phase, where we began to collect thematic findings and develop MVPs. In this phase, we emphasized developing bare-bone products using the information gathered in the learn phase. We decided to develop MVPs when we noticed that all interviewees offered the same perspectives and ideas—our thematic findings. Based on these conversations, we crafted MVPs to solve the issues brought up in interviews. We created the three MVPs at different times in the process. They were developed as our interviews progressed, and we learned more. We began to measure our findings by sharing them with interviewees.

In the measure phase, we used AI to identify thematic responses in each recorded interview. We also reviewed our notes and recordings to validate the AI analysis manually. In this phase, we also began to share our critical findings and MVPs to solicit feedback, which quickly transitioned us into the learn phase once more. This time, the emphasis was on refining our MVPs based on feedback from our interviewees. We validated our learning by testing our assumptions to ensure they are providing value. We went through the process several times until we identified our critical findings and developed our final MVPs. Our roadmap of the build-measure-learn process captures key events as shown in Figure 2.

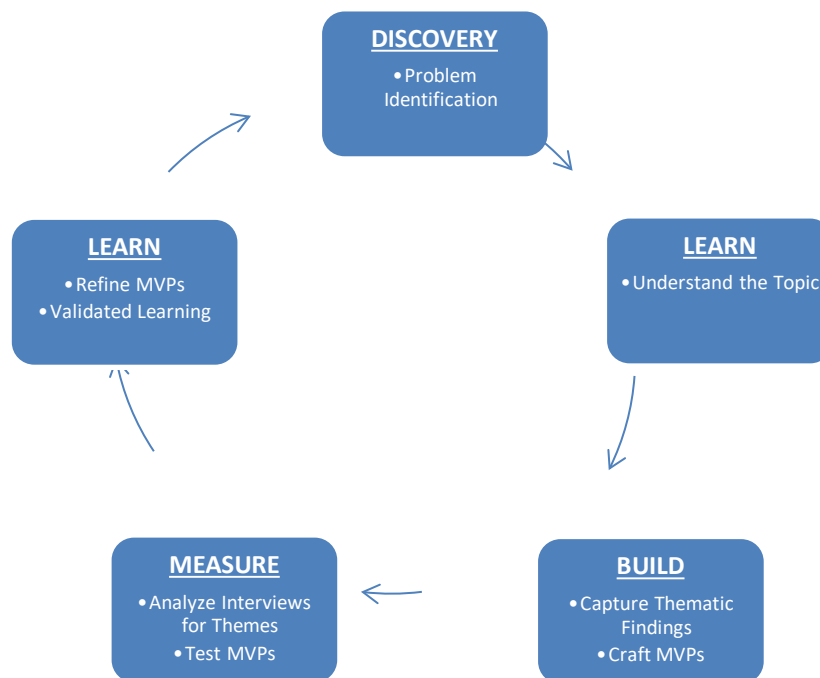


Figure 1. Build Measure Learn Process: Path to Critical Findings. Adapted from Ries, 2011 (p. 75).

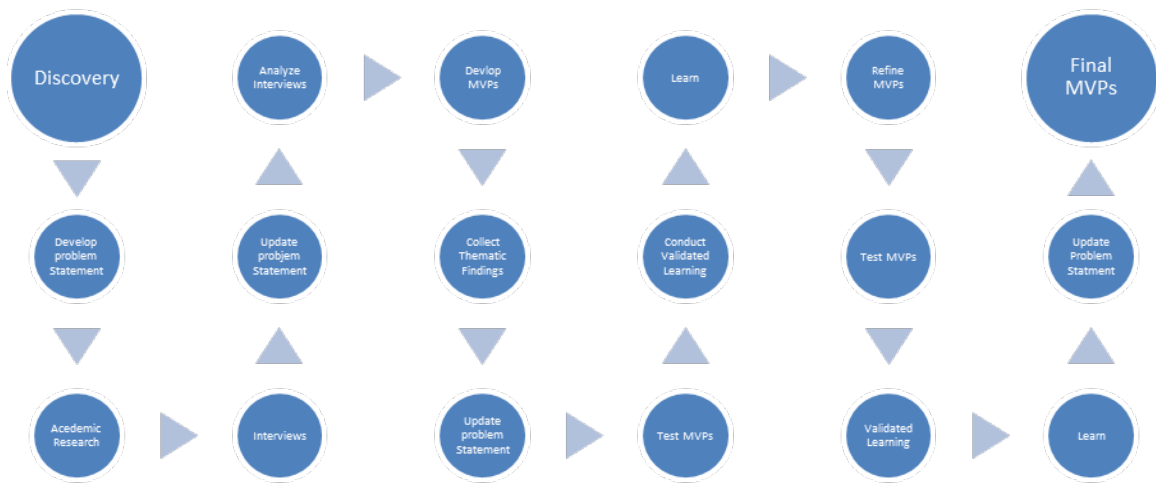


Figure 2. Iterative Process to Critical Findings

F. MVP (SOLUTION) EVOLUTION

We used the Mission Model and Value Proposition Canvases developed by Steve Blank and Peter Newell to develop our MVPs (Blank, 2019). These canvases, shown in Figures 14 and 15 in the Appendix, helped guide our thought logic throughout the research process, identifying key stakeholders, resources needed, key activities, and whose buy-in would be required. The Value Proposition Canvas identifies the current state and how it can be improved with “pain relievers” and “gain creators.” We updated these documents throughout the process as more information was gained and our learning progressed.

Having captured this information upfront helped ground our development of MVPs, as we could compare them to the Mission Model and Value Proposition Canvases to see if they aligned with them. We tested our MVPs to the value proposition to see if they solved the pains we initially listed. If so, this indicated that we were on the right track. If not, this suggested that though the MVP may be beneficial, we still need to solve our problem statement. These MVPs created are post-H4D and are separate from those developed in the previous H4D course mentioned earlier. Figure 3 depicts the development timeline of our MVPs throughout this project.

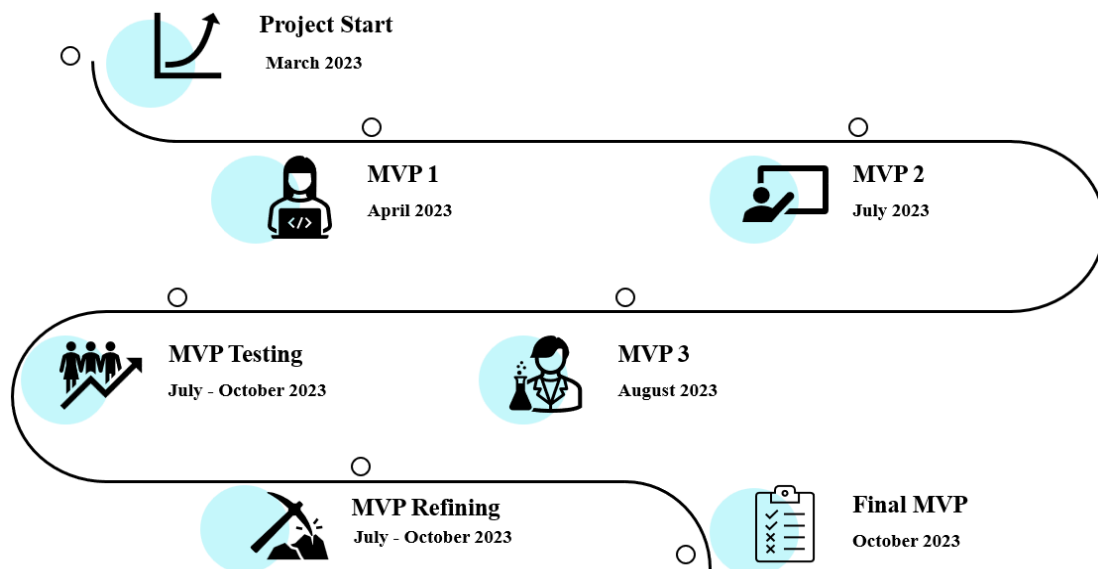


Figure 3. MVP Development Timeline

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

In our review of the available literature, we chose topics based on their relevance to readiness—and the systemic issues affecting readiness—as well as their significance to HCM and HCMS’ effect on an organization. We narrowed our scope to focus on capturing information available on readiness in the DOD, job satisfaction, and human capital management systems because of their relevance to readiness and the Air Force’s ability to meet IN&D. We believe the Air Force can achieve its readiness objectives better if they focus on these areas.

A. READINESS IN THE DOD

1. What is Readiness?

The Department of Defense prides itself on its ability to always be mission-ready to respond to threats (Department of Defense [DOD], n.d.-a). Even though readiness has a high level of importance, it lacks a statutory definition and there are multiple variations in its definition demonstrating a lack of consistency (Nicastro, 2022). The DOD Dictionary of Military Associated Terms and the Joint Publication 1 has one such variation of readiness. There it is defined as “The ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of assigned missions” (DOD, 2021; JCS, 2017). The DOD’s ability to accomplish national strategies is the center of this definition. Another definition is found in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3100.01E, *Joint Strategic Planning Systems*, which broadly defines readiness as meeting the immediate warfighting and contingency challenges while simultaneously preparing for future challenges (Joint Staff, 2021).

These definitions of readiness allow for broad interpretation, but all are focused on how we organize, train, and equip our forces to meet strategic objectives (Builder & Karasik, 1995; Herrera, 2020; Nicastro, 2022). Some associate readiness with preparedness. Examples include materiel readiness and medical readiness. Over the past few decades, this association between readiness and preparedness has become more common (Herrera, 2020). Other federal entities outside the DOD have actively used the term readiness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023; Department of

Homeland Security [DHS], 2023; Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools [REMS], n.d.). What differs between the use of the term preparedness and readiness is the purpose and context in which it is used. Readiness is applied to groups or communities of people at risk (Herrera, 2020). Understanding that the definition of readiness can be extremely broad, the DOD is rebranding readiness within its organization. This rebranding includes coining a new term—strategic readiness—and breaking readiness into ten dimensions, listed below (Jackson, 2022). Viewing readiness from these different dimensions provides a holistic approach to gain a better understanding of where units stand, produce a complete picture of DOD readiness, and accomplish congressional requirements (Department of Defense [DOD], 2023).

- Allies & Partners
- Business Systems and Organizational Effectiveness
- Force Structure
- Global Defense Posture
- Human Capital
- Mobilization
- Modernization
- Operational Readiness
- Resilience
- Sustainment

10 U.S.C. §117 and 10 U.S.C. §482 require the Secretary of Defense to assess and report the DOD’s state of readiness to Congress. This requirement is because readiness is imperative in informing military strategic direction and congressional decision-making regarding national security issues (Joint Staff, 2021; Nicastro, 2022). Compliance is tracked and fulfilled through the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). This system aggregates commanders’ indication of their unit’s readiness level, signaling their ability to accomplish their assigned core tasks and missions (Joint Staff, 2021).

Commanders must continually assess their units and report their status monthly at a minimum. Figures 4 and 5 show DRRS’s metrics for unit resourcing, training, and mission capability. Commander responses based on these metrics generate reports to Congress, measuring warfighting deficiencies and capabilities.

Rating	Definition
C-1	The unit possesses the required resources and is trained to undertake the full wartime mission(s) for which it is organized or designed.
C-2	The unit possesses the required resources and is trained to undertake most of the wartime mission(s) for which it is organized or designed.
C-3	The unit possesses the required resources and is trained to undertake many, but not all , portions of the wartime mission(s) for which it is organized or designed.
C-4	The unit requires additional resources or training to undertake its wartime mission(s), but it may be directed to undertake portions of its wartime mission(s) with resources on hand.
C-5	The unit is undergoing a Service, Combatant Commander, Defense Agency, or other Department of Defense-directed resource action and is not prepared , at this time, to undertake the wartime missions for which it is organized or designed.

Figure 4. DRRS Resource Readiness Metrics. Source: United States Government Accountability Office [GAO] (2021)

Rating	Definition
Y	Unit can accomplish task to established standards and conditions.
Q	Unit can accomplish all or most of the task to standard under most conditions. The specific standards, conditions, and shortfalls impacting the unit's task must be clearly detailed in the mission essential task assessment.
N	Unit is unable to accomplish the task to prescribed standard and conditions at this time.

Figure 5. DRRS Mission Capability Metrics. Source: United States Government Accountability Office [GAO] (2021)

These metrics indicate a unit’s readiness to accomplish their assigned core tasks and missions (Joint Staff, 2021). Some argue that these metrics are not all-encompassing and do not paint an accurate picture of a unit’s readiness status (Nicastro, 2022; Yonekura et al., 2023). Other components that affect a unit’s ability to meet objectives are not

factored in the assessment. This disparity is one of many LIMFACS of readiness in the literature.

2. Readiness LIMFACS

The DOD is making many changes to its approach to readiness, including its definition and its areas of focus (Department of Defense [DOD], n.d.-b, 2023; Joint Staff, 2021; United States Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2021, 2023). A crucial component that hinders DOD effectiveness is how the department captures information and how it reports that information. Some authors suggest these changes are a result of the gaps in current metrics and readiness reporting in the DOD (Moore et al., 1991; Nicastro, 2022; Yonekura et al., 2023). A 1991 report from the RAND Corporation highlighted the need for a better method of capturing and reporting readiness metrics in the DOD as they do not provide decision-makers with appropriate information (Moore et al., 1991).

Another LIMFAC to readiness in the DOD is our capability and focus. Literature shows that for more than twenty years, the DOD has been focused on training, organizing, and equipping forces to respond to conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq (Department of Defense [DOD], n.d.-a). This narrowed focus has created gaps in our capability and capacity to respond to other threats in different regions. Two decades of continued conflict has degraded the military's ability to project readiness at a time when national strategies are calling for preparation for great power competition (United States Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2021). The Government Accountability Office captured this degradation in a report showing changes in DRRS report ratings from 2017–2021. Their findings are depicted in Figure 6.



Figure 6. DOD Resource and Mission Capability Readiness Ratings from Fiscal years 2017–2021. Source: United States Government Accountability Office [GAO] (2023)

Figure 6 shows that though the DOD is improving its ratings in resource readiness, it is drastically struggling with mission capability. Though the report found positive results in achieving resource availability, the DOD is currently struggling with personnel readiness. All military branches are struggling to meet recruitment goals, thus raising questions on the long-term sustainability of an all-volunteer force (Kube & Boigen, 2022). These manning gaps can create future readiness issues in maintaining a proficient force. For instance, it takes six-months to regain any lapse in proficiency qualification needed for readiness in the Air Force (Department of Defense [DOD], n.d.-a).

By not meeting recruitment goals, each service must overcome years of training backlog to regain the needed proficiency in its force and return to an acceptable readiness state. For example, as proficient personnel rotate to new units, losing units will see decreases in their readiness level until new recruits can become proficient. The way in which we train our members also poses a risk to readiness. A heavy focus on specific regions resulted in a decreased capability for conflicts in other areas of the world. However, how we train, organize, and equip our forces is largely affected by external forces beyond our control, such as civilian control of the military.

Each year, Congress passes the National Defense Authorization Act which provides funding and authorization for the DOD. This authorization ensures the DOD have the

equipment, training, and resources needed to meet its mission requirements (House Armed Services Committee, 2022). The military is under civilian control; that is, it is subordinate to the civilian authority in Congress, and thus, the objectives and agendas of those civilians who dictate the laws and policies governing military actions (Schmidt, 2023b, 2023a; Szayna et al., 2007). This dynamic can affect a leaders' ability to effectively implement forces to achieve their objectives (Bledsoe, 2023; Feaver, 2003). This control can create a hindrance in achieving readiness goals in the DOD, as leaders are subjected to the changing objectives of political appointees. It can also restrict leaders' ability to meet personnel IN&D. For example, in a situation where even though the military has a clear path forward, it must implement actions dictated or restricted by the civilian leadership, showing a clear LIMFAC in the DOD's flexibility for achieving readiness (Baker, 2017; E. Cohen, 2002; Feaver, 2003).

3. Conclusion

Readiness is broadly defined and interpreted differently based on the context in which it is used. However, what remains the same is the overarching end-state of achieving national strategies. Steps are being taken to improve our understanding of readiness, such as new definitions and dimensions, but this all still relies on correcting the LIMFAC of how we track and report readiness. These LIMFACS are all relevant to Air Force Readiness and how we prepare our forces to meet mission needs. They will be especially relevant in force generation under the new Air Force Force Generation (AFFORGEN) model, which stands to tackle some of the LIMFACS discussed above.

B. JOB SATISFACTION: PERSON–JOB FIT, PERSON–ORGANIZATION FIT, & PERSON–ENVIRONMENT FIT

The match or compatibility between an employee and the job in which they are performing has been extensively researched. These efforts have been qualitative and quantitative, reviewing outcomes such as job satisfaction, retention, and employee commitment (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006). There are three perspectives that point to benefits incurred when key elements of individuals' work environments match with employees'

IN&D. These are the person–job, person–organization and person–environment fit theories. Though all three are similar, with some overlapping principles, they differ in how employees’ IN&D are being met. That is, whether it is being met by the job they are performing, the type of organization they work for or the environment they work in. By having the right people in the right job, organization, or environment, the literature shows that both parties will benefit, leading to better outcomes.

1. Person-Job Fit

The focus of this research has been on person–job fit, which has multiple applications. Person–job fit focuses on the employee’s fit with the job requirements. It is the level of compatibility an employee has with their job (Deniz et al., 2015). Person–job fit occurs when the employees’ IN&D are met by the job they perform, resulting in reduced stress, and more employees’ receptive to change (Deniz et al., 2015; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This approach to job satisfaction is individualistic, focusing on having the right job for the individual and the right individual for the job—a clear example of talent management. It differs from other person fit theories in that it focuses on how well the responsibilities of a position align with an individual’s interests and abilities. Another view is having the right organization for the individual—person-organization fit—which focuses on an individual’s level of comfort with an organization’s culture (Arthur et al., 2006; O’Reilly et al., 1991).

2. Person-Organization Fit

Additional research revolves around a person’s fit within their organization. This person–organization fit is the congruence between the organization’s value system and the individual’s value system (Bretz Jr. et al., 1989). Congruence is achieved when both parties have similar values, resulting in the individual fitting with the organization’s culture (Venkatesh et al., 2017). An organization’s culture is partly shaped by the employees’ values as they add to the acceptable norms (Afsar et al., 2015; Dust, 2020). Employees’ values aligning with the company’s would result in better fit and commitment to the organization and ultimately the establishment of a stronger organizational culture (O’Reilly et al., 1991). In fact, a study found that employees were more likely to leave an organization

because of their lack of fit with the organization rather than their fit with the job (Hur & Hawley, 2020).

Another study found that organizations with an organizational structure of high-quality leadership and effective communication—including engagements between manager and employee—yielded a lower turnover rate (Boon & Biron, 2016). According to this study, job satisfaction excels when employees are able to adjust to the organization and culture more easily. This is accredited to the fact that there is a correlation between job satisfaction and value system matching (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Job satisfaction flourishes when there is alignment between individuals and the organization concerning what is important, motives, communication and trust—leading to more predictability between both parties (Boon & Biron, 2016). Kristof (1996) supports this by adding that this shared understanding of values may be framed as a mechanism showing the desires of the employee and the rewards provided in the employment relationship in the organization. This demonstrates a positive correlation between the attributes of an individual and the characteristics of the organization in which they work. The literature shows that having a good person–organization fit leads to more satisfactory outcomes for both parties in the form of lower turnover rates, stronger employee commitment, and overall job satisfaction (Boon & Biron, 2016; Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This job satisfaction is achieved through the organization satisfying the employees’ IN&D.

3. Person–Environment Fit

Person–environment fit is the alignment of employees’ personality, needs, and physiological state with the right group, environment, interactions, or even supervisor (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). It is a broad concept involving individual’s compatibility with multiple factors of the work environment (Boon & Biron, 2016). This is supported by the Theory of Work Adjustment, which says that a person–environment fit affects a company’s turnover rate to the extent that satisfied employees whose needs are being met and are fulfilled professionally are less likely to seek employment elsewhere (Saxberg, 1984). The fit affects the employees’ quality of life and ability to influence their work environment (Parmenter, 1992). This disparity could prevent employees from pursuing their desires or

values, resulting in stress or other negative outcomes. There is also a correlation between how the employee fits in the work environment and job satisfaction. Hoffman and Woehr (2006) elaborated on the benefits an organization gains by aligning an employee with the right environment, including job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. However, person–organization fit is often confused with other forms of person-fit theories due to the limited distinction (Kristof, 1996).

Dr. Jeffrey Edwards, a subject matter expert in the field, highlighted the correlation of person–environment fit to employee stress levels. He finds that there are two traditional approaches to this understanding. The first is the correspondence between characteristics of the environment and the individual’s motives and value system (Edwards, 1996; Edwards & Cooper, 1990). This thought process is similar to other authors, arguing that the ideal state is where both parties’ value systems align (French et al., 1982; Venkatesh et al., 2017). It parallels Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory, as the provided factors motivate, satisfy, and align with the values of the individual (Dagher & El-Farr, 2023). Edwards’ second traditional approach focuses on the relationship between the demands of the environment and the skills and abilities of the individual. The environment fit is a continuous interaction, one between employees in the environment and the continued supply of needed factors for job satisfaction in the environment (Saxberg, 1984).

4. Conclusion

All three person-fit theories above are unique in their respective understanding. This understanding can be applied to the Air Force’s current readiness situation with its HCM. The DOD has defined readiness as how forces are organized, trained, and equipped (Herrera, 2020). Person–job fit speaks directly to two parts of this definition. It relates to how we organize and train our personnel. Ideally, placing personnel in jobs that align with their IN&D would be beneficial as this would affect motivation. At a CMSAF Panel at a 2023 Air Force Materiel Command conference, retired CMSAF Frederick “Jim” Finch spoke on this topic. He stated that “people stay motivated when they believe they are doing important work” (J. Finch, personal communication, 9 Nov 23).

Person–organization fit affects the value system and culture of an organization. Due to the Air Force being an all-volunteer force, this is hard to achieve as it cannot always ensure the right fit for the organization. However, we can retain the right people through talent management by placing them in the right positions after they join the Air Force. The articles also highlighted that the all-volunteer force LIMFAC can be influenced by having positive interactions with managers and the workforce. The Air Force would need to align an individual’s values with those of the Air Force. We strive to accomplish this by teaching the Air Force Core Values to create an environment of inclusiveness, acceptance and positive interactions (Air Force, 1 Nov 21). Further engagements between leaders and personnel can help achieve alignment and reduce personnel attrition.

Person–environment fit speaks to the Air Force’s ability to equip its forces. This type of fit is related to job satisfaction and how the Air Force provides the needed supplies to be effective. More so, it affects how our employees view the current state and future state of the Air Force and how they would be able to achieve their IN&D. Negative effects may create a lack of confidence or trust in the Air Force’s ability to change an unsatisfactory environment into a satisfactory one. Airmen may believe they are stuck with what they have with little hope things will get better. By understanding this, leaders in the Air Force can create an environment that efficiently equips personnel and fosters confidence for positive future change.

These articles all demonstrate the importance of job placement, which is crucial for organizational effectiveness and maintaining a readiness posture. Some authors believe that understanding job-fit extends beyond the employee’s fit with the job, the organization, or the environment. They believe it also involves creating and maintaining the culture and is critical in recruiting, developing, and managing talent. By striving for job satisfaction, an organization would progress towards improved effectiveness and maintain an acceptable state of readiness. By applying these theories to the Air Force, we stand to yield increased job satisfaction, performance, and ultimately, increased retention rates, which is a major concern for the entire U.S. government (Hur & Hawley, 2020).

C. HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

1. Introduction to HCMS

HCM systems—or HCMS—are often discussed interchangeably with human resources (HR) systems and are critical to organizational success. They impact every functional area of an organization (Automatic Data Processing Inc [ADP], 2023). Effective implementation of HCMS is becoming more crucial with the growing demand for technological performance as it presents an opportunity for strategic workforce optimization (Gilday, 2023; Leonard-Barton & Kraus, 1985). The context and speed at which information is available can be used to gain a competitive advantage by exploiting assets that an organization already owns (Porancea-Răulea, 2021). While much emphasis is placed on recruiting and retaining talent, developing existing talent is also important (Venkatesh et al., 2017). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many organizations have come to learn the value of intangible, nonfinancial management assets such as HCMS. These systems create value by organizing effectively and efficiently while identifying resources that can be exploited for sustainable growth (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Teece et al., 1997).

According to a comprehensive review of the HR literature by Atieh Mirfakhar et al. (2018), three HR system antecedents affect successful implementation: content, context, and process, shown in Figure 7. Content antecedents include user-friendliness, simple appraisal techniques, and avoiding excluding groups. Context antecedents operate within the macro, mezzo, and micro levels. At each of these levels, there are specific factors that should be considered and tackled prior to implementing a new HCMS for it to be successfully received. Implementing a new HCMS can either add value to an organization or send it into turmoil with consistent changes and uncertainties because HCMS has a direct effect on the environment and culture of an organization.

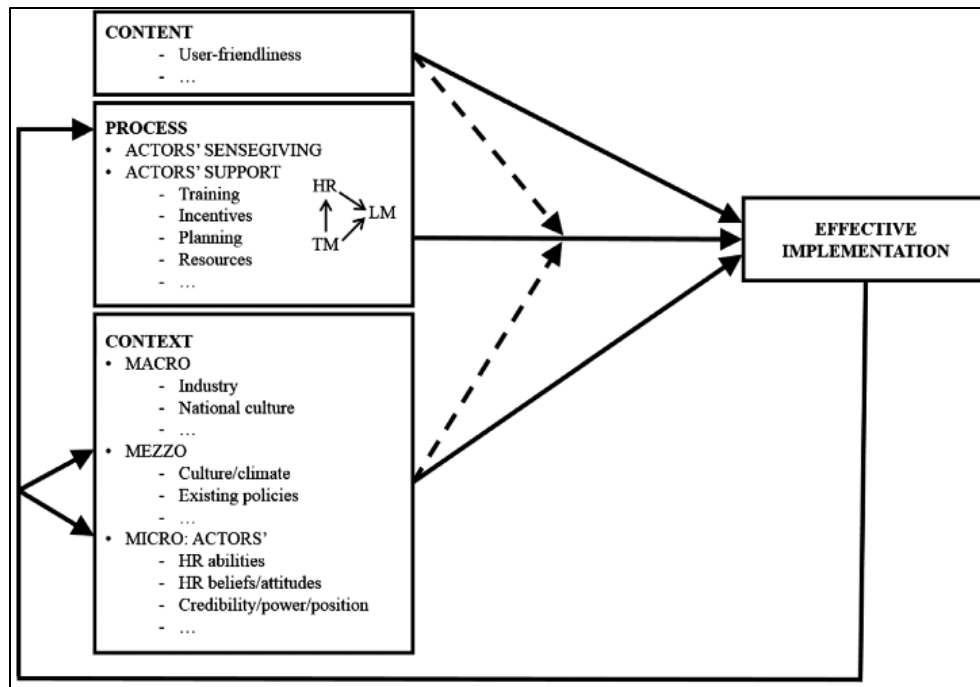


Figure 7. HR System Implementation Antecedents. Source: Mirfakhar et al. (2018).

2. HCMS Background

HCMS originated as internally crafted databases, often touted as personnel systems, and were manual, noncomputerized operations to manage larger companies' workforces (Hughes, 2017). Today, most systems evolve and grow alongside the organizations in which they operate to remain flexible, effective, and up to date with technological changes. This adaptability ensures that the HCMS remains relevant and current in supporting the organization's evolving needs as new demands are added. Instead of organizations building their systems from scratch, many third parties provide cloud-based tailorable systems and features (Hughes, 2017). The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2021) believes that the desired attributes of an effective HCMS for the Air Force would achieve the following:

1. Mission Responsiveness
2. Accurately Informed and Informative

3. Agile and Flexible
4. Innovative yet Disciplined
5. Collaborative
6. Understood and Trusted

Air Force stakeholders also value either “best practices” or “best fit,” where “best fit” is the development of an internal, closed system that best aligns with an organization’s specific context (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). The efficient implementation of an HCMS is crucial as it must achieve realistic objectives, and it will affect the organization’s culture (Systems, Applications & Products in Data Processing [SAP] Insights, n.d.). A failed or shaky implementation would result in a loss of trust from its employees. To counter this, an organization would need involvement from top-level leadership along with creditable HR professionals leading the charge. Their perceived background and credibility determine how the organization’s workforce receives the system. Mirfakhar et al. (2018) found that the credibility of HR professionals aided them in championing and mobilizing support from both leadership and employees in supporting their initiatives.

Currently, the Air Force uses the platform Talent Marketplace as its HCMS. The system, initially only utilized by specific groups of Air Force officers, was inspired by the Nobel Prize-Winning National Residency Matching Program with the goal of matching officer priorities with those of the hiring organizations (Bailey, 2018). Talent Marketplace utilization has since expanded Air Force wide, with the intent of being a one-stop-shop assignment platform. The goal of this HCMS platform is to bring the Air Force assignment process into the twenty-first century by syncing mission needs, transparency, flexibility and assignment policy (Whaley, 2021). This is part of the Air Force’s objective of improving talent management. However, the expansion of the HCMS to include enlisted members has not been without issues, as many enlisted users have voiced their complaints of the lack of the transparency and timeliness of the system (Reddit Forum, 2022). The Air Force is not the only military department making upgrades to their HCMS for talent

management. The Army has deployed new HCMS to modernize how it achieves talent management, military pay and readiness (Johnson & Wilson, 15 Nov 23). One of its new systems is the the Army Talent Alignment Process. This system uses a market-style hiring process that aligns officers' preferences with available jobs (Brading, 2020). Both the Air Force and Army HCMS strive to meet personnel IN&D by aligning preferences with mission needs.

3. Conclusion

The Air Force continues recruiting, training, organizing, and equipping extraordinary talent. However, the pool of candidates willing to join an all-volunteer force is continuously shrinking as other branches and industries strive to make themselves more appealing (R. Cohen, 2023; Kesling, 2023; Ware, 2023). A crucial part of making the Air Force more attractive to the masses is how it manages its most important assets—human capital. The system that manages its people must be agile and inclusive in order to respond faster than adversaries (Air Force, 1 Nov 21). At the 2023 Air Force Sergeant's Association International Summit, the Secretary of the Air Force emphasized that the most crucial asset in the Air Force's inventory is its Airmen; Airmen are why the Air Force is so effective (Kendall, 2023). Acquiring an HCMS that manages the Air Force's number one asset effectively is a crucial priority. The next chapter will cover the methods and techniques we used to collect data for this project, including how we identified interviewees, conducted interviews, and analyzed our data.

V. FINDINGS

As we went through the research discovery process, we began to identify, collect, and validate thematic responses. This chapter captures those thematic responses and key findings. These findings range from the mindset of Air Force personnel to issues with its readiness culture. Most significant are the variations in how readiness is understood in the Air Force, which is based on the experience and longevity of personnel.

A. READINESS CONTINUUM

There can be autonomy between readiness and IN&D. Our initial assumption entering this project was that tension exists between the Air Force achieving readiness objectives and meeting the IN&D of its personnel. We believed this tension pulled in opposite directions along a zero-sum continuum on which one must give for the other to gain. We adopted a practice done by a financial institution, categorizing their workforce into critical, core, or supporting roles. We then plotted where we believed the individual roles in the Air Force would fall on the continuum in Figure 8.

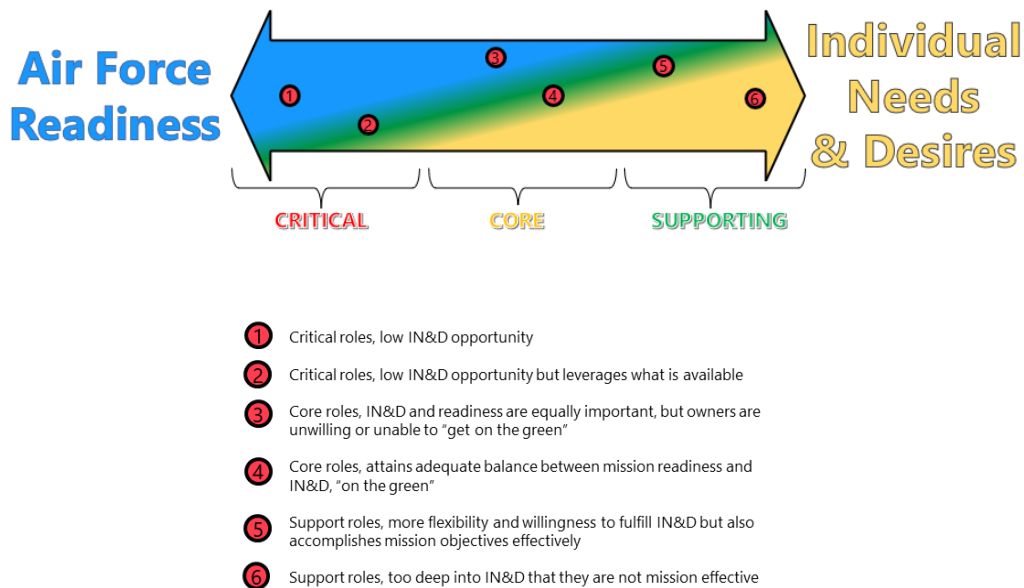


Figure 8. Initial Assumption: Zero-Sum Continuum

We quickly learned that instead of being a zero-sum continuum, we can view the relationship between Air Force Readiness and meeting IN&D as a two-by-two conceptual model. In this model, shown in Figure 9, we found there to be four possible results based on meeting readiness objectives and IN&D. We believe the current state to be where the Air Force is striving to meet readiness objectives at the expense of meeting IN&D. The opposite of this on the spectrum is where the Air Force seeks to meet IN&D at the cost of achieving readiness objectives. Failing to meet both goals would result in overall failure. We believe the ideal state is one where readiness and individuals' needs and desires are balanced.

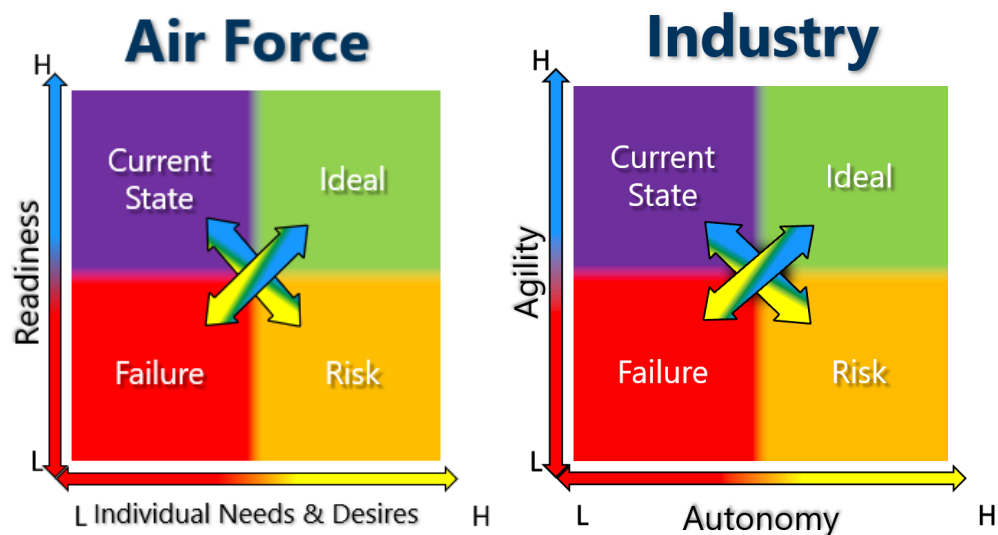


Figure 9. Conceptual Model Between Readiness and Individual Needs and Desires

Based on our findings in this project, we can apply the same model to how industry views agility while balancing autonomy of their workforce. Our literature review suggests that employees perform higher when they find value in their work or feel valued by the organization. Our interviews also found that the ideal HCM strategy for industry is to place the employees in the right position that allows them to operate at their utmost capability. Interviewees confirmed that they leverage HCM to gain strategic advantage by exploiting employee motivation and loyalty due to their IN&D being met.

B. GOVERNMENT INTERVIEW ANALYSIS USING CHATGPT (N=16)

The interviews with Air Force and DOD leaders revealed a comprehensive and evolving perspective on readiness within the Air Force, emphasizing both traditional and innovative approaches. There were twelve government interviews in total in which sixteen individuals were represented. Most interviews were with one individual, but a few had multiple interviewees from the same work center. The overlapping themes for each subgroup are presented first, with a more granular view of the individual interviews' thematic responses presented afterward. We believe it is important to show the consistent themes our interview participants bring up over time, with their unique responses presented next.

Subgroup 1 underlines the multifaceted nature of readiness, integrating human capital management, data utilization, and personal and family readiness. Key themes included the need for a broader, more strategic definition of readiness, moving beyond unit-level metrics to encompass aspects like individual well-being and cultural shifts. Interview 1 focused on enhancing readiness through data-driven decision-making and managing human capital, while Interview 2 emphasized the personal dimensions of readiness, advocating for holistic assessments over compliance-based approaches. Overlapping themes include the importance of human capital considerations, the necessity of a cultural shift in readiness practices, and a redefined, expanded understanding of readiness that balances personal preparedness with organizational efficiency.

Subgroups 2 to 6 further expanded on these themes, consistently focusing on human aspects such as mental health, adaptability, and resilience. Key points included the balance between operational capability and personal well-being, the need for practical and realistic training, and the alignment of human capital management with operational demands. Interviewees advocated for continuous improvement in readiness practices, drawing insights from industry best practices, and emphasized the importance of leadership in shaping readiness culture. There was a consensus on redefining readiness to include a broad range of factors such as family and personal readiness, financial stability, and overall well-being, especially in preparation for modern warfare against peer competitors.

In summary, the government interviewees presented a holistic view of readiness in the Air Force, highlighting the need for a balance between traditional military preparedness and human-centric factors. The analysis underscores the importance of adaptability, continuous improvement, and a strategic alignment of resources with operational demands. The sentiments reflect a shift towards a more dynamic and comprehensive strategy that integrates human capital and resiliency into traditional readiness frameworks, advocating for a culture that supports continuous improvement and realistic training methodologies. Below, each subgroup is further broken down into their analyses and thematic responses. At the end of this section is a list of themes drawn out of the entire government group that ChatGPT considered to be “consensus.”

1. Government Subgroup 1 Analysis: Interviews 1 and 2 (n=2)

Interview 1, a representative in the DOD, emphasized the integration of human capital management and data utilization in enhancing readiness. They highlighted the need for a systematic approach that includes data analysis to inform decision-making and improve readiness. The interviewee also pointed out the importance of overcoming organizational and structural challenges to ensure effective readiness. This approach signifies a blend of strategic management and operational efficiency, aiming to optimize human resources and preparedness.

Government Interview 2 provided a nuanced view of readiness, emphasizing personal and institutional dimensions. They highlighted the importance of personal and family readiness, considering physical, emotional, and mental preparedness as crucial as professional competencies. Critiquing the current methods of measuring readiness, they suggested a shift from compliance-based approaches to more holistic assessments. They also advocated for more practical and hands-on training experiences and acknowledged the need for a cultural shift within the Air Force for a more realistic approach to training and readiness.

Overlapping themes in Subgroup 1 underscored the multifaceted nature of readiness in the Air Force and DOD, though from different perspectives. Interview 1 focused on integrating human capital management and strategic data use for decision-

making, while Interview 2 highlighted the personal and family aspects of readiness, advocating for a holistic approach. There was a consensus on the need for a cultural shift to enhance readiness practices, with Interview 1 emphasizing overcoming structural challenges and Interview 2 advocating for realistic training experiences. These insights reflect a comprehensive understanding of readiness that transcends traditional methods, integrating individual well-being and organizational efficiency. Additionally, these perspectives suggest that readiness in the Air Force requires a balance between personal preparedness, data-informed management, and a culture that supports continuous improvement and realistic training methodologies. Included with this list are the interview questions that are connected to these themes. These questions are the ones that fostered discussion around these responses.

a. Government Interviews 1 and 2: Overlapping Themes

(1) Cultural Challenges

- Government Interviews 1 and 2 emphasized the need for a cultural shift within their organizations to enhance readiness. While Government Interview 1 focused on overcoming organizational and structural challenges, Government Interview 2 advocates for more realistic and hands-on training experiences.

(2) Human Capital Considerations

- Both interviewees highlighted the importance of human capital in readiness, though from different angles. Government Interview 1 discussed the structural integration of human capital through a management role, while Government Interview 2 brings attention to the personal and family aspects of readiness.

(3) Enhancing Readiness Practices

- Both interviewees discussed the need to improve readiness practices. Government Interview 1 mentioned data utilization for decision-making, and Government Interview 2 focuses on more realistic training experiences.

(4) Defining Readiness

- Both interviewees spoke to the diverse and nuanced understandings of readiness in military contexts. While Government Interview 1 advocated for a strategic expansion of the readiness definition at an organizational level, Government Interview 2 highlights the significance of individual perspectives, including personal and family readiness, in the overall concept. This theme underscored the evolving nature of readiness in the military, accommodating both broad strategic considerations and individual experiences and needs.

b. Government Interview 1's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Broadening the Definition of Readiness

- The interviewee discussed the evolution of the concept of readiness from a traditional focus on unit-level metrics (personnel, equipment, training) to a broader, more strategic definition.
- **Quote:** “Readiness has traditionally been defined at the unit level... Our goal is to broaden this definition to encompass more than just personnel, equipment, and training.”

(2) Integration of Human Capital in Readiness

- The establishment of the Chief Talent Management Officer position underlined the integration of human capital considerations into the broader strategic framework of readiness.
- **Quote:** “We’ve established a Chief Talent Management Officer position... to ensure that both military and civilian manpower and talent management are being effectively overseen as part of our readiness strategy.”

(3) Cultural and Structural Challenges in Readiness

- The interview highlighted challenges in changing organizational culture and addressing structural issues, including legislative requirements and the need for technological updates.
- **Quote:** “One of the major challenges is changing the cultural mindset... we also have structural challenges like legislative requirements and the need for software and hardware updates.”

(4) Limiting Factors in Adopting Industry Practices

- While acknowledging lessons from industry, especially in equipment maintenance, the interviewee noted the unique nature of military readiness and potential difficulties in directly adopting civilian industry practices.
- **Quote:** “There are lessons to be learned from industry, especially in areas like equipment maintenance... However, the military has unique readiness needs that don’t always align directly with industry practices.”

(5) Data Utilization in Decision-Making

- The development of the ‘Readiness Decision Impact Model’ (REDEEM) signified an effort to use data-driven tools to support decision-making, emphasizing the importance of data in understanding long-term impacts on readiness.
- **Quote:** “We’re developing a tool called REDEEM... to help decision-makers understand the long-term impacts of their decisions on both equipment and personnel.”

(6) Service-Specific Readiness Challenges

- The interview touched upon the specific challenges faced by different military services, such as the Air Force, in readiness reporting and force structuring.

- **Quote:** “Each service has its own unique challenges when it comes to readiness... For the DOD, we’re particularly focused on issues related to readiness reporting and force structuring.”

c. Government Interview 2’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Personal and Family Readiness

- Emphasized the importance of personal and family readiness, including physical, emotional, and mental preparedness. This perspective broadens the traditional understanding of readiness beyond professional competencies to include personal well-being.
- **Quote:** “Is my family ready? Am I ready? Am I physically, emotionally, mentally ready?”

(2) Institutional vs. Individual View of Readiness

- Noted a potential discrepancy between what they believed readiness entails and the institutional view of the Air Force. They suggested that the institutional perspective might be more focused on checklists and compliance.
- **Quote:** “So if I answer what I think readiness is... I don’t know if that is the same view that the institution has of it.”

(3) Measurement of Readiness

- The interview discussed how readiness is measured, critiquing the current approach that focuses on compliance with training and medical requirements rather than a holistic assessment of preparedness.
- **Quote:** “When we measure readiness... it doesn’t, to me, say we have a ready force if we’re green.”

(4) Cultural Shift for Readiness

- Suggested the need for a cultural shift in the Air Force to enhance readiness. She proposed incorporating more practical and hands-on experiences into training and readiness exercises.
- **Quote:** “I think it does need a culture change... to give them experiences that they otherwise wouldn’t have.”

(5) Understanding of Readiness Among Personnel

- The interviewee discussed their observation that many personnel view readiness as a requirement rather than a comprehensive state of preparedness for potential challenges.
- **Quote:** “I think that they see it as a requirement to be green. They don’t see it as... prepared to lay their life down.”

(6) Improving Readiness Practices

- Discussed the need for more realistic training and experiences to prepare Air Force personnel for actual combat scenarios, suggesting enhancements to current readiness practices.
- **Quote:** “I think we need more of that... people running into the woods.”

(7) Balancing Individual Needs and Air Force Requirements

- The interview touched on the challenge of balancing the needs of individual personnel with the broader requirements of the Air Force, acknowledging that this balance is handled inconsistently across different career fields.
- **Quote:** “I think the answer is probably inconsistency... at the end of the day we are a war-fighting company.” “[sic]”

2. Government Subgroup 2 Analysis: Interviews 3 and 4 (n=2)

Government Interview 3, focusing on Air Force talent management, delved into the complexities of readiness and its evaluation. Emphasizing a holistic approach, they argued that readiness extends beyond traditional evaluations, including mental preparedness and resilience. This interviewee critiqued the current perception of readiness among personnel, often equated with performance in current roles and advocated for a broader understanding of readiness for diverse mission scenarios. They also highlighted challenges posed by outdated human capital management systems and advocated for real-time integrated systems for better efficiency and readiness management. Additionally, they discussed policy development, calling for a more streamlined approach and cautioning against directly emulating industry practices due to the unique nature of military operations.

Government Interview 4 discussed the perception and evaluation of readiness within the Air Force. They noted that readiness is often seen through personal evaluations and capabilities within one's functional area. However, they argued that it is a multifaceted concept extending beyond functional capabilities to include mental preparedness and resilience. They discussed policy development and implementation challenges, highlighting the fragmented approach and the need for streamlined, adaptive policymaking. The interviewee acknowledged strengths in the Air Force's approach, like the commitment of career field managers, but also pointed out challenges such as unpredictability in global events and internal inefficiencies.

Overlapping themes in Government Subgroup 2 provided a comprehensive view of the Air Force's readiness, touching on various elements from talent management to policy and leadership. They shared the perspective that readiness is a multifaceted concept extending beyond traditional metrics, emphasizing the importance of mental preparedness, resilience, and adaptability to changing scenarios. Both interviewees discussed the balance between maintaining operational capability and managing the capacity and well-being of personnel. They highlighted the need for practical training and education to ensure personnel are prepared for real-world scenarios. Additionally, both interviewees addressed policy development and implementation challenges, advocating for more streamlined and coherent approaches. Their views suggested a necessity for a more integrated, adaptive,

and holistic approach to readiness in the Air Force, balancing traditional performance metrics with broader considerations of mental resilience and adaptability.

a. Government Interviews 3 and 4: Overlapping Themes

(1) Enhancing Readiness Practices

- Both emphasized the importance of practical training and education to ensure personnel are prepared for real-world scenarios. They highlighted the need for training to be realistic and relevant, ensuring that personnel are not only technically proficient but also adaptively prepared for unforeseen challenges.

(2) Human Capital Considerations

- Both interviewees discussed the significance of personal well-being in the context of readiness. Government Interview 3 focused on the physical health of personnel, while Government Interview 4 extended this to include mental preparedness and resilience as essential components of readiness.

(3) Defining Readiness

- Both acknowledged the complexity of defining and evaluating readiness. They point out that readiness is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond traditional metrics and involves broader considerations such as personal readiness and adaptability to changing scenarios.

(4) Operational Readiness

- Both interviews touched on the theme of operational readiness, with a focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of readiness practices. Government Interview 4 talked about the effectiveness of readiness in the Air Force but points out challenges in terms of efficiency and the need for improvement.

(5) Capacity vs. Capability

- Both interviewees discussed the balance between maintaining operational capability and managing the capacity and well-being of personnel. Government Interview 4 also delved into the challenges in policy development and implementation, which is related to how readiness is structured and managed within the Air Force.

b. Government Interview 3's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Operational Readiness and Preparedness:

- Readiness is defined as the capability to execute missions effectively, focusing on members' health, equipment availability, and proper training.
- **Quote:** "I would say readiness in the DOD... involves making sure you have enough equipment, making sure folks are trained properly to utilize such equipment... getting some realistic exercise training... in a perfect world, you know readiness... making sure you have the equipment, your members are trained, they're healthy and then you can go out and get the job done."

(2) Realistic Training and Exercises

- The emphasis on realistic exercise training to ensure preparedness for real-world scenarios, not just theoretical knowledge.
- **Quote:** "Practicing exercising getting some realistic exercise training."

(3) Equipment and Resource Adequacy

- Stresses the necessity of having sufficient equipment and ensuring personnel are well-trained to use it effectively.
- **Quote:** "Making sure you have enough equipment, making sure folks are trained properly to utilize such equipment."

(4) Health and Well-being of Personnel

- The importance of maintaining the health and well-being of military members as an integral part of readiness.
- **Quote:** “You’re talking members’ health.”

(5) Education and Training Emphasis

- Notes the significance of continuous education and training for personnel in their respective roles.
- **Quote:** “Which goes back to I guess education and training.”

(6) Capacity vs. Capability

- Discusses the balancing act between maintaining operational capability and managing the capacity and well-being of personnel and equipment.
- **Quote:** “The fear is that we may lose out on readiness capability... We’re trying to propose that possibly there is an ideal balance between the two, or you can’t accomplish high readiness with high taking care of our folks.”

c. Government Interview 4’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Readiness and Evaluation

- Talks about how Air Force personnel perceive readiness in relation to their evaluations and functional capabilities.
- **Quote:** “People see it as, in my opinion, they see that as—what does my evaluation say? What have I have done in the last year that shows that I am a capable airman within my functional area?”

(2) Challenges in Defining and Achieving Readiness

- Highlights the complexity of readiness, including aspects like mental preparedness and resilience.
- **Quote:** “But am I able to do the Air Force mission when it’s time to do hard things?... I don’t think that people see it in all those different facets.”

(3) Human Capital Management and System Limitations

- Points out the antiquated systems used for tracking personnel and argues for the need for real-time, integrated systems.
- **Quote:** “We’re using old systems to track to track, to track bodies, to track people, to track readiness.”

(4) Policy Development and Implementation

- Discusses the fragmented approach to policy development and the need for more coherence.
- **Quote:** “I believe that there is one central authority which is the regulation, but there are so many different hands in it.”

(5) Strengths and Challenges of Air Force Readiness

- Acknowledges strengths in career field management but also notes challenges like unpredictability in global events.
- **Quote:** “We have a centralized authority. We have CFM’s... But what if something happened where you know whether they are healthy?”

(6) Comparisons with Industry Practices

- Suggests learning from industry best practices rather than trying to directly emulate them.

- **Quote:** “I think the honesty and transparency... that some institutions have that’s in the corporate world and industry... they have shareholders they have people that hold them accountable to their bottom line.”

(7) Leadership and Culture

- Emphasizes the importance of leadership in shaping airmen’s mindset and readiness culture.
- **Quote:** “But I also I think it boils down to leadership. You know if they see the example, they see those warriors out there, those folks who are being courageous and bold, I believe that that thinking, and that mindset will transfer over to younger airmen.”

3. Government Subgroup 3 Analysis: Interviews 5 and 6 (n=4)

Government Interview 5 discussed Air Force readiness with an emphasis on the human aspect, particularly mental health, and its impact on deployment readiness. They highlighted the critical role of training in ensuring readiness, focusing on the significance of proper training for deployment. The interviewee also pointed out the importance of supervisors in assessing the readiness of their airmen, indicating a more personalized approach to readiness evaluation. Concerns were raised about the impact of staffing changes on training effectiveness, emphasizing the need for adequate staffing and preparedness. The balance between having enough personnel (capacity) and ensuring they are adequately skilled and prepared (capability) was a key theme in their interview.

Government Interview 6 involved three individuals from the same work center. Their responses have been amalgamized into one section due to having similar, overlapping answers and discussions. Additionally, due to technical limitations on the interviewee side, the transcript was one-sided. The interviewees were only able to speak on a phone call and the audio was not picked up by MS Teams. However, both researchers took notes, and the one-sided transcript was analyzed alongside them. The thematic responses do not include direct quotes from our interviewees, however, they include direct quotes from researcher notes.

The interviewees presented a multidimensional view of Air Force readiness under the AFFORGEN model, which prioritizes aligning personnel capabilities with specific operational needs. They discussed the importance of Human Capital Management (HCM) in readiness for multi-domain conflicts. Acknowledging generational differences within the Air Force, the interviewees noted a shift in focus among newer generations towards individual needs, which impacts readiness and mental preparedness. The need for enhancing standardization and strategic communication across the Air Force was emphasized, advocating for a unified readiness approach through standardization. They also saw potential benefits in adopting industry practices, especially in decision-making autonomy and individual development.

Overlapping themes in Government Subgroup 3 concentrated on the human factors affecting Air Force Readiness. They emphasized the importance of mental health, training, and human capital management in readiness. While Interview 5 focused on the immediate aspects of deployment readiness, including training effectiveness and the role of supervisors, Interview 6 looked at a strategic shift in readiness approaches, highlighting the need for aligning individual development with operational requirements. Both interviews addressed the balance between capacity and capability, underscoring the importance of not only having enough personnel but also ensuring they are effectively trained and mentally prepared. The synthesis of their perspectives indicated a need for a holistic approach to readiness that incorporates both individual mental preparedness and a strategic alignment of human resources with operational demands, suggesting an evolution in readiness practices that align both quantitative and qualitative aspects within the Air Force.

a. Government Interviews 5 and 6: Overlapping Themes

(1) Importance of Training in Readiness

- Both emphasized the critical role of training in ensuring readiness. Interview 5 focused on the significance of proper training for deployment, while Interview 6 discussed the need for improved training alignment with operational requirements and the importance of standardizing processes across bases.

(2) Role of Supervisors in Assessing Readiness

- The role of supervisors in assessing the readiness of their airmen was a focus for Interview 5, while Interview 6 discusses the broader challenge of balancing individual airmen's needs with the overall objectives of the Air Force. Both themes converged on the importance of understanding and addressing individual requirements in the context of organizational readiness with supervisors playing a pivotal role.

(3) Human Capital Management

- Both interviewees addressed the importance of human capital management in readiness. Interview 5 expressed concerns about the impact of staffing changes on training effectiveness, while Interview 6 emphasized the new focus on human capital management in the rebranding of readiness within the DOD.

(4) Capacity vs. Capability

- Both interviewees addressed the balance between having enough personnel (capacity) and ensuring they are adequately skilled and prepared (capability). While Government Interview 5 implicitly touched on this theme through the importance of training and readiness for deployment, Government Interview 6 explicitly discussed it in the context of the AFFORGEN model, emphasizing the need for a capability-focused mindset in validating force capacity.

b. Government Interview 5's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Readiness Definition and Deployment

- Defined readiness as being ready to deploy at any moment, filling positions even if not fully knowledgeable about the job.
- **Quote:** "It's really being ready to deploy at any moment in time to be able to fill a position whether you know the job or not."

(2) Importance of Training in Readiness

- Stressed the significance of proper training for deployment readiness.
- **Quote:** “You don’t wanna send somebody down range that doesn’t have the skill set to go... that’s part of readiness to me, right?”

(3) Mental Health and Deployment Readiness

- Discussed the importance of mental readiness and the flexibility in assessing mental fitness for deployment.
- **Quote:** “If you’re sending somebody who’s not ready both physically and mentally, I don’t know if we’re always gonna get the outcome that we want.”

(4) Role of Supervisors in Assessing Readiness

- Highlighted the role of supervisors in determining the mental fitness of their airmen for deployment.
- **Quote:** “I would leave that up to... supervisors to be like hey I don’t think this person should go cause first line supervisors should know their airmen the best right?”

(5) Human Capital Management

- Discussed the challenges in staffing and training within her section, expressing concerns about the reduction in Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and the impact on training and readiness.
- **Quote:** “We don’t have enough manpower... for my section alone right, we’re getting rid of NCO and we’re putting in more airmen. And I am like, but if you do that, who’s gonna teach the airmen? The senior NCO’s who do not have time, like, the NCOs are the ones that are supposed to be training our airmen. But if we are getting rid of, like, a whole bunch of the NCO tier and adding in all these new airmen, like, it is not going to help the situation.”

c. Government Interview 6's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Culture Shifts

- Acknowledged generational differences within the Air Force, noting a shift in focus among newer generations towards individual needs ('the Me'), which contrasts with the traditional focus on mission benefits.
- **Notes:** "New generation focuses a lot on the 'Me' oppose to benefiting the mission"

(2) Readiness in Multi-Domain Conflicts

- Readiness is now viewed in the context of organizing and executing in major conflicts across multiple domains.
- **Notes:** "Readiness is how to organize to execute in a major conflict in multi-domains."

(3) Capacity vs. Capability

- Moving towards a capability mindset, focusing on validating capacity against tasking needs.
- **Notes:** "AFFORGEN is moving towards a capability mindset."

(4) Improving Standardization and Communication

- Addressing past training limitations and advocating for improved standardization and strategic communication across the Air Force.
- **Notes:** "Ways to improve readiness include improving standardization and strategic communication."

(5) Challenges in Current Readiness Practices

- Identifying limitations in IT systems, policy, and generational differences that affect Air Force readiness.

- **Notes:** “Challenges of AF Readiness include IT system limitations, outdated policies, and generational differences.”

(6) Learning from Industry Readiness Practices

- Recognizing the benefits of industry practices, especially in individual development and decision-making processes.
- **Notes:** “Benefits of Industry Readiness: Industry places a lot of weight on developing individuals.”

4. Government Subgroup 4 Analysis: Interviews 7 and 8 (n=2)

Government Interview 7 noted a significant strategic shift in Air Force training focus, particularly towards the Pacific and Eastern European theaters, driven by changing defense strategies and identified readiness gaps. They expressed concerns about skill atrophy among airmen, particularly hands-on skills, leading to increased training frequency and depth. The interviewee discussed challenges in transitioning to the new AFFORGEN and Ready Airmen Training (RAT) programs, including compliance issues and the need for better strategic communication and updated policies. The implementation of the Commanders’ Toolkit for monitoring training status and a commitment to continuous improvement in the RAT program were also highlighted.

Government Interview 8 discussed the multifaceted nature of readiness, challenging traditional metrics and advocating for a redefined approach that aligns with actual mission demands. They emphasized the importance of honest readiness reporting, noting discrepancies between reported preparedness and actual realities. Leadership development, organizational challenges, and the need for more practical skill rehearsal were key themes. The interviewee also touched on the contrast between military readiness and industry efficiency, suggesting the Air Force could learn from industry practices, particularly in individual development and adapting organizational strengths during change.

Overlapping themes in Government Subgroup 4 emphasized a shift from traditional readiness definitions to a more strategic and multidimensional approach. They highlighted the importance of transparency in policy and reporting, with a focus on honest readiness assessments and effective communication. There was a shared commitment to continuous improvement, recognizing challenges in implementing new training programs and adapting to new readiness practices. Both discuss the importance of training in readiness, with Interview 7 focusing on the Commanders' Toolkit and Interview 8 critiquing the 'just-in-time' training model. The synthesis of these perspectives suggested a dynamic Air Force Readiness approach, balancing traditional metrics with broader considerations like mental resilience, adaptability, and strategic alignment with operational demands. This approach should incorporate honest readiness reporting, leadership development, and practical skill rehearsal, drawing insights from industry best practices to foster a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability.

a. Government Interviews 7 and 8: Overlapping Themes

(1) Defining Readiness:

- Both interviewees discussed a shift from a traditional definition of readiness to one that is more strategic and multidimensional, encompassing a variety of domains beyond just the Air Force's ability to meet the demands of the missions it is assigned.

(2) Transparency in Policy and Reporting

- There was an emphasis on the need for better communication regarding readiness. Interview 7 talked about the need for effective communication and updated policies, while Interview 8 highlighted the struggle with honest readiness reporting, suggesting an overlap in the need for transparency and clarity in readiness assessments and communication.

(3) Commitment to Continuous Improvement

- There was a commitment to refining readiness practices to ensure effectiveness in operational environments, which includes preparing for contested fights that the Air Force has not recently faced at scale.

(4) Barriers to Improvement

- Both interviewees recognized structural challenges in implementing new training programs and adapting to new readiness practices. Interview 7 noted difficulties in transitioning to new readiness programs, while Interview 8 pointed out that current organizational structures can be barriers to such changes.

(5) Importance of Training in Readiness

- Both interviewees touched on the issue of how readiness is monitored and reported. Interview 7 discussed the Commanders' Toolkit's binary red/green indicator for training completion, while Interview 8 critiqued the just-in-time training model, which can be seen as part of the broader conversation on how readiness is tracked and the implications for actual preparedness.

b. Government Interview 7's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Strategic Shift in Training Focus

- Government Interview 7 noted a significant strategic shift in the Air Force's training focus towards the Pacific and Eastern European theaters. This shift was driven by changes in defense strategies and identified readiness gaps.
- **Quote:** "Before the pacing threat and the National Defense strategy...started to change to the pacing threat to the Pacific theater and to the Eastern European Theater..."

(2) Concerns About Skill Atrophy

- The interviewee emphasized the concern regarding the atrophy of skills, particularly hands-on skills, among airmen. This led to an increase in training frequency and depth to ensure sustained proficiency.
- **Quote:** “We started to get concerned about the atrophy of skills of airmen particularly for our hands-on skills...”

(3) Challenges in Implementing New Training Programs (AFFORGEN and RAT)

- Government Interview 7 highlighted the difficulties in transitioning from the old training model to the new AFFORGEN and RAT programs, including issues of compliance and understanding among personnel.
- **Quote:** “And so the whole machine is still in the state of transition...every airman knows where they fall into the AFFORGEN cycle what phase they’re in...”

(4) Importance of Strategic Communication and Policy Update

- The interviewee pointed out the need for effective communication and updated policies to align training requirements with operational needs.
- **Quote:** “Our messaging could have been better. Our strategic communications on the front end of this thing didn’t go as...probably as smooth as it could have.”

(5) Monitoring and Reporting Training Status

- The use of the Commanders’ Toolkit for monitoring and reporting airmen’s training status was discussed, now operating on a binary red/green status indicator for training completion.
- **Quote:** “Commanders are seeing airmen that are red... because of the Ready Airmen training program.”

(6) Commitment to Continuous Improvement

- Government Interview 7 expressed a commitment to continually refine and improve the RAT program, acknowledging the ongoing need for effective communication and coordination.
- **Quote:** “We wanna get it right. We’re committed to getting it right and you know just gonna keep at it.”

c. Government Interview 8’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Honesty in Readiness Reporting:

- There is an acknowledged issue with the honesty of readiness reports at different levels, with some understanding readiness merely as meeting medical requirements or as a binary state of red or green.
- **Quote:** “There’s a different definition of readiness and most folks look at it from just that medical standpoint... am I red opposed to the full force of am I actually ready to go?”

(2) Organizational Structure as a Barrier:

- The current organizational structure was noted as a potential barrier to adopting new readiness practices, with a need for foundational leadership readiness and core task identification for airmen.
- **Quote:** “Readiness requirements have all been career field driven... there wasn’t a foundational layer of leadership readiness.”

(3) Readiness for Contested Fights:

- Readiness involves preparing personnel to think, understand, and act, especially in preparation for a contested fight, which requires a shared understanding of different roles.

- **Quote:** “My role in readiness is to prepare people to think and understand and then to act, when necessary, particularly as we prepare for a contested fight.”

(4) Just-in-Time Training vs. Sustained Readiness:

- There was a critique of the ‘just in time’ training model, suggesting that this approach does not foster sustained day-to-day readiness.
- **Quote:** “We just did a bunch of just in time training which means your day-to-day readiness is not that high.”

(5) Industry Best Practices and Air Force Bureaucracy:

- The Air Force is becoming more like a corporate bureaucracy, which poses questions about adopting industry best practices for readiness and maintaining forces or employees.
- **Quote:** “So I like the fact you hit the word bureaucracy because we’ve noticed that the Air Force operates more and more like a corporate bureaucracy. But with that there’s certain things that we cannot do that industry does.”

(6) Adapting Industry Lessons:

- Lessons from industry, particularly from organizations that did not change too much during grand transformations, can be insightful for the Air Force. These organizations survived by holding on to what made them great while adapting, as necessary.
- **Quote:** “What I found interesting studying those organizations is the organizations that actually didn’t change too much in periods of grand transformation are the ones who survived but they held on to what made them great.”

(7) Human Capital Management in Industry:

- Industry practices show a focus on individual development to create a supportive culture within the organization. This contrasts with the Air Force's approach, suggesting a potential area for improvement.
- **Quote:** "Industry did this by focusing on the individuals... they're able to focus on individuals a lot more and develop that individual."

5. Government Subgroup 5 Analysis: Interviews 9 and 10 (n=3)

Government Interview 9 focused on long-term talent management and development in the Air Force. Key directives aim to develop airmen by 2030, focusing on IT systems and communication improvements. The interviewee discussed challenges in the Pathfinders program, emphasizing the need for broad understanding and acceptance within leadership. The reassessment of command tours and their value was also addressed, considering the balance between downrange and home station commands. Readiness, in this context, combined risk and talent management with an effort to refine the talent management process to utilize airmen's unique skills effectively.

Government Interview 10 included two senior enlisted leaders from different numbered Air Force offices. They emphasized understanding readiness at various levels, from airmen to senior officers. There is a focus on redefining readiness, particularly in terms of functional tasks essential for warfighting. The interviewee discussed the Multi-Capable Airmen (MCA) concept and its integration into readiness training, including Agile Combat Employment (ACE) exercises. They stressed the practical application of readiness skills in training and raised concerns about a risk-averse service culture affecting decision-making and readiness. Leadership development integrated with readiness training was highlighted, focusing on building leadership values alongside readiness skills.

Overlapping themes in Government Subgroup 5 underscored the importance of talent management and leadership development in readiness. Interview 9 focused on long-term talent development and the challenges within leadership programs, while Interview 10 emphasized the practical application of readiness skills and leadership development in

training. They both addressed the need to redefine readiness, highlighting risk management as a core aspect. The synthesis of their perspectives suggested an evolving approach to Air Force readiness, where talent management, leadership development, and a redefined understanding of readiness are intertwined. This approach must balance long-term strategic goals with practical, on-the-ground training and leadership development, all while managing risk and preparing for a diverse range of operational scenarios.

a. Government Interviews 9 and 10: Overlapping Themes

(1) Talent Management and Development

- Both Government Interview 9 and Government Interview 10 underscored the importance of talent management in the Air Force. Government Interview 9 discussed a long-term approach to talent development, while Government Interview 10 focused on the practical application of readiness skills and the integration of the Multi-Capable Airmen (MCA) framework.

(2) Readiness at Varied Levels of Experience

- Both interviewees highlighted the need to reevaluate and redefine readiness. Government Interview 9 emphasized viewing readiness from a human capital management perspective, whereas Government Interview 10 stressed the varied understanding of readiness at different levels and the necessity for more clarity and education.

(3) Leadership Development in Readiness

- Leadership development in relation to readiness is a key focus for both Government Interview 9 and Government Interview 10. Government Interview 9 discussed leadership challenges in operational matters, while Government Interview 10 emphasized the integration of leadership development and readiness training, particularly for small team leadership in combat environments.

(4) Risk Management as Integral to Readiness

- Both Government Interview 9 and Government Interview 10 addressed risk management as an essential aspect of readiness. Government Interview 9 considered readiness as intertwined with risk management and talent management, and Government Interview 10 also addressed the importance of understanding and applying readiness in the context of risk.

b. Government Interview 9's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Long-term Approach to Talent Management and Development

- The Air Force is undergoing significant changes with a focus on long-term talent management initiatives and strengthening communications, in line with directives aimed at developing airmen by 2030.
- **Quote:** “So General Miller has this focus on some different lines of efforts, everything from talent management to improving our IT systems and then strengthening our communications... He wants us to develop the airmen by 2030...”

(2) Pathfinders Program and Leadership Challenges

- The Pathfinders program under the Vice Chief aims to address promotion and development concerns but faces the challenge of broad understanding and acceptance within leadership boards.
- **Quote:** “Especially when you go into these boards and you have three chiefs [and a colonel], we’re pretty much banking that the [colonel] knows what’s going on, cause the chiefs aren’t really tracking this Pathfinder program, which is unfortunate.”

(3) Reassessment of Command Tours and Deployment Value

- There was an ongoing discussion about the length and value of command tours, especially in the context of how much a downrange command tour is valued compared to a home station command.

- **Quote:** “We’re looking at things like what, what constitutes a command tour. There’s nothing in writing that says how long a successful command tour is, so we’re working our way through... do we value that more than a home station Command tour?”

(4) Risk Management as a Core Aspect of Readiness

- Readiness within the A1 realm was considered to be a combination of risk management and talent management, with significant attention on how risk is defined and accepted.
- **Quote:** “Am I safe to say that readiness equals risk management and talent management?... I think it does.”

(5) Barriers and Opportunities in Talent Management

- The talent management process was being refined to better utilize unique skill sets of airmen, with hopes that platforms like the talent marketplace will enhance this effort.
- **Quote:** “We are fighting our way through this talent management piece, properly utilizing people in the right positions and hopefully things like talent marketplace will allow us to get after this.

c. Government Interview 10’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Varied Understanding of Readiness at Different Levels

- Noted that understanding of readiness varies across the Air Force, from airmen to senior officers. He emphasized that there has been a shift in perspective on readiness, with a focus on functional tasks essential for warfighting, indicating a need for clarity and education about what readiness really means.
- **Quote:** “I think you have to look at this at different levels... I don’t think that our airmen... fully understood readiness... It was very clear very deliberate of what I need to be able to execute... my perspective on readiness has really shifted because I believe that there is a missing in the education piece of why or what is what does readiness mean?”

(2) Introduction and Impact of the MCA Training Framework

- Discussed the Multi-Capable Airmen (MCA) training framework, highlighting its role in enhancing readiness training. This framework represents a shift in training focus, aiming to develop airmen with broader skills and capabilities.
- **Quote:** “Alright have you had a chance to see the MCA training FRAGO and most specifically the MCA framework that we developed?”

(3) Practical Application of Readiness Skills in Training

- There was an emphasis on the practical application of readiness skills during basic and technical training. He pointed out the challenges in maintaining these skills post-training and the need for continuous development.
- **Quote:** “So as you know if you’re tracking you know now airmen that are going through basic military training or BMT are getting they’re going through pacer forwards... But how do you keep those readiness skills going?”

(4) Leadership Development and Readiness Training

- The interview touched on the integration of leadership development with readiness training. He highlighted the importance of focusing on building leadership values alongside readiness skills.
- **Quote:** “That’s our first leadership course that we go through there... how much are we going to really get out of by trying to instill more readiness into there when we really need to build those leadership values because they’re gonna be leading small teams in a combat environment.”

6. Government Subgroup 6 Analysis: Interviews 11 and 12 (n=3)

Government Interview 11 described readiness as varying based on the unit role and command assignment, indicating that readiness criteria differ across squadrons or commands in the Air Force. This definition acknowledged the unique operational

requirements of different units. They emphasized that readiness perception shifts with an individual's skill level and rank, evolving from merely being prepared for daily tasks to leading in combat scenarios.

Interview 11 underscored the need to reassess readiness strategies, especially in modern warfare against peer competitors like China or Russia. They addressed the need to balance readiness with garrison mission requirements, understanding the cost and risk associated with achieving readiness. A critical point emphasized was the cultural shift in the Air Force, moving away from traditional static models of readiness to more dynamic and flexible approaches. Despite these changing dynamics, Interview 11 believed in the continued strength of the Air Force's warrior ethos, based on deployment experiences, and discusses the importance of clear prioritization and appropriate resource allocation for managing readiness effectively.

Government Interview 12 included two individuals working in policy development related to readiness and force management. They emphasized a holistic approach to readiness beyond traditional military preparedness. They pointed out that readiness is not solely about military training and equipment but also includes the readiness of the family and the individual on a personal level, considering factors like financial stability and overall well-being. Interview 12 appreciated the move towards a more comprehensive strategy that integrates human capital and resiliency as integral parts of readiness. This shift indicates a departure from previous practices where these elements were less central to strategic planning. The challenge of pivoting from counterinsurgency operations to preparing for potential conflicts with major powers is highlighted, requiring significant adjustments in training and mentality. The theme of readiness as an "anytime, anywhere" mentality was also discussed, reflecting a shift towards more unpredictable and flexible deployment models. Interview 12 addressed the balance between achieving readiness goals and meeting the needs and desires of personnel, suggesting that while readiness sometimes must take precedence, there are opportunities to prioritize individual needs without compromising the mission.

Overlapping themes in Government Subgroup 6 suggested an evolving approach to Air Force readiness, where traditional concepts of military preparedness are being

expanded to include a broader range of factors such as personal and family readiness, financial stability, and overall well-being. This approach acknowledged the need for adaptability and flexibility in readiness strategies, particularly in preparation for conflicts with peer competitors. Both interviewees highlighted the importance of understanding the different requirements of various units and ranks, and the need for a dynamic and comprehensive strategy that integrates human capital and resiliency into traditional readiness frameworks. They also emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between mission readiness and the personal needs of service members, reflecting a more holistic and human-centered approach to readiness in the modern Air Force.

a. Government Interviews 11 and 12: Overlapping Themes

(1) Holistic Definition and Approach to Readiness

- Both interviewees emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to readiness that extends beyond the traditional focus on military training. Government Interview 11 discussed the need for a whole-person concept that includes family and personal readiness, while Government Interview 12 also highlighted the inclusion of personal and family preparedness as part of overall readiness.

(2) Adaptation to New Warfare and Strategic Shifts

- Government Interview 11 mentioned the necessity of changing readiness paradigms to prepare for potential conflicts with peer adversaries, suggesting a pivot from past strategies. Government Interview 12 similarly acknowledged the shift from counterinsurgency operations to preparing for different kinds of warfare, underlining the need for adaptability in training and mindset.

(3) Balancing Readiness with Individual Needs

- Both interviewees recognized the challenge of balancing mission readiness with the needs and desires of Air Force personnel. Government Interview 11 discussed the cultural shift in the Air Force's readiness approach, including prioritization decisions,

while Government Interview 12 spoke to the balancing of readiness goals and individual welfare.

b. Government Interview 11's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Readiness Defined by Unit and Role:

- Government Interview 11 described readiness as varying based on the unit, role, and command assignment. This definition acknowledged the unique requirements and tasks of different squadrons or commands within the Air Force.
- **Quote:** "I would define readiness in the Air Force as uh depending on what unit you're assigned... It's then, we'll go down to the squadron level. What you're required to provide the warfighter based off of your wartime tasking."

(2) Skill Level and Rank Influence Readiness Perception:

- The perception of readiness changes with an individual's skill level and rank, from being physically and mentally ready for daily work to leading airmen in combat.
- **Quote:** "Well I think it depends on your skill level and what your rank is and what you're required to know... readiness to them is you know being ready to go to work every single day and you know being physically mentally ready."

(3) Evolving Concept of Readiness:

- Government Interview 11 emphasized the need to reassess readiness, especially in modern warfare scenarios against peer competitors.
- **Quote:** "No I think we need to look at readiness completely different right? What worked for us you know ten years ago 20 years ago in Afghanistan is not going to work with us for a peer competitor in like China or near peer competitor like Russia."

(4) Readiness and Garrison Mission Balance:

- There's a focus on balancing readiness with garrison mission requirements, understanding the cost and risk associated with achieving readiness.
- **Quote:** "So the ability to communicate that to our most senior leaders of yeah I have the ability to do this but it's gonna come out of cost."

(5) Cultural Shift in the Air Force:

- Acknowledging a shift from traditional practices in the Air Force, Government Interview 11 pointed out changes in the approach to readiness and deployment.
- **Quote:** "So it's a culture shift from what we've been doing normally in the Air Force. Seems like we're as with the Air Force a little bit different than other services where we have large Garrison missions to take care of. Yeah. Umm. And so, it almost seems like we're trying to copy their model deployment where they go out, the whole unit, but we're not."

(6) Maintaining Warrior Ethos Amidst Changing Dynamics:

- Despite changing readiness dynamics, Government Interview 11 believed in the continued strength of the Air Force's warrior ethos, based on deployment experiences.
- **Quote:** "I'm not concerned about where our airmen are at now because I've deployed a lot... so I think you can do just in time training for some of that stuff, but I wouldn't venture to say that that we've lost our warrior mindset or our ethos."

(7) Prioritization and Resource Allocation for Readiness:

- Emphasizing clear prioritization and appropriate resource allocation, Government Interview 11 discussed managing readiness effectively within the constraints of work and personal time.

- **Quote:** “You’re not going to be able to do all your current work... I think if it’s a priority then fund it or if it’s a priority then allows the time to do it.”

c. Government Interview 12’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Defining Readiness

- Government Interview 12 emphasized a comprehensive definition of readiness that included personal and family preparedness, financial stability, and the whole person concept. This approach extended beyond the traditional focus on military training and equipment.
- **Quote:** “Readiness is not just you know, on the military side, are they trained, are they equipped, are they proficient at doing their job? That is absolutely part of readiness... but it’s also their family ready? Are there finances ready? Are they ready as a whole person concept?”

(2) Readiness as a Lifelong Commitment

- Readiness was described not just as preparation for an event but as a continuous lifestyle. It is about maintaining day-to-day readiness and preparing for long-term commitments across all aspects of life.
- **Quote:** “Readiness isn’t something that you just prepare for like a test... It’s the way you live your life... It’s how you prepare for basic day-to-day items versus long term commitments.”

(3) Integration of Resiliency and Human Capital

- The integration of resiliency and human capital into readiness strategies was highlighted as essential. The shift from past practices showed an acknowledgment that the human element is critical to the effectiveness of any readiness strategy.
- **Quote:** “I think in the past resiliency and human capital... they were talked about but they were never part of a strategy... having those in there I think is essential because...”

if your people aren't ready and able to go and you haven't developed that human capital... none of it works.”

(4) Adapting Readiness for New Types of Warfare

- Interview 12 acknowledged the need to adapt readiness training and preparedness from counterinsurgency-focused operations to different kinds of warfare that may involve major powers.
- **Quote:** “We’re pivoting from counter VEO [Violent Extremist Organizations] to a different kind of war.”

(5) Flexibility and Preparedness

- The importance of being prepared at a moment’s notice was emphasized, indicating a shift towards a more unpredictable and flexible deployment model within the Air Force.
- **Quote:** “No we gotta pop that stuff on people last minute at a minute’s notice and say go. You gotta be prepared.”

(6) Balancing Readiness with Individual Needs

- Government Interview 12 discussed the balance between achieving readiness goals and the needs and desires of personnel, suggesting that the Air Force must sometimes prioritize readiness over individual needs, but there are also opportunities to focus on the individual when possible.

Quote: “Sometimes readiness is gonna take priority over the individual needs, right? Sometimes the individual needs can take priority... It’s absolutely that continuum sometimes we have to take over here to give a little bit over here.”

7. Thematic Consensus According to ChatGPT – Government

The below themes were extracted by prompting ChatGPT with the entire government analysis—Section B. It was asked to analyze the entire section and provide

themes that could be considered as consensus among all government participants. The intention for this was to cross reference similar themes from all government interviewees.

(1) A Holistic Approach to Readiness

- There is a consensus on expanding the concept of readiness to include operational and tactical aspects, mental health, resilience, and individual and family well-being. This broadened perspective acknowledged the complexity and multifaceted nature of modern military readiness.

(2) Importance of Human Capital Management

- Emphasized by all interviewees, this theme revolves around the critical role of human resources in achieving readiness. It involved practical training, professional development, leadership cultivation, and recognizing individual talents and potential. The focus was on aligning skills and roles for optimal performance and employee satisfaction.

(3) Adaptability and Flexibility

- Interviews brought up the need for the Air Force to be agile and responsive, adapting training, strategies, and policies to changing scenarios, including new types of warfare, is widely accepted. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining relevance and preparedness in a dynamic operational environment.

(4) Balancing Readiness with Individual Needs

- Interviews acknowledge the challenge of balancing organizational readiness with service members' personal needs. This balance ensures the Air Force's operational effectiveness and personnel welfare.

(5) Capacity vs. Capability

This theme highlighted a crucial discussion point among interviewees – the balance between having enough personnel (capacity) and ensuring they are adequately skilled and

prepared (capability). The emphasis was on having the right number of personnel and ensuring that they are effectively trained, mentally prepared, and capable of fulfilling their roles. This concept involved a strategic alignment of human resources with operational demands, recognizing that readiness is not just a quantitative measure but also a qualitative one, encompassing the skill level, readiness perception, and the ability to respond effectively to diverse scenarios. This theme underscored the importance of maintaining operational capabilities and managing the capacity and well-being of personnel, striking a balance between quantitative and qualitative aspects of readiness within the Air Force.

Government Interviews Theme Saturation

We have two sections of interview questions for Air Force and DOD personnel regarding concepts of readiness. One section is for personnel with generalized readiness and HCM knowledge incidental to their primary role and the second set is for personnel in positions specializing in readiness and HCM. Section 1 questions are identified with S1 and then the question number, e.g., S1Q1 for Section 1 Question 1. Section 2 will start with S2. These questions cover the below areas; we have analyzed each Subgroup and have aggregated their themes around the ones that apply (see Table 4).

Table 4. Government Interview Questions' Theme Areas

Questions	Theme Area
S1Q1, S2Q1	Defining Readiness
S1Q2a, 2b	Control Over Readiness
S1Q3	Human Capital Influence on Readiness
S1Q4	Readiness and Objectives
S1Q5, S1Q6, S2Q3, S2Q6	LIMFACS in Readiness Management
S1Q7, S2Q7	Readiness Strengths
S1Q8, S1Q9, S2Q8	Readiness and IN&D
S1Q10	Interviewees' Desired Changes to Readiness
S2Q1	Personnel's Role in Readiness
S2Q4, S2Q5	Industry Best Practices and Air Force LIMFACS

b. Government Subgroup 1 Themes: Interviews 1 and 2 (n=2)

- Defining Readiness (S1Q1 and S2Q1): Interviews highlighted how readiness is misunderstood throughout the DOD. They emphasized a traditional unit-level understanding, focused on compliance with requirements, as well as a strategic understanding, focused on a comprehensive state of preparedness for objectives. They also brought up that readiness extends beyond being green (compliant) but includes being physically, mentally, and socially ready—and the same for families.
- Control Over Readiness (S1Q2a and 2b): While new policies are being drafted, challenges still exist in enacting and changing current policies. They also discussed LIMFACS in how the DOD is structurally organized and the need to meet legislative requirements.
- HC Influence on Readiness (S1Q3): Human Capital and talent management play an important role in readiness strategy. Additionally, readiness extends beyond the Airmen's skillset and preparedness but includes other factors.
- Readiness and Objectives (S1Q4): Interviews brought up the theme that readiness is important to strategic objectives and the consideration of availability versus capability and capability versus capacity.
- LIMFACS in Readiness Management (S1Q5, S1Q6, S2Q3, and S2Q6): Interviews discussed LIMFACS in how the DOD is structurally organized, the need for hands-on training experiences, the current peace-state cultural mindset, and readiness data collection, reporting, and utilization. There is a need for technological updates to readiness systems—and specifically for the Air Force—implementation of AFFORGEN and its issues on tracking readiness.
- Readiness Strengths (S1Q7 and S2Q7): One strength of current readiness practices that was identified was our uniformity across the Air Force. Examples of expeditionary training were shared.

- Readiness and IN&D (S1Q8, S1Q9, and S2Q8): Interviews suggested that while the Air Force strives to meet IN&D, it accomplishes this inconsistently based on career field. There is a challenge in balancing both, but a balance can be achieved.
- Interviewees' Desired Changes to Readiness (S1Q10): Interviewees discussed the desire to change readiness culture, enhance the warfighter mentality, and update old legislature.
- Personnel's Role in Readiness (S2Q1): Both personnel worked in roles directly related to readiness and HCM.
- Industry Best Practices and Air Force LIMFACs (S2Q4 and S2Q5): HCMS maintenance, flexibility, and pay benefits were industry best practices identified in our interviews. They brought up that readiness in the DOD has a unique motive and goal orientation that would result in difficulties in adopting industry policies, and the DOD lacks the flexibility in how it can make swift changes and compensate its personnel as dynamically as industry.

c. Government Subgroup 2 Themes: Interviews 3 and 4 (n=2)

- Defining Readiness (S1Q1 and S2Q1): Readiness is often misunderstood in the Air Force. There are different understandings of readiness, and it extends beyond being compliant in any system. They emphasized the importance of readiness training. No new themes were brought up.
- Control over Readiness (S1Q2a and 2b): Interviews echoed previous statements that policy changes are progress, and due to bureaucracy, there are challenges in making those changes. New themes such as policies being informed by national strategies and the need to update old policies were introduced.
- HC Influence on Readiness (S1Q3): Human Capital and talent management play an important role in readiness strategy. Additionally, readiness extends beyond the Airmen's skillset and preparedness but includes other factors. No new themes were brought up.

- Readiness and Objectives (S1Q4): Interviews confirmed the theme that readiness is important to strategic objectives and the consideration of capability versus capacity. However, they did not discuss availability versus capability. Interviews introduced the new theme that the Air Force has and always will achieve mission objectives, albeit its efficiency could be improved.
- LIMFACS in Readiness Management (S1Q5, S1Q6, S2Q3, and S2Q6): Interviews echoed themes of LIMFACS in how the Air Force is structurally organized, the need for training experiences, the current peace-state cultural mindset, and readiness data collection, reporting, and utilization. They also brought up the need for technological updates to readiness systems and a new theme of the unpredictable environment of the military and heeding caution when making changes to readiness practices.
- Readiness Strengths (S1Q7 and S2Q7): Interviews confirmed the strength of our uniform readiness processes, e.g., training requirements to be compliant. Interviews introduced a new theme: different AFSCs approach readiness differently.
- Readiness and IN&D (S1Q8, S1Q9, and S2Q8): Interviews discussed the themes that the Air Force strives to meet IN&D and should adopt a holistic approach to readiness but did not discuss any tension between readiness and IN&D.
- Interviewees' Desired Changes to Readiness (S1Q10): Like in previous interviews, these interviewees discussed the desire to change readiness culture, enhance the warfighter mentality, and update the old legislature. No new themes were discovered.
- Personnel's Role in Readiness (S2Q1): One interviewee's role had general exposure while the other was directly related to readiness and HCM.
- Industry Best Practices and Air Force LIMFACs (S2Q4 and S2Q5): Interviews brought up the industry best practices of HCMS maintenance, flexibility, and pay benefits. They also discussed that readiness in the Air Force has a unique motive and goal orientation that would result in difficulties in adopting industry policies, and the Air Force lacks the flexibility in swiftly making changes, managing personnel, and compensate its

personnel as dynamically as industry. They brought up the new themes of industry focusing on developing individuals and caution directly emulating industry due to their profit motives compared to the military's unique nature and mission.

d. Government Subgroup 3 Themes: Interviews 5 and 6 (n=4)

- Defining Readiness (S1Q1 and S2Q1): Interviews brought up the themes of readiness being misunderstood in the Air Force, there are different understandings of readiness, that readiness extends beyond being compliant in the system. They emphasized the importance of readiness training. No new themes were discovered.
- Control Over Readiness (S1Q2a and 2b): Interviews echoed previous statements that policy changes are progress, and due to bureaucracy, there are challenges in making those changes. They confirmed the themes of policies being informed by national strategies and the need to update current policy. No new themes were discovered.
- HC Influence on Readiness (S1Q3): Interviews brought up the themes of HC and talent management playing an important role in readiness strategy and that readiness extends beyond the Airmen's skillset and preparedness but includes other factors. No new themes were brought up.
- Readiness and Objectives (S1Q4): Interviews brought up the themes that readiness is important to strategic objectives, efficiency, and capability versus capacity. No new themes were discovered.
- LIMFACS in Readiness Management (S1Q5, S1Q6, S2Q3, and S2Q6): Interviews brought up the themes of LIMFACS in how the Air Force is structurally organized, the need for training experiences, the current peace state cultural mindset and readiness data collection/reporting/utilization. They also brought up the need for technological updates to readiness systems and the unpredictable environment of the military.
- Readiness Strengths (S1Q7 and S2Q7): Interviews confirmed the theme that the readiness process is very uniform e.g., the required training to be compliant. They also

confirmed that AFSCs approach readiness in very different ways. No new themes were discovered.

- Readiness and IN&D (S1Q8, S1Q9, and S2Q8): Interviews brought up the themes that the Air Force strives to meet IN&D and should adopt a holistic approach to readiness but did not discuss tension between readiness and IN&D. No new themes were discovered.
- Interviewees' Desired Changes to Readiness (S1Q10): Interviews echoed the themes of changing readiness culture, enhancing the warfighter mentality, and updating old legislature. No new themes were discovered.
- Personnel's Role in Readiness (S2Q1): All interviewees held roles directly related to readiness and HCM.
- Industry Best Practices and Air Force LIMFACs (S2Q4 and S2Q5): Interviews brought up the themes of industry best practices of HCMS maintenance, flexibility, and pay benefits. They brought up that readiness in the Air Force has a unique motive and goal orientation and would result in difficulties in adopting industry policies, and the Air Force lacks the flexibility in how it can make swift changes and compensate its personnel as dynamically as industry. They discussed the industry best practice of individual development and introduced the new theme of decision-making at lower levels.

e. Government Subgroup 4 Themes: Interviews 7 and 8 (n=2)

- Defining Readiness (S1Q1 and S2Q1): Interviews brought up the themes of readiness being misunderstood in the Air Force, there are different understandings of readiness, that readiness extends beyond being compliant in the system. They emphasized the importance of readiness training. There were no new themes.
- Control Over Readiness (S1Q2a and 2b): Interviews brought up the themes of policy changes in progress, the challenges with making the changes due to bureaucracy, and

policies being informed by national strategies and outdated policies. There were no new themes.

- **HC Influence on Readiness (S1Q3):** Interviews brought up the themes of HC and talent management playing an important role in readiness strategy and that readiness extends beyond the Airmen's skillset and preparedness but includes other factors. There were no new themes.
- **Readiness and Objectives (S1Q4):** Interviews brought up the themes that readiness is important to strategic objectives, efficiency, and capability versus capacity. There were no new themes.
- **LIMFACS in Readiness Management (S1Q5, S1Q6, S2Q3, and S2Q6):** Interviews echoed themes of how the Air Force is structurally organized, the need for realistic training, the current peace-state cultural mindset, readiness data collection, reporting and utilization, the need for technological updates to readiness systems, the unpredictable environment of the military, and reporting discrepancies. They brought up the new theme of the transition to the new AFFORGEN model being a current LIMFAC in readiness management.
- **Readiness Strengths (S1Q7 and S2Q7):** Interviews confirmed the strength of readiness uniformity in the context of training requirements. Interviews did not discuss the theme of how AFSCs approach readiness differently. There were no new themes.
- **Readiness and IN&D (S1Q8, S1Q9, and S2Q8):** Interviews brought up the themes that the Air Force strives to meet IN&D and should adopt a holistic approach to readiness but did not discuss tension between readiness and IN&D. Interviews brought up the new theme of leveraging Airmen skills.
- **Interviewees' Desired Changes to Readiness (S1Q10):** Interviews brought up the themes of changing readiness culture, enhancing the warfighter mentality, and updating the old legislature. They brought up the new theme of leveraging talent management to bridge the gap between Air Force needs and supporting IN&D.

- Personnel's Role in Readiness (S2Q1): One interviewee's role had general exposure while the other was directly related to readiness and HCM.
- Industry Best Practices and Air Force LIMFACs (S2Q4 and S2Q5): Interviews brought up flexibility and that industry is focused on the bottom line compared to the unique nature of the Air Force. They did not mention HCMS maintenance, pay benefits, individual development, or decisions at lower levels. There were no new themes.

f. Government Subgroup 5 Themes: Interviews 9 and 10 (n=3)

- Defining Readiness (S1Q1 and S2Q1): Interviews brought up the themes of readiness being misunderstood in the Air Force, the existence of different understandings of readiness, and that readiness extends beyond being compliant in any system. They emphasized the importance of readiness training. There were no new themes.
- Control Over Readiness (S1Q2a and 2b): Interviews brought up the themes of policy changes in progress and the bureaucratic challenges in making changes. They did not discuss policies being informed by national strategies. There were no new themes.
- HC Influence on Readiness (S1Q3): Interviews brought up the themes of HC and talent management playing an important role in readiness strategy and that readiness extends beyond the Airmen's skillset and preparedness but includes other factors. There were no new themes.
- Readiness and Objectives (S1Q4): Interviews brought up the themes that readiness is important to strategic objectives, efficiency, and capability versus capacity. There were no new themes.
- LIMFACS in Readiness Management (S1Q5, S1Q6, S2Q3, and S2Q6): Interviews brought up the themes of how the Air Force is structurally organized, the need for realistic training, the current peace-state cultural mindset, readiness data collection, reporting, and utilization, the need for technological updates to readiness systems, the unpredictable environment of the military, and reporting discrepancies. They confirmed the transition and rollout of the new AFFORGEN model being a LIMFAC

to readiness. They introduced new themes of Congressional leadership and Career Field Managers (CFMs) being a LIMFAC to changes in Air Force Readiness.

- Readiness Strengths (S1Q7 and S2Q7): Interviews introduced the new theme that the Air Force has a diverse pool of leaders to choose from whom provide a different perspective on situations. Interviews did not discuss the themes of AFSC approaches to readiness or uniformity of readiness practices such as training.
- Readiness and IN&D (S1Q8, S1Q9, and S2Q8): Interviews confirmed the themes that the Air Force strives to meet IN&D, should adopt a holistic approach to readiness, and the value of talent management but did not discuss tension between readiness and IN&D. Interviews echoed the theme of leveraging Airmen skills and reiterated a theme from previous subgroups that readiness objectives and IN&D are difficult to balance. No new themes were discovered.
- Interviewees' Desired Changes to Readiness (S1Q10): Interviews brought up the themes of changing readiness culture, enhancing the warfighter mentality, and updating old legislature. They introduced new themes regarding the budget process and organizational design in the Air Force.
- Personnel's Role in Readiness (S2Q1): All interviewees' roles were directly related to readiness and HCM.
- Industry Best Practices and Air Force LIMFACs (S2Q4 and S2Q5): No new themes. This topic was not discussed in the interview.

g. Government Subgroup 6 Themes: Interviews 11 and 12 (n=3)

- Defining Readiness (S1Q1 and S2Q1): Interviews brought up the themes of readiness being misunderstood in the Air Force, the different understandings of readiness, and that readiness extends beyond being compliant in and system. They emphasized the importance of readiness training. There were no new themes.

- Control Over Readiness (S1Q2a and 2b): Interviews brought up no new themes but reiterated the challenges in making policy changes.
- HC Influence on Readiness (S1Q3): Interviews confirmed themes of HC and talent management playing an important role in readiness strategy and that readiness extends beyond the Airmen's skillset and preparedness but includes other factors. There were no new themes.
- Readiness and Objectives (S1Q4): Interviews echoed the themes that readiness is important to strategic objectives, efficiency, and capability versus capacity. There were no new themes.
- LIMFACS in Readiness Management (S1Q5, S1Q6, S2Q3, and S2Q6): Interviews brought up no new themes. They mentioned the difficulty of implementing readiness policies which was captured in a different question and in prior subgroups.
- Readiness Strengths (S1Q7 and S2Q7): These questions were not discussed. No new themes presented.
- Readiness and IN&D (S1Q8, S1Q9, and S2Q8): Interviews brought up the themes that the Air Force strives to meet IN&D, should adopt a holistic approach to readiness, the value of talent management, leveraging Airmen skills, and trying to balance readiness objectives with supporting IN&D. No new themes were discovered.
- Interviewees' Desired Changes to Readiness (S1Q10): Interviews brought up the theme of changing the budget process, organizational design, and introduced the new theme of wanting the flexibility to make policy changes quickly.
- Personnel's Role in Readiness (S2Q1): One interviewee's role provides general exposure to readiness with the other two being directly related to readiness and HCM.
- Industry Best Practices and Air Force LIMFACs (S2Q4 and S2Q5): Interviews brought up flexibility, the industry focus of bottom line compared to the unique nature of the

Air Force. They did not mention HCMS maintenance, pay benefits, individual development, or decisions at lower level. There were no new themes.

h. Conclusion

The above comparison of thematic findings for each question shows how we progressed through the project to eventually realize thematic saturation. The comparison of themes mapped to each question in the different subgroups showed us that the same themes were being repeated and that nothing new was being gained from additional interviews. One question provided some variation in responses, but this question—what the interviewee would change in readiness—was opinionative. Though opinionative, we did find that several interviews provided similar responses to this question, highlighting that several individuals have identified the same problems. We stopped conducting further government interviews because of reaching thematic saturation. Additional interviews did not provide any more unique thematic responses.

C. FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS USING CHATGPT (N=11)

1. Focus Group's Perspective

The focus group discussion was centered on the definition and elements of readiness within the Air Force. Readiness was broadly defined by the ability of units and personnel to perform assigned missions, which encompasses personnel health, training, equipment, and supplies. A critical point of discussion was the individual understanding of readiness and its implications for deployment and mission execution. It was noted that readiness is often perceived in binary terms – whether someone is “green” or “red” in the system—meaning they can be deployed or not due to medical or training reasons—but the actual scope is more extensive, involving multiple dimensions, including human capital management, operational readiness, and equipment status.

The group also touched on the Air Force's cultural shift from traditional readiness models to more dynamic approaches that adapt to new realities and threats. The cultural shift involves transitioning from static models to focusing on flexible, strategic readiness, leveraging human capital more effectively. There was a consensus that the current

definition of readiness may be too narrow and not encompass all necessary aspects. The discussion revealed that readiness is not well understood and lacks a standardized definition, which varies across different ranks and experiences within the Air Force.

One of the key insights from the discussion was the presentation of MVPs. These MVPs are aimed at improving the current state of readiness by offering practical solutions that leverage technology and data systems. One MVP suggested enhancing the Talent Marketplace system to increase transparency and match individual skills and training with Air Force needs. This would allow members to see which positions they qualify for based on their profiles and prior AFSCs. Another MVP involved a cultural and educational shift that regularly integrates readiness education throughout an airman's career, emphasizing the holistic aspect of readiness and its relevance to each member's role. Themes were not tied to any specific questions since this was not an official interview. Moreso, we wanted to garner feedback on our findings as well as our MVPs. Relevant quotes, however, speak to our thematic responses for the focus group.

a. Feedback on MVPs

The reception of the MVPs by the focus group members was mixed and revealed a thoughtful engagement with the concepts presented. Members recognized the potential benefits of the MVPs but also raised concerns and provided critical feedback on implementation challenges. The first MVP concerned enhancing the Talent Marketplace system—specifically for the system to push notifications to personnel. Currently, the system operates in a pull-only facet with candidates not receiving any notification of opportunities that they may be eligible for. All members of the focus group agreed that the value of increased transparency and matching already attained skills and training to Air Force needs is beneficial. However, there was also apprehension about the impact on individual expectations and trust in the system. Some members were skeptical about whether the deployment opportunities presented as part of this MVP are seen as rewards or obligations, reflecting a deeper cultural nuance within the Air Force regarding deployments and assignments. They expressed concern that this MVP could affect

personnel reception of being selected or not selected for opportunities to which they applied for—reducing confidence in such a system over time.

The second MVP, which is the implementation of readiness training, involved regularly integrating readiness education and “reps and sets” throughout an airman’s career. This was discussed in the context of its potential to standardize understanding and enhance the overall approach to readiness. The focus group concurred with the benefits of this repetition of familiarity, but they also provided feedback about the current curriculum’s limitations and the challenge of adding new content without subtracting valuable existing content. The third MVP, utilizing a database of prior AFSCs to leverage individual skill sets in pursuit of readiness was well-received by the focus group as a means of efficient workforce utilization. However, the MVP received feedback on the practicality of maintaining a comprehensive database of members’ skills and history. While seen as a tool that could enhance short-term readiness, there was also a consensus that it may not be a sustainable long-term solution to fill readiness gaps. Concerns about the feasibility of implementing such a system and its operational implications were prominent in the discussion.

Overall, the group’s feedback on the MVPs suggested a cautious optimism. Members were open to innovation but also profoundly made note of the practical challenges and potential unintended consequences of implementing new systems and processes. The focus on individual readiness, the balance of skills and needs, and the importance of a shared understanding of readiness throughout the Air Force were clear thematic takeaways from the discussion.

b. Focus Group’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Understanding Readiness:

- The group acknowledged a broad spectrum of interpretations of what readiness means within the Air Force. There was a strong emphasis on health (being green) and meeting standards, but readiness also encompassed operational and family readiness, highlighting a holistic approach.

- **Quote:** “Readiness... it’s no longer that operational focus. It is definitely more dynamic than that.”

(2) Readiness and Human Capital Management:

- The discussion highlighted the need to leverage human capital more effectively to meet readiness goals. This included better management of personnel qualifications and histories to fill skill gaps dynamically.
- **Quote:** “Leveraging everyone’s previous and current skill sets... I think it would be a value added.”

(3) Cultural and Educational Shift:

- Participants suggested that to achieve a cultural shift towards a more comprehensive understanding of readiness, there must be a systematic integration of readiness education and practices across different career stages within the Air Force. This would continue throughout one’s career.
- **Quote:** “We think that we should be implementing it a little bit more often throughout someone’s career... showing them the whole readiness picture.”

D. INDUSTRY INTERVIEW ANALYSIS USING CHATGPT (N=11)

Interviews with the industry leaders presented a nuanced view of organizational readiness from an industry perspective, emphasizing agility, human capital management, strategic alignment, and a cultural shift towards a more holistic understanding of readiness.

Firstly, agility and flexibility are central themes across the industry responses. Agility, in this context, is defined as the ability to rapidly adapt to technological changes, customer needs, and market dynamics. This agility was seen as vital for maintaining competitiveness and operational effectiveness in a dynamic business environment. Agility was considered to be the industry equivalent to military readiness. Industry leaders draw parallels between military readiness and industry standards, suggesting that a faster, more

flexible approach, similar to that of the tech industry, could benefit the military. Ethical considerations in product development and human capital management are identified as crucial components of this agility.

Human capital management and employee development are other prominent themes. Industry leaders emphasized the strategic importance of managing human resources effectively. This includes hiring the right individuals, providing effective training, creating a supportive work environment, and aligning employees' skills with their roles. There was a strong focus on employee empowerment, job satisfaction, and fostering a culture that supports autonomy and trust. These aspects are believed to drive better employee performance and satisfaction, thus contributing significantly to organizational readiness.

Regarding strategic alignment, the industry interviewees highlighted the need for aligning talent strategy with broader business objectives. This alignment ensured that the workforce is skilled and strategically contributing to the organization's goals. Corporate metrics such as annual recurring revenue and customer retention are key indicators of readiness and success. Additionally, the importance of market intelligence, flexibility in roles and responsibilities, and compensation for additional responsibilities are underscored.

Traditional military practices contrasted with approaches industry leaders take. This involved redefining readiness to include broader, more holistic aspects such as emotional intelligence and mental health, in contrast to the more structured definition in a military context. The industry perspective painted a picture of corporate readiness as a multidimensional construct that includes adaptability, strategic talent alignment, and a culture conducive to continuous growth and innovation.

In summary, the industry interviews in this section provided valuable insights into the contemporary understanding of organizational readiness in the civilian sector. The emphasis on agility, human capital management, strategic alignment, and a holistic approach to readiness highlighted a trend towards more dynamic, integrated, and employee-centric practices, contrasting with the more rigid and defined approaches in military service. Each subgroup was further broken down into their analyses and thematic

responses. At the end of this section, a list of themes that can be drawn out of the entire industry group that ChatGPT considered to be “consensus” is listed.

1. Industry Subgroup 1 Analysis: Interviews 1 and 2 (n=3)

Industry Interview 1, two individuals, a President and a Chief Science Officer of a technology and psychological services company, emphasized the need for rapid adaptation to technological changes and customer needs, underlining the importance of agility in mission accomplishment without compromising reliability. They discussed the definition of readiness within the industry, often equated with the term “agility.” This term reflects the ability to rapidly adapt to changes and respond to new customer needs, ensuring that missions are accomplished without compromising reliability or performance. They pointed out that within their own company, personal readiness is maintained through regular check-ins and team-dependent activities, recognizing that what works for one team may not work for another.

They drew parallels between the military’s concept of readiness and the tech industry’s pace, suggesting the military might benefit from adopting faster, more flexible processes. Ethical considerations in product development were acknowledged as crucial, along with effectively managing human capital to foster an adaptable workforce. The importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and credentialing was also highlighted, ensuring personnel remain authoritative in their fields. The interviewees provided insights into the company’s geographical distribution, indicating a dispersed but connected structure, contributing to a flexible and responsive business model. They expressed frustration with traditional measures of readiness, advocating for a more holistic understanding that includes the mental and emotional state of the workforce.

Industry Interview 2, with a military background, offered insights into the operational dynamics of a large civilian company. They emphasized agility as a core component of industry readiness, paralleling the military’s strategic readiness but with greater flexibility. Their role included project management, personnel development, and contracting, reflecting a culture that values diverse skill sets and quick adaptability. They discussed the cultural and motivational contrasts between the military and private sector,

highlighting the importance of passion for work in driving job satisfaction and performance. The company empowered employees through trust and autonomy, enabling impactful decisions and fostering a satisfying work environment. Compensation was tied to their willingness to take on additional responsibilities. Transparency in managing expectations and providing clarity is vital, with revenue as a significant metric for success. The interviewee also noted the company's focus on balancing financial objectives with employee well-being and professional growth.

Overlapping themes in Industry Subgroup 1 highlighted agility as a critical aspect of industry readiness. Interview 1 stressed the importance of adapting rapidly to technological and client needs, integrating ethical considerations in product development, and managing human capital effectively for organizational flexibility. They advocated for a holistic approach to readiness that encompasses the mental and emotional well-being of the workforce. Interview 2 underscored agility in terms of diverse skill sets and the capacity to adapt to emerging needs. They emphasized the importance of passion, trust, and autonomy in the workplace, linking job satisfaction to effective performance. Both interviewees drew attention to the need for a more dynamic and comprehensive approach to readiness in the industry, focusing on agility, ethical practices, human capital management, and the well-being of employees, contrasting with the more rigid and defined roles typically found in military service.

a. Industry Interviews 1 and 2: Overlapping Themes

(1) Agility as a Core Competency

- Both interviewees emphasized the importance of agility within their organizations. They viewed agility as synonymous with readiness in the industry, where the ability to quickly adapt to changes is crucial for maintaining competitiveness and meeting operational demands.

(2) Importance of Diverse Skill Sets

- There is a shared acknowledgment of the value of having employees with diverse and versatile skill sets. Both interviewees indicated that the ability to perform various roles is not only beneficial but necessary for the company's success and adaptability.

(3) Employee Empowerment and Satisfaction

- Both interviews revealed a focus on employee empowerment, satisfaction, and the encouragement of a culture that supports autonomy. This theme suggested that when employees feel valued and have control over their work, they are more satisfied and productive.

(4) Flexibility in Roles and Responsibilities

- Interview 1 and Interview 2 both discussed the flexibility within their roles and the broader organizational structure. This flexibility allowed for a more dynamic response to internal and external challenges and opportunities.

(5) Compensation for Additional Responsibilities

- The topic of compensation, particularly for taking on responsibilities beyond one's primary role, was mentioned by both interviewees. They highlighted that in the industry, additional efforts are often directly compensated, which can be a strong motivator for employees.

(6) Cultural Shift from Military to Civilian Practices

- Both interviews touched on the cultural shift from the military to the civilian sector, particularly in how readiness is defined and approached. While the military has a more structured and rigid definition of readiness, the industry emphasizes a broader and more holistic approach.

(7) Strategic Use of Human Capital

- There was a strategic emphasis on managing human capital effectively. Both interviewees noted that understanding and leveraging the skills, passions, and motivations of employees are key to the company's success.

b. Industry Interview 1's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Agility in Response to Technological and Client Needs

- Both interviewees stressed the importance of agility within their organization. This is demonstrated by their ability to respond rapidly to new customer requirements and technological changes, ensuring mission accomplishment without sacrificing reliability.
- **Quote:** "Agility... applies to our ability to respond to new customer needs in ways that ensure mission accomplishment."

(2) Comparative Readiness and the Pace of Necessity

- A comparison was made between readiness in military terms and industry standards. The concept of 'pace of necessity' is introduced, highlighting how adversaries operate and the need for the U.S. to adapt quicker processes similar to those in the technology industry to stay relevant and prepared.
- **Quote:** "It's more about the pace of necessity and when you look at our adversaries, that's how they're operating..."

(3) Ethical Considerations in Product Development

- Ethical considerations played a significant role in the agility and readiness of the company. Both interviewees mentioned the integration of ethical practices within their technological and psychological approaches, ensuring compliance with industry standards and ethical codes.

- **Quote:** “Ethics are KPI for us...integrated and ingrained into both aspects of this.”

(4) Human Capital Management and Organizational Flexibility

- The discussion highlighted the importance of human capital management in achieving organizational objectives. The company’s approach to managing people and supporting transitions to other opportunities within the company reflected its commitment to personnel readiness and adaptability.
- **Quote:** “But ultimately it’s about knowing... for us... focusing on the people that make up our company and showing we do the best by each of them.”

(5) Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Credentialing

- The interviewees discussed how their company ensured that personnel are on the leading edge of their respective fields, whether technology or psychology. They emphasized hiring the right people with the right credentials to maintain authority and proficiency in their space.
- **Quote:** “We have the right personnel with the right credentials to even be authoritative in that space.”

(6) Agility as an Industrial Competency

- Within the industry, readiness was closely associated with agility. Agility can be defined as the capability of an organization to rapidly adapt to market changes and customer demands, while still managing operational risks effectively. It involves responsiveness, flexibility, and the ability to pivot when necessary. This industrial competency was critical for maintaining a competitive edge and ensuring that a company could fulfill its mission in a dynamic and often unpredictable environment.
- **Quote:** “I think a terminology that we often find in like the technology sphere is agility, right?”

c. Industry Interview 2's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Readiness and Agility

- Readiness within the industry was equated with the ability to be agile and responsive to the dynamic business environment.
- **Quote:** “I like where they’re going with this. And to your point kind of looking at it more of just to me, this new definition really talks more about agility really than readiness.”

(2) Diverse Skill Sets

- Emphasized the importance of versatility in the workforce and the ability to take on various roles within the organization.
- **Quote:** “I do a little bit of everything right now from PM to people development to contracting.”

(3) Passion and Job Satisfaction

- Passion for one’s work is essential for job satisfaction, leading to a more dedicated and effective workforce.
- **Quote:** “When you get a team put together of people who want to do the work for you just because they don’t want to let you down, holy cow is that powerful.”

(4) Culture of Trust and Autonomy

- Trusting employees to self-manage leads to empowerment and drives better results and job fulfillment.
- **Quote:** “They’re making the decisions. They’re making the impacts; they’re making the results happen.”

(5) Compensation and Incentives

- Discussed how additional work or specialized skills beyond one's primary job is often recognized and rewarded with additional compensation.
- **Quote:** "So people aren't as reluctant to raise their hand in those situations because they get compensated for it."

(6) Communication and Transparency

- Stressed the importance of open communication and transparent processes within the company.
- **Quote:** "If there was anything I could ask folks to work on, it would just be just a little bit more communication across the kind of the headquarters staff."

(7) Evaluation Based on Revenue

- Highlighted that revenue generation is a primary factor in measuring success and readiness within his organization.
- **Quote:** "Their biggest evaluation factor, and I mean biggest by a long ways, is their revenue."

(8) Flexibility and Adaptation to Change

- The need for an organization and its employees to be flexible and able to adapt to changes is paramount.
- **Quote:** "Private companies have way more flexibility right now to move people around wherever they deem appropriate."

(9) Employee Empowerment and Satisfaction

- Empowering employees by aligning their roles with their skills and interests is key to maintaining satisfaction.

- **Quote:** “If you’re a valuable person, they’ll say, OK, what do you wanna do? I really want to do HR, OK, well, let’s push you over on the HR team.”

2. Industry Subgroup 2 Analysis: Interview 3 (n=3)

In Interview 3, a three-member team from an emergency management organization discussed their approach to readiness and the distinction between it and general preparedness. The members considered ‘readiness’ a more apt term for the staff’s state of preparedness, suggesting a possible need to differentiate the two concepts. The idea is that while ‘preparedness’ is a broad term used for the public, ‘readiness’ could be more focused and tailored towards the organization’s internal staff, who need to be immediately responsive to incidents.

Training was a prominent theme, with agility being a key component. Industry Interview 3 emphasized that while it is impossible to anticipate every scenario, staff can be trained to adapt to various situations. The interviewees discussed the importance of a qualifications system that aligns with FEMA’s standards, ensuring that staff are adequately trained and certified for their roles. However, they also expressed concerns about the practical challenges of maintaining an on-call staff, noting that while employees may be trained and qualified, availability outside of regular hours can be inconsistent.

The team also discussed the real-world applications of their training programs. They emphasized the benefits of engaging in actual incidents, which provide a more impactful learning experience than hypothetical training scenarios. This hands-on approach is believed to better prepare for actual events. However, the organization faced hurdles during COVID-19. Staff turnover led to a “reset” in readiness levels and necessitated the retraining of new personnel.

Finally, the interview highlighted internal and external policy influences on readiness. While the organization has some flexibility with its internal policies to ensure staff preparedness, it must also adhere to broader state policies that can impose constraints. One significant challenge noted was the lack of a legal or HR mechanism to compensate staff for on-call time, which impacts the enforcement of readiness culture. The interviewees suggested that creating a culture of readiness and responsibility is complex, particularly

when long periods pass without incidents, making it harder to maintain staff engagement and seriousness about on-call duties. They advocated for innovative solutions that could streamline aligning staff skills with organizational needs, potentially enhancing readiness and response effectiveness.

a. Industry Interview 3: Overlapping Themes with Industry Subgroup 1

(1) Agility and Flexibility

- All interviewees underscored the need for agility and flexibility within their organizations. Interviews from all groups highlighted that the ability to adapt quickly to changes is crucial for maintaining competitiveness and operational effectiveness.

(2) Training and Qualifications

- Similar to Interview 2, Industry Interview 3 emphasized the importance of proper training and certifications. This parallels the discussion from Interview 2 about the value of diverse skills and the importance of having the right personnel with the right credentials.

(3) Real-World Application of Training

- The theme of real-world training from Industry Interview 3 echoed the focus on real-world applications and interdisciplinary collaboration mentioned by Interview 1, highlighting the importance of practical experience over theoretical knowledge.

(4) Strategic Use of Human Capital

- Industry Interview 3's highlighted potential benefits of a self-identification system for aligning staff skills with organizational needs are in line with Interview 1's strategic emphasis on managing human capital effectively.

b. Industry Interview 3's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Readiness versus Preparedness

- Industry Interview 3 reflected on the differentiation between ‘preparedness’ for the public and ‘readiness’ for staff, suggesting a strategic shift to focus on readiness as a more action-oriented concept for internal operations.
- **Quote:** “Maybe we should be differentiating between preparedness like for the public and readiness for our staff.”

(2) Agility and Preparedness

- The conversation with Industry Interview 3 highlighted the significance of agility in readiness, associating the concept with the ability to prepare for and respond to varied and unpredictable scenarios effectively.
- **Quote:** “But I don’t think that you can push up preparedness for a readiness message without the idea of agility because it’s not prescriptive.”

(3) Training and Qualifications

- Industry Interview 3 discussed their job qualification system, which mirrors FEMA’s NQS, emphasizing the importance of role-specific training and certifications to perform effectively in emergency situations.
- **Quote:** “We have our system very similar to that for our staff as far as training goes and certifications.”

(4) Real-World Events Training

- Industry Interview 3 noted that real-world training, as opposed to hypothetical scenarios, significantly bolstered their readiness for actual events, underscoring the value of hands-on experience.

- **Quote:** “For the most part, I think because of all the trainings that we have, we do a pretty good job of managing real-world events.”

(5) Impact of Turnover on Readiness

- The conversation indicated that high staff turnover, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has affected the organization’s readiness levels, resulting in a need for retraining and integration of new personnel.
- **Quote:** “It’s not that we’re not ready or prepared; we just have a lot of new people who are in training.”

(6) Self-Identification for Skill Alignment

- Industry Interview 3 saw potential benefits in a self-identification system for staff skills, which could help management align personnel with the organization’s needs more effectively and efficiently.
- **Quote:** “So if there was some kind of standardized survey to say you tell us about you and where you see yourself, it would probably speed that process up of quantifying their skills.”

(7) Influence of Policies on Readiness

- The discussion acknowledged the influence of various levels of policies on readiness, from state codes to internal procedures, and the necessity for internal flexibility within those policies to ensure practical staff readiness.
- **Quote:** “We’re not paying them to be sitting by the phone... But if they don’t or if that person is not available, it’s just hard for us to have people come in sometimes.”

3. Industry Subgroup 3 Analysis: Interviews 4 and 5 (n=2)

Industry Interview 4 focused on managing government contracts and integrating human capital management. They oversaw strategic contracts valued at approximately \$2.2

billion, highlighting the importance of compliance and legislative programs. The key themes included the significance of human capital, emphasizing hiring the right people, practical training, and creating a supportive work environment. The company used Gallup “Q12” surveys for potential hires, focusing on job matching and role congruency. The interviewee noted the company’s integrity, accountability, and performance values. Additionally, he described the company culture as focused on social responsibility, ensuring employees feel seen, heard, and valued. He believed that taking care of employees leads to business profitability and success.

Industry Interview 5, a key figure in a company specializing in government defense and aerospace, discussed the importance of corporate metrics, particularly annual recurring revenue (ARR) and the ‘rule of 40,’ to indicate the company’s readiness and success. They emphasized sales and solutions responsiveness, customer retention, and the importance of market intelligence. The shift to remote work for balancing employee needs with organizational goals and the challenges of maintaining work-life balance at the executive level were also highlighted. The interviewee talked about leadership succession planning and the company’s approach to providing growth opportunities within the same role. They suggested that the DOD could benefit from adopting more data-focused and efficiency-driven approaches used in the commercial sector.

Overlapping themes in Industry Subgroup 3 emphasized the importance of human capital management and corporate metrics in their approach to organizational readiness and success. Interview 3 highlighted the need for effective hiring, training, and a supportive work environment, focusing on integrity, accountability, and performance. They stressed the significance of job matching and maintaining a culture of social responsibility. Interview 4 focused on annual recurring revenue and the ‘rule of 40’ as key readiness indicators, sales responsiveness, customer retention, and market intelligence. They also discussed the challenges of remote work, work-life balance, and leadership succession planning. Both interviewees are committed to aligning employee skills and roles for optimal performance and satisfaction, indicating a more holistic and employee-centric approach to readiness in their respective organizations.

a. Industry Interviews 4 and 5: Overlapping Themes

(1) Human Capital Management and Employee Development

- Both interviewees placed a strong emphasis on human capital management. Industry Interview 4 discussed the importance of job matching, ensuring that employees are in roles that align with their skills. Similarly, Industry Interview 5 focused on hiring the right people and providing them with the necessary support and training, indicating a shared belief in the value of nurturing employee growth and development.

(2) Cultural Values and Employee Satisfaction

- A culture that values integrity, accountability, and performance is central to both organizations. Industry Interview 4 described a culture of social responsibility and caring, ensuring employees feel seen, heard, and valued. Industry Interview 5 also emphasized the importance of creating a supportive work environment, indicating that both interviewees recognize the link between a positive company culture and employee satisfaction.

(3) Strategic Alignment with Organizational Goals

- Both interviewees discussed the need for aligning employees' roles with the organization's strategic goals. Industry Interview 4 focused on the importance of market intelligence and strategic readiness, while Industry Interview 5 talks about managing significant contracts and compliance programs in line with higher directives. This alignment ensured that the workforce is not only skilled but also strategically contributing to the organization's objectives.

(4) Efficiency in Operations

- Efficiency in operations and the pursuit of optimal performance were common themes. Industry Interview 4 mentioned the importance of sales velocity and customer retention for business efficiency, while Industry Interview 5 discussed the governance of

contracts and compliance for operational effectiveness, highlighting a shared focus on maintaining efficiency in different aspects of their operations.

b. Industry Interview 4's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Corporate Metrics as Indicators of Readiness

- Industry Interview 4 discussed the use of annual recurring revenue (ARR) and the 'rule of 40' as metrics that indicate the company's readiness and success. These metrics assess growth and profitability, determining the company's capacity to sustain and expand its operations.
- **Quote:** "That's the annual recurring revenue... And then something we call rule of 40. That's annual growth in ARR. Plus profitability."

(2) Sales and Solutions Responsiveness

- Readiness for Industry Interview 4 also involved the ability to rapidly respond to RFPs (Requests for Proposals), which required an agile sales and solutions consulting team. This readiness was critical for capturing new business opportunities efficiently.
- **Quote:** "So we will look at things like the... sales generation... So, for every \$1.00 in AR, we don't we need to know how many dollars we spend in terms of, umm, labor for the folks that work in sales and solutions consulting."

(3) Customer Retention as a Readiness Factor

- Customer churn and retention are significant factors for Industry Interview 4's company's readiness. Maintaining high customer satisfaction is crucial for preserving and increasing ARR, which in turn affects the company's readiness to meet market demands.
- **Quote:** "So we have a client that is a \$500,000 client... maybe they are a \$750,000 client dollar next year."

(4) Importance of Market Intelligence

- Industry Interview 4 emphasized the role of market intelligence in preparing for and adapting to future business landscape changes. This forward-looking approach was an essential aspect of the company's strategic readiness.
- **Quote:** "So this is an area where it's very hard for us to assess with metrics as it hasn't happened yet... Uh, we need really good market intelligence."

(5) Remote Work and Employee Flexibility

- The shift to remote work has been a significant aspect of maintaining readiness by balancing employee needs with organizational goals, particularly in response to client needs for Industry Interview 4's company.
- **Quote:** "We're almost 100% remote, so we offer our employees a ton of flexibility in terms of the hours that they keep."

(6) Executive Work-Life Balance

- At the executive level, Industry Interview 4 noted the balance between personal needs and work is not optimal due to the compensation structure that heavily incentivizes performance.
- **Quote:** "Work-life balance is and strong is not great for the executive team and that's the same with most of the executive teams of the companies that I work with."

(7) Leadership Succession Planning

- Readiness included planning for leadership succession, acknowledging that employees may not stay for extended periods. Industry Interview 4's company provided promotion opportunities that do not necessarily involve changing job roles but provide a path for advancement within the company.

- **Quote:** “So one of the things we have is lots and lots of tiers of promotion, but don’t necessarily mean you change jobs.”

(8) Comparison to Military Readiness

- Industry Interview 4 drew a distinction between commercial readiness and military readiness, suggesting that the DOD could benefit from adopting more data-focused and efficiency-driven approaches used in the commercial sector.
- **Quote:** “So at the end of the day, uh, you know, I harken back to why I really want... Readiness really depends on the mission that an individual entity or organization is trying to get to.”

c. Industry Interview 5’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Focus on Human Capital Management

- Emphasizing the importance of human capital, Industry Interview 5 aligned with the philosophy from the book “Good to Great,” focusing on hiring the right people, training them effectively, and creating a conducive work environment.
- **Quote:** “And then you’re gonna train them up and you gonna treat them right and they’ll tell you where to go from there.”

(2) Integrity and Accountability in Performance

- The interviewee highlighted the importance of integrity, accountability, and performance, suggesting that these values are central to the company’s approach to managing its workforce and ensuring operational success.
- **Quote:** “Oh I’m going to think of integrity, accountability, people, and performance.”

(3) Employee Success and Development

- Industry Interview 5 discussed the company’s commitment to employee development, ensuring each employee is set up for success within the organization.

- **Quote:** “These are the areas that you’re going to have to pay attention to and how you’re going to have to help this person be successful inside the company.”

(4) Job Matching and Role Congruency

- The respondent’s company spent significant time ensuring job matching, where employees’ skills and roles are aligned, demonstrating an emphasis on placing the right people in the right positions for optimal performance.
- **Quote:** “I think the company spends a lot of time job matching you know.”

(5) Culture of Social Responsibility

- Industry Interview 5 described the company’s culture as one focused on social responsibility, ensuring that employees feel seen, heard, and valued. This culture contributed to the overall success and satisfaction within the organization.
- **Quote:** “So I think the companies developed the culture of social responsibility and caring for each other being making sure that everybody in the company is seen heard and valued.”

(6) Belief in Taking Care of People

- There was a strong belief in the organization that by taking care of its people, the business will prosper. This approach underlined the connection between employee welfare and organizational success.
- **Quote:** “But the belief is, is that if we are taking care of our people and they are taking care of business then we’re going to make money.”

4. Industry Subgroup 4 Analysis: Interviews 6 and 7 (n=3)

Industry Interview 6 outlined a similar approach to other interviewees to organizational readiness in the interview, emphasizing operational and human capital aspects. Readiness is categorized as addressing past problems, managing current

operations, and planning for future growth. The interviewee stressed the development of people rather than just training, advocating for personal and professional development, including leadership development and succession planning. The Employee Value Proposition (EVP) was highlighted as the organization's commitment to its employees. Effective communication of organizational values and benefits, like healthcare, was crucial, along with 'stay interviews' to understand why employees chose to remain with the company. The interviewee's approach illustrated a commitment to people management as a critical driver of success, blending operational efficiency with a strong focus on employee development and organizational culture.

Industry Interview 7 included two individuals from the same corporation. They discussed the concept of readiness as organizational effectiveness, which involved the ability to adapt and compete in a dynamic marketplace. The interviewer noted that this sounded like other industry interviewees describing agility. The interviewees agreed. They emphasized "people – experience – design" in human capital management, considering the entire employee life cycle from recruitment to retirement. The critical alignment between talent strategy and business strategy was highlighted, ensuring the workforce is strategically integrated into the company's broader vision and objectives. Financial agility is mentioned as part of organizational readiness. Their insights painted a picture of corporate readiness as a multi-dimensional construct that includes adaptability, strategic talent alignment, and a culture conducive to continuous growth and innovation.

Overlapping themes in Industry Subgroup 4 emphasized a comprehensive approach to organizational readiness, focusing on human capital and strategic alignment. Interview 6 highlighted the importance of addressing past, present, and future challenges, strongly emphasizing developing people and the EVP. Interview 7 focused on organizational effectiveness, including adaptability in the marketplace and integrating people's experience design in human capital management. Both interviewees underlined the importance of aligning talent strategy with business goals, suggesting a holistic view of readiness that extends beyond operational capabilities to include employee development, strategic integration, and cultural growth. This synthesis indicated a trend in the industry

towards a more integrated and employee-centric approach to readiness, encompassing operational efficiency and workforce well-being and development.

a. Industry Interviews 6 and 7: Overlapping Themes

(1) Organizational Readiness Through Human Capital Management

- Both Interview 6 and Interview 7 emphasized the importance of addressing past, present, and future challenges through a human-centric approach. Interview 6 discussed organizational readiness as a response to various scenarios, while Interview 7 spoke of readiness in terms of organizational effectiveness and the importance of culture and human capital management. Both saw the development of people as integral to the ability of the organization to adapt and prepare for future growth.

(2) Development vs. Training

- Interview 6 placed significant emphasis on the development of people rather than mere training, which aligned with Interview 7's discussion on 'people experience design' and the emphasis on the entire employee life cycle. There was a shared understanding that development should be personalized and aligned with individual talents and potential, which is crucial for long-term growth and potential.

(3) EVP and Organizational Culture

- EVP was a central theme in Interview 6's interview, where she highlights it as the organization's commitment to its employees in exchange for their skills and dedication. Interview 7 also touched on the effective communication of organizational values and benefits, and how this contributed to job satisfaction and retention. Both agreed on the importance of a reciprocal relationship where the organization offers value to its employees.

(4) Communication and Retention Strategies

- Interview 6's discussion of "stay interviews" to understand why employees remain with the company mirrored Interview 7's concern for communicating organizational value and benefits effectively to employees. They both advocated for proactive strategies to engage and retain talent within the organization, suggesting that understanding and addressing employee needs is key to maintaining a positive EVP.

(5) Alignment of Individual and Organizational Goals

- Both interviews discussed the alignment of talent strategy with business strategy. Interview 6 spoke about the importance of aligning individual development with organizational objectives, while Interview 7 discussed the holistic approach to readiness that includes emotional intelligence and mental health. This alignment was seen as critical for readiness and adaptability in both military and industry settings.

b. Industry Interview 6's ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Readiness as Response to Different Scenarios

- Industry Interview 6 defined readiness in industry as the ability to respond to past problems, current operations, and future growth. This approach covered all aspects of an organization's functioning and planning.
- **Quote:** "The second bucket is current day-to-day operations and then the third bucket is the ability to plan for the future."

(2) Agility and Contextual Application

- Agility was discussed, but with a desire to provide more context, relating it to the organization's ability to address legacy issues and prepare for future challenges.
- **Quote:** "Being able to be agile which I think is those leaders... understanding are we do we need to fix past legacy problems."

(3) Development Over Training

- A significant emphasis was placed on the development of people rather than just training, focusing on long-term growth and potential.
- **Quote:** “They are much more interested in development of people rather than training of people.”

(4) Succession Planning and Leadership Development

- Succession planning and leadership development courses were highlighted as focal points, preparing for future organizational needs and leadership transitions.
- **Quote:** “So being able to have people in succession plans and leadership development courses is what industry spent way more time focusing on.”

(5) Individual Talents and Potential

- Recognizing and harnessing individual talents and potential was seen as crucial for developing individuals based on their unique strengths.
- **Quote:** “All of the individuals have different talents and potential and it’s the managers... their privilege to be able to pull out what that potential is.”

(6) Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

- EVP was discussed as an industry standard, promising certain benefits in return for employees’ skills, experience, and commitment.
- **Quote:** “EVP is an industry standard and that is the promise that your organization it has with you on what they’re going to provide for you in return for your skills and your experience and your commitment.”

(7) Communicating Organizational Value

- Effectively communicating the value of benefits provided by the organization, such as healthcare, to employees was emphasized as crucial.
- **Quote:** “You can’t just come out and say you have free healthcare because brand new people don’t even know that they don’t know what that value is.”

(8) Stay Interviews and Understanding Employee Values

- Conducting stay interviews to understand why employees remained with the organization is part of maintaining a positive EVP.
- **Quote:** “But putting all of these things that people value why are they here doing stay interviews for people?”

(9) Human Capital Infusion in Decision-Making

- Human capital management was seen as central in every decision and at every level within the organization.
- **Quote:** “I think it is infused in every single decision it’s infused in every single level, and it is owned by human capital.”

c. Industry Interview 7’s ChatGPT Thematic Responses

(1) Organizational Effectiveness and Conditions for Growth

- The discussion outlined the necessity of certain conditions within an organization that facilitate growth and adaptability to competitive market changes. Organizational effectiveness is seen as a parallel to military readiness, emphasizing the creation of an environment conducive to growth, akin to nurturing a garden.
- **Question:** “What areas does your industry/organization track and evaluate to determine its state of readiness?” and “Is there a terminology or competencies within your

industry that is equivalent or similar to the definition of either ‘readiness’ or ‘strategic readiness?’”

- **Quote:** “But like my field was sort of organization effectiveness which is essentially kind of what you mean by readiness is what are the things that have to exist in an organization to allow it to grow and to adapt to different competitive things that might show up in the market?”

(2) Integration of Experience Design in Human Capital Management

- This theme focused on the concept of ‘people experience design,’ which puts humans at the center of the entire organizational process, from hiring to retiring. It emphasized the importance of designing a comprehensive experience that continues even after employees exit the organization, influencing how they can become advocates for the company externally.
- **Quote:** “You really have to start thinking about how do we put humans at the center and think about the end-to-end experience design... even at the retire stage or the exit stage what’s that entire life cycle experience?”

(3) Business and Talent Strategy Alignment

- The narrative here was about the alignment between talent strategy and business goals. The discussion suggested that companies are increasingly trying to ensure that their talent management strategies are in direct support of their broader business objectives, such as entering new markets or innovating product offerings.
- **Quote:** “I think workforce readiness is a huge thing that people are talking about. The other key thing I don’t wanna miss is how do we hook the talent strategy with the business strategy.”

5. Thematic Consensus According to ChatGPT – Industry

As with our government interviews, ChatGPT was prompted to identify themes across all industry interviews that could be considered as a consensus among our industry

interviewees. The entirety of Section D was ingested into our chat window and ChatGPT was asked to identify themes that were presented across all our interviews, representing a reasonable consensus among our industry leaders.

(1) Agility as a Competency

- Across the industry interviewees, agility was consistently emphasized as a core competency. This involved the ability to adapt rapidly to technological changes, market shifts, and client needs. Agility was linked not only to operational adaptability but also to ethical considerations in product development and the creation of a flexible workforce. Interviewees highlighted the necessity of agility for maintaining competitiveness and meeting operational demands, contrasting with the more structured approach to military readiness. Agility was considered the industry equivalent to readiness.

(2) Human Capital Management and Employee Development

- Another prominent theme was the strategic use and development of human capital. This encompassed hiring the right people, providing effective training, and fostering a supportive work environment. Interviewees discussed the importance of aligning employees' skills with their roles, employee empowerment, and creating a culture that values diverse skill sets, trust, and autonomy. The emphasis was on nurturing employee growth and development and fostering job satisfaction and performance.

(3) Strategic Alignment with Organizational Goals

- Industry leaders stressed the importance of aligning talent strategy with business goals, ensuring that the workforce contributes strategically to the organization's objectives. This alignment was considered crucial for organizational readiness, efficiency, and adaptability. Interviewees discussed the significance of corporate metrics, such as annual recurring revenue and customer retention, as indicators of readiness and success.

(4) Cultural Shift and Organizational Effectiveness

- A cultural shift from military to civilian practices is noted, with industry readiness defined more broadly and holistically. Interviewees advocated for a holistic approach to readiness, including emotional intelligence and mental health, and emphasized the need for conditions within the organization that facilitate growth and adaptability. This approach reflected a comprehensive view of readiness beyond operational capabilities to encompass employee development, strategic integration, and cultural growth.

6. Industry Interview Theme Saturation

We have 11 interview questions for industry personnel. These questions cover the areas identified in Table 5; we have analyzed each Subgroup and have aggregated their themes around the ones that apply.

Table 5. Industry Interview Questions' Theme Areas

Questions	Theme Area
Q1	Role in Organization
Q2	Readiness Equivalent
Q3	Readiness Determination
Q4	Achieving Objectives
Q5, Q5a	Control of Readiness
Q6	Human Capital Influence on Readiness
Q7	Ways to Improve Readiness
Q8	Readiness Best Practices
Q9	What Employee's Value
Q9a	Management of IN&D
Q10	Managing Employee Skills
Q11	What Would Change if King/Queen

a. Industry Subgroup 1 Analysis: Interviews 1 and 2 (n=3)

- Role in Organization (Q1): President / Lead on the Air Force Project Refuel Program, Chief Science Officer, and Director / Project Manager.
- Readiness Equivalent (Q2): Interviews brought up the themes of agility and meeting organizational objectives as being the industry equivalent to readiness.
- Readiness Determination (Q3): Interviews brought up the themes of readiness being evaluated through achieving organizational objectives, company growth, earning revenue, and customer satisfaction.
- Achieving Objectives (Q4): Interviews brought up the themes of targeted hiring, compensation, and the alignment of employee skills with their role in the organization.
- Control of Readiness (Q5 and Q5a): Interviews brought up the theme of upper management setting the strategy for the organization but also providing flexibility for implementation at lower levels.
- HC Influence on Readiness (Q6): Interviews brought up the theme of leveraging HC for strategic advantage.
- Ways to Improve Readiness (Q7): Open communication and transparency were identified themes for improving readiness within the organization.
- Readiness Best Practices (Q8): Interviews brought up the themes of employee empowerment, job satisfaction, flexibility, organizational culture, and compensation. Another theme was that policies operate as a living document continuously reviewed and updated to match strategies.
- What Employee's Value (Q9): Interviews brought up that employees valued empowerment to have control over their work, organizational culture, and compensation.

- Management of IN&D (Q9a): Interviews brought up that industry strive to meet IN&D for employee job satisfaction as a means of achieving employee commitment.
- Managing Employee Skills (Q10): Interviews brought up the theme of accessing employee skills through frontline managers and allowing flexibility.
- What Would Change if King/Queen (Q11): No themes were discussed for this question.

b. Industry Subgroup 2 Analysis: Interview 3 (n=3)

- Role in Organization (Q1): Recovery Planner and two Deputy Directors, all from the same organization.
- Readiness Equivalent (Q2): Interviewees brought up the themes of agility and meeting organizational objectives as being the industry equivalent to readiness. No new themes were discovered.
- Readiness Determination (Q3): Interviewees brought up the new theme of readiness being tracked in their job qualification system, which tracks training completed by employees. However, they did not discuss the themes of achieving organizational objectives, earning revenue, managing a budget, or customer satisfaction.
- Achieving Objectives (Q4): Interviewees brought up the themes of targeted hiring and compensation. They also discussed the new theme of onboard training to ensure personnel capability but did not discuss the alignment of employee skills with their role in the organization.
- Control of Readiness (Q5 and Q5a): Interviewees brought up the theme of upper management (the state of Delaware) setting the strategy for the organization; however, they did not mention having flexibility for implementation at lower levels.
- HC Influence on Readiness (Q6): Interviewees brought up the theme of leveraging HC for strategic advantage and a new theme of investing significant resources into developing their HC.

- Ways to Improve Readiness (Q7): No themes were discussed for this question.
- Readiness Best Practices (Q8): Interviewees brought up the themes of employee empowerment, job satisfaction, flexibility, organizational culture, and compensation. However, they did not discuss that policies operate as a living document continuously reviewed and updated to match strategies. No new themes were discovered.
- What Employee's Value (Q9): Interviewees brought up that employees valued empowerment to have control over their work, organizational culture, and compensation. They brought up a new theme of flexibility.
- Management of IN&D (Q9a): Interviewees brought up that they strive to meet IN&D for employee job satisfaction. They emphasized that pay is a key component. No new themes were discovered.
- Managing Employee Skills (Q10): Interviewees brought up the theme of accessing employee skills through frontline managers. They emphasized the value of having a conversation with staff and understanding them and their capabilities. No new themes were discovered.
- What Would Change if King/Queen (Q11): Interviewees discussed the new theme of hiring more employees.

c. Industry Subgroup 3 Analysis: Interviews 4 and 5 (n=2)

- Role in Organization (Q1): Senior Director of Government Contracts and President of Government / Defense / Aero Divisions of Resilinc Corp.
- Readiness Equivalent (Q2): Interviews brought up the themes of agility and meeting organizational objectives as being the industry equivalent to readiness. No new themes were discovered.
- Readiness Determination (Q3): Interviews brought up the themes of achieving organizational objectives, earning revenue, company growth, and customer satisfaction. However, they did not discuss readiness being tracked in their job

qualification system as a means to track training completed by employees. No new themes were discovered.

- Achieving Objectives (Q4): Interviews brought up the themes of targeted hiring, compensation, alignment of employee skills with their role in the organization and onboarding new employees. No new themes were discovered.
- Control of Readiness (Q5 and Q5a): This question was not discussed.
- HC Influence on Readiness (Q6): Interviews brought up the themes of leveraging HC for strategic advantage and investing significant resources into developing their HC. No new themes were discovered.
- Ways to Improve Readiness (Q7): No themes were discovered from this question.
- Readiness Best Practices (Q8): Interviews brought up the themes of employee empowerment, job satisfaction, flexibility, organizational culture, compensation, employee growth opportunities, and data-focused decision-making. No new themes were discovered.
- What Employee's Value (Q9): Interviews brought up that employees valued empowerment to have control over their work, organizational culture, and compensation. They confirmed the theme of flexibility. No new themes were discovered.
- Management of IN&D (Q9a): Interviews confirmed the theme that they strive to meet IN&D for employee job satisfaction. No new themes were discovered.
- Managing Employee Skills (Q10): Interviews echoed the theme of accessing employee skills through frontline managers. No new themes were discovered.
- What Would Change if King/Queen (Q11): No themes were discovered from this question.

d. Industry Subgroup 4 Analysis: Interviews 6 and 7 (n=3)

- Role in Organization (Q1): Former HR business Partner, Senior Manager / Federal Practice lead, and Chief Executive officer / Founder
- Readiness Equivalent (Q2): Interviews brought up the themes of agility and meeting organizational objectives as being the industry equivalent to readiness. No new themes were discovered.
- Readiness Determination (Q3): Interviews brought up the themes of achieving organizational objectives, earning revenue, company growth, and customer satisfaction. No new themes were discovered.
- Achieving Objectives (Q4): Interviews brought up the themes of targeted hiring, compensation, alignment of employee skills with their role in the organization and onboarding new employees. No new themes were discovered.
- Control of Readiness (Q5 and Q5a): No themes were discovered from this question.
- HC Influence on Readiness (Q6): Interviews confirmed the themes of leveraging HC for strategic advantage and of investing significant resources into developing their HC. No new themes were discovered.
- Ways to Improve Readiness (Q7): No themes were discovered from this question.
- Readiness Best Practices (Q8): Interviews brought up the themes of employee empowerment, job satisfaction, flexibility, organizational culture, compensation, employees growth opportunities, and data-focused decision-making. No new themes were discovered.
- What Employee's Value (Q9): Interviews brought up that employees valued empowerment to have control over their work, organizational culture, and compensation. They did not discuss flexibility. No new themes were discovered.

- Management of IN&D (Q9a): Interviews brought up that they strive to meet IN&D for employee job satisfaction. No new themes were discovered.
- Managing Employee Skills (Q10): Interviews brought up the theme of accessing employee skills through frontline managers. They emphasized the necessity of employee development. No new themes were discovered.
- What Would Change if King/Queen (Q11): No themes were discovered from this question.

e. Conclusion

The above comparison of thematic findings for each question shows how we progressed through the project to eventually realize thematic saturation. The comparison of themes mapped to each question in the different subgroups showed us that the same themes were being repeated and that nothing new was being gained from additional interviews. Not all questions generated theme. Some interviewees were reluctant to respond to Q5 and Q7—who controls policies and ways the organization can improve. Additionally, Q11—what would you change if king/queen—provided a variation in responses, which we accredited to them being opinionative thus generating no themes. We stopped conducting further industry interviews because of reaching thematic saturation. The last interviews did not provide any more unique thematic responses.

E. THEMATIC FINDINGS (MANUALLY CAPTURED AND VALIDATED)

The key findings in this report originated from interviews and the focus group. These key findings emerged from the interviewees' consistent responses and overlapping themes. Diverse groups of personnel from different backgrounds, experiences, and expertise consistently brought up the same topics and perspectives, owing to the importance and relevance of our findings regarding Air Force Readiness.

1. Definition of Readiness

Readiness is understood differently based on experience and longevity. Definitions vary from whether you are green or red in the system to a more strategic outlook focused

on mission objectives. This variance affects the Air Force's culture and reception of Air Force Readiness objectives and implementation. Today, more than ever, we need to understand and achieve Air Force Readiness to deter enemy actions and engage strategic threats. This thought is shared by retired CMSAF Gerald Murry, who, on a recent panel, stated that "demonstration of readiness is what will keep us out of a kinetic fight" (G. Murray, personal communication, 9 Nov 23). However, a side effect of an ambiguous understanding of readiness is the lack of ability to capture and evaluate it properly.

2. Capacity vs. Capability

When determining our readiness, we evaluate requirements in terms of capacity but do not truly consider capability. We may require a certain skill level and rank for personnel as required by a Unit Type Code (UTC) or tasking notification, but we do not factor if that individual is the right fit and is mentally capable for the tasks at hand. Interviewees highlighted that we need to consider whether the individual has the right skillset for the deployment based on location or other requirements. Capacity looks at personnel as ones and zeros, whereas a capability outlook factors in the whole person concept and mission alignment. For example, one interviewee questioned the need for twelve aircraft and a large support force because our requirements call for it, or if we could fulfill the need with a smaller and more capable force. Focusing on capability could achieve the required results and outcomes with less input, resulting in an increased readiness posture.

3. Levels of Experience

We observed that the experience of Air Force personnel seemed to influence their understanding of Air Force Readiness. Interviews highlighted that the level of experience corresponds to years served, where personnel have worked, and what strategic initiatives or policymaking they have been exposed to. These factors determined the variability in the understanding of readiness among personnel. Interviewees concurred that we could counter this variation through educating the force on readiness. Knowledge and practice—reps and sets—provide the missing link in understanding. Several interviewees believed that this begins at the Wing, or installation, level. Interviewees suggested that the Air Force needs to increase education, training, and exposure to readiness concepts and practices amongst

its Airmen. From junior to senior, this is a career-long initiative that can have lasting impact across the force.

4. Air Force Culture: Warfighter vs. Peacetime State Mentality

For the past several years, most Airmen have only experienced a peacetime state. Interviewees highlighted that though we have been continuously engaged in conflicts and deploying warfighters across the globe, the operations tempo has not been as high as it has been in the past. They believe that this has resulted in Airmen developing a peacetime mentality. Not all Air Force interviewees agreed wholeheartedly, but all concurred that this mentality depends on functional areas and career choice. For example, Air Force Special Forces Command maintain a high warfighter mentality while functional areas such as dental or contracting may have a different mentality due to low proximity to threats. These differences affect the Air Force's readiness culture, as Airmen are lacking the motivation and buy-in to maintain a warfighter mentality and a high state of readiness.

Interviewees highlighted that this peacetime state of mentality begs the question of are we ready for the next fight? This lack of having a warfighter mentality comes down to Airmen's perspectives on what and why we do what we do. Many younger Airmen do not see value in readiness exercises but view them as some sort of hindrance to their daily lives. However, interviewees believed they should be viewing readiness exercises and training as preparatory actions for what will be required of them. Some interviewees highlighted the need to educate the force on strategic objectives so that they understand the "why." Through the force understanding the why, they will develop more of a warfighter mentality across the force and shift the culture positively. Cultural change is needed to get members to look and think of readiness in a broader way.

5. Military Readiness = Industry Agility

The industry equivalent to readiness is organizational agility, the ability to respond to problems, meet priorities, and accomplish objectives effectively. Our first industry interview shared the term agility, which they defined as their ability to respond to their customer's needs in a way that ensures mission accomplishment. Other interviewees concurred that agility paralleled readiness within industry and added that agility also

involves the company's flexibility and how it is structured to meet objectives. The only difference in the definition of agility was what the specific objectives were within the organization.

6. Readiness = Organizational Objectives

Industry personnel we interviewed worked in a variety of functional areas. Their industries ranged from technology development and management consultation to supply chain management. As different as these industries were, they all shared that the industry equivalent of readiness is agility—the company's ability to adapt and meet objectives quickly. There was variation in their respective company's objectives: for some, it was profit; others were budget management, customer satisfaction, and meeting tribal goals for one organization. The DOD can apply this interpretation of achieving organizational objectives to readiness competencies.

F. OBJECTIVE I: DEFINITION OF READINESS

Our first research objective was to define what readiness is. We learned that readiness is defined very broadly across DOD documents, depending on the level and context in which it is applied. Variations in definition range from military forces' ability to meet missions demands to their ability to meet warfighting challenges while preparing for future challenges (Department of Defense [DOD], 2021; Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2017). The DOD's ability to accomplish national strategies is at the core of this definition. With this broad overarching definition, the term is understood differently at distinct levels and echelons. What has remained the same for the past several decades is the understanding that readiness is how we organize, train, and equip our forces (Herrera, 2020).

The RAND Corporation shares this simple definition of readiness, albeit using a different term. They define readiness as “preparing the necessary air forces to organize, train, equip, and provide forces to carry out operations” (Builder & Karasik, 1995). However, other functions fall under the umbrella of these three operations—organize, train, and equip. They include having efficient manpower and managing that manpower. Figure 10 depicts what Herrera considers the readiness process.

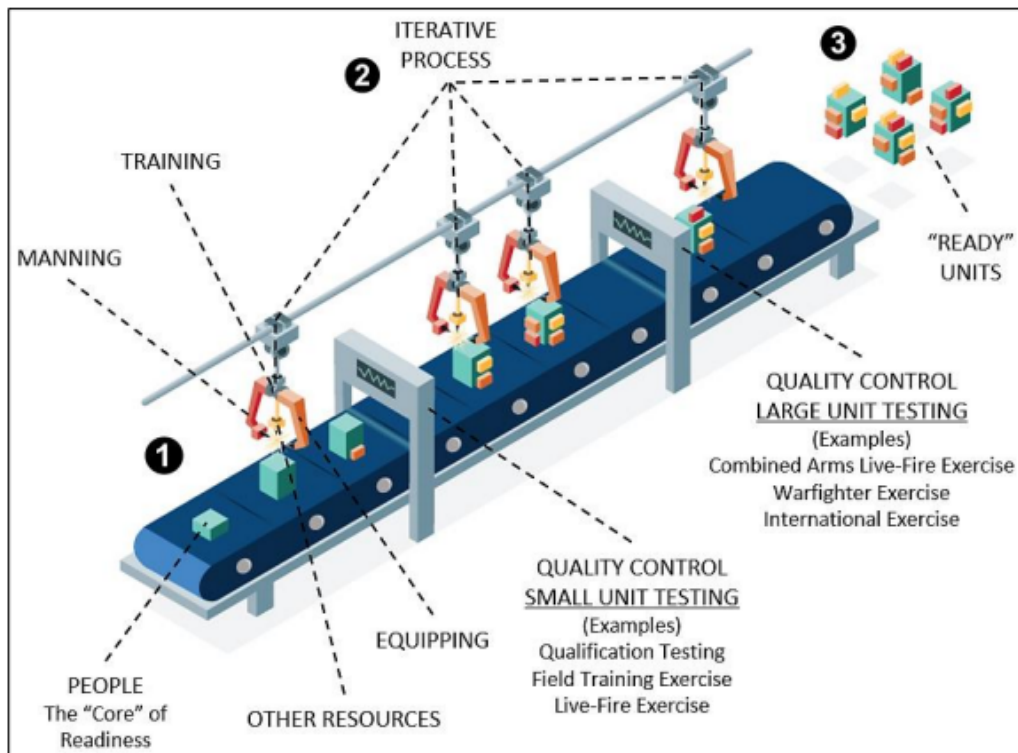


Figure 10. Unit Readiness Production Process. Source: Herrera (2020)

1. Strategic Readiness

Though there may be multiple definitions of readiness, they are all centered around the ability to generate forces to achieve missions or objectives. This ambiguity led the DOD to restructure how organizations define, understand, and capture readiness. The DOD published an update to DOD Doctrine 7730.65, DOD Readiness Reporting System, on 31 May 2023. In this updated version, the DOD coined the term strategic readiness, provided a common understanding, and produced a complete picture of how it uses strategic readiness to achieve strategies (Department of Defense [DOD], 2023). The DOD Directive defines strategic readiness as:

The requisite military power arrayed across time and space to achieve strategic ends. Looks beyond operational readiness of military forces to include supporting and complementary elements necessary to meet the defense objectives identified by the NDS. (Department of Defense [DOD], 2023, p. 14)

The DOD is also preparing to release a new DOD Instruction under the 3000 series titled “Strategic Readiness.” We received a copy of the draft instruction, which defines strategic readiness as “the ability to build, maintain, and balance warfighting capabilities and competitive advantages that ensure the DOD can achieve strategic objectives across threats and time horizons” (Department of Defense [DOD], n.d.-b, p. 9).

2. Levels of Experience

The interviews and focus group taught us that two distinct levels of understanding readiness exist in the Air Force. We classified these understandings in Figure 11 based on experience and how members defined readiness. Identifying the disparity in understanding readiness was one of our key findings. Ground-level understanding is what we classify as the entry-level view of readiness; at the entry-level, interviewees considered readiness to be a simple matter of being “greened-up”—or current—in the tracking system. This view is predominant among members who have only had operational exposure with little or no exposure to positions requiring strategic or tactical planning and thinking. Interviewees and focus group members with this experience level work at the squadron level. This viewpoint is more focused on the force’s capacity than the force’s capability and is more concerned about meeting the quota requirements of the force—being greened up.

The other level of understanding readiness is the strategic level. Interviewees with this level were more experienced than our entry-level members. They currently operate or have operated strategically, looking at matters beyond what is in front of them. They currently are or have worked in positions that expose them to operations or policies beyond the tactical viewpoint. Many interviewees currently work in staff jobs or higher-level positions affecting or implementing policies. They viewed readiness as a strategic means to accomplish national strategies, such as the National Defense Strategy (NDS), National Security Strategy (NSS), and National Military Strategy (NMS). They also valued the force’s capability over the capacity, understanding that they could meet mission needs with a smaller, capable force.

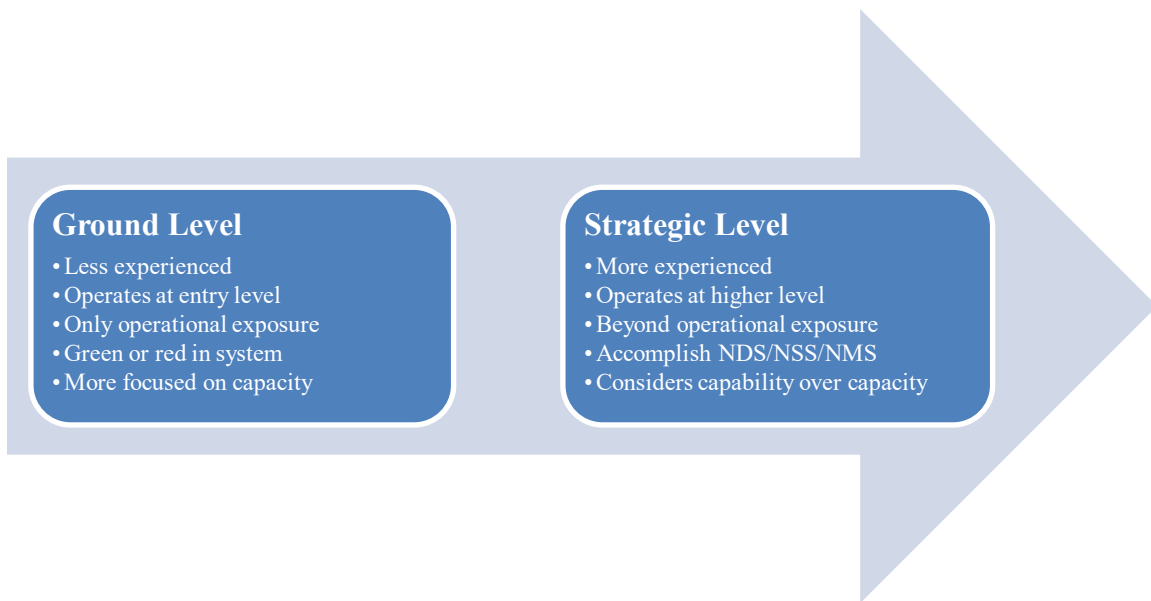


Figure 11. Readiness Levels of Understanding

3. Definition Based on Experience/Level

Interviewees at the ground level experience little exposure to strategic readiness and primarily view readiness as green or red in the medical tracking system and the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). This understanding was not only shared by interviewees but also by some members of the focus group. Contrarily, interviewees at the strategic level with more exposure to strategic readiness linked the definition of readiness with national strategies. Though definitions varied somewhat, they were all tied to how we ready the force to achieve objectives and missions. These individuals captured the importance of personnel management, training needs, organizing the force with policies and procedures, and equipping them with the tools and equipment needed to be successful.

Based on experience, the definitions viewed readiness at either face value or an analytical definition. This variance highlighted the disparity in how readiness is understood and, ultimately, the lack of readiness education given to the force. Interviewees highlighted that their understanding of readiness was primarily developed on the job. Some highlighted that Basic Military Training and Squadron Officer School taught readiness competencies, but this education and training did not continue in their operational duties. They believed this lack of repetition to be a substantial limiting factor in the Air Force's ability to project

power. This disparity in the understanding of readiness directly hinders the Air Force from achieving readiness objectives. According to our participants, this lack of understanding further decreases the warfighter mentality among younger Airmen but can be countered with education and training.

G. OBJECTIVE II: INDUSTRY BEST PRACTICES

Our second research objective was to determine what is the industry equivalent to readiness and its best practices to achieving it. The industry equivalent to readiness is organizational agility—the ability to respond to problems and priorities and effectively meet organizational objectives. These concepts are not foreign to the Air Force, but we implement them differently. Our organizational objectives and to whom we are responsible contribute to these differences. Though implementation varies, our research found that industry shares similar difficulties as the Air Force. However, the difference is that industry has more flexibility and autonomy to implement changes to solve these difficulties.

1. Industry Flexibility to Implement Changes

Industry places more responsibility at the front-line manager level than the Air Force. The companies interviewed highlighted that though they ultimately answer to someone, they are empowered with the flexibility to make decisions and manage their workforce, allowing them to move at the “pace of necessity.” Leadership sets the strategic objectives and parameters in which they can operate. As such, lower-level managers have the flexibility to quickly implement changes that align with the organization’s strategic objectives. As a result, employees feel more empowered, increasing job satisfaction and yielding faster results instead of routing every request up the chain of command and waiting for the request to go through the bureaucratic process. The Air Force currently operates in a bureaucratic manner, in which it takes significant time to make any changes. In contrast, industry operates more fluidly to implement changes at lower levels.

One significant industry flexibility discovered in interviews was its ability to utilize its workforce strategically. Industry understands the value of HCM as a strategic and competitive advantage and strives to create value in this area. They individualize the

development of employees by listening to their needs and striving to accomplish them. By taking action at lower levels, managers can provide a more individualized approach to develop better, reward, and structure their workforce. These actions may include hiring, promoting, reutilizing, or firing personnel based on observation. Interviews found that some managers approach this using the 9-box model shown in Figure 12. This model is an assessment tool used to assess employees' current and potential contribution levels to the organization (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2022).

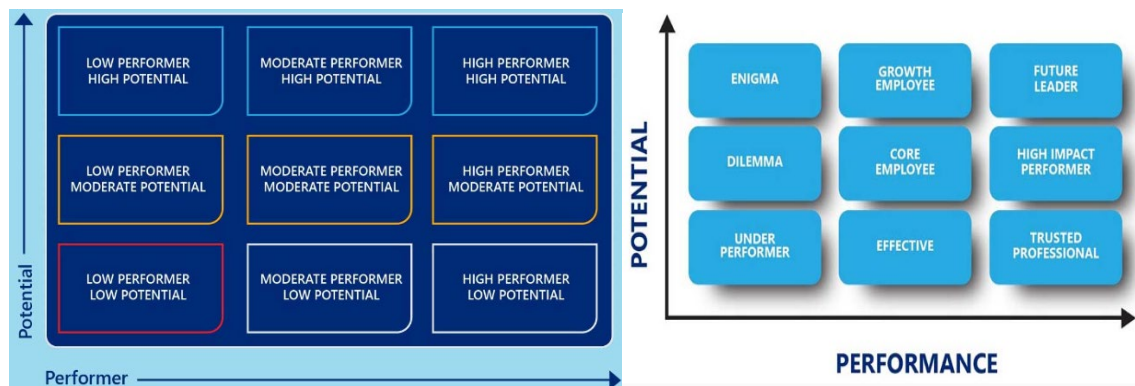


Figure 12. 9-Box Grid and Key Employee Attributes in the Grid. Source: Talent Management Institute [TMI] (2021)

This individualized approach allows managers to make changes or take controlled risks quickly. It also allows them to revert changes and make corrections at speed. If they placed an individual in a particular position and were not performing, managers could quickly remove that individual or transfer them somewhere they are better suited. The same approach was shared if a manager implemented a strategy that failed to achieve organizational objectives. This flexibility is a best practice for industry and plays a massive role in building employee commitment. The lower-level flexibility in industry allows for faster implementation of changes. It also allows for a more individualized approach to personnel management at the lower-level manager level. The Air Force can become more effective by adopting this approach instead of restricting authority for change and workforce utilization to a higher level.

2. Culture / Employee Commitment

By taking an individualized approach to HCM, industry builds a commitment from their employees, where the employees feel loyal to managers and the organization because they created a culture and norms of striving for employee satisfaction. This culture of employee satisfaction and commitment to the organization results in the organization getting its return on investment, as the employee would strive to avoid disappointing or letting down the manager or the organization. This commitment is similar to the concept in the Air Force we regard as “buy-in.” This culture also speaks to our Air Force Core Values, which is an aspiration for all Airmen to always do their best in everything they do (US Air Force, 2022). However, the difference lies in how industry actively incentivizes and creates a culture for buy-in, whereas the Air Force presents it as the expectation. Industry achieves this buy-in by meeting the needs of the employees who, in turn, go above expectations to take care of the organization. They focus on developing talent versus managing positions, looking at the organization for what needs to change for employees to succeed.

3. Development Opportunities/Human Capital Management

Throughout our interviews, we learned that industry focuses on developing its personnel. Interviewees highlighted that employees remain with an organization for a variety of reasons. These reasons ranged from monetary compensation to promotion opportunities to benefits. Like the Air Force, the organization had to find a way to retain and develop its talent. This goal is achieved within industry through flexibility and quickly providing developmental opportunities at lower levels, unlike the Air Force’s time-based approach. These opportunities were education, training, or the potential to explore other functional areas. For instance, one of the interviewed companies was a technology development company. The Chief Engineer valued his role because it allowed him to develop himself and his craft by exploring new, innovative approaches. He is just one example of industry merging the organization’s needs with the individual’s desires to yield positive outcomes.

HCM was a theme throughout our interviews and research. Industry allowed managers to “hire fast and fire fast.” They can incentivize employees by associating their pay with their performance. They also can implement modern state-of-the-art HCMS rapidly. This agility is thanks to the small amount of different operating systems and requirements they may support, mitigating migration issues. Their systems evolve and grow alongside the organization, providing them flexibility and the ability to remain current with technological changes by leveraging third-party cloud systems (Hughes, 2017). Their use of HCMS affects their ability to achieve their bottom line and champion the organization’s culture.

4. Responsibility

Industry has different levels of responsibility than the government. While they are responsible to their shareholders, owners, customers, and employees, their primary objective is meeting their bottom line. In contrast, the government is responsible to their department’s leadership and the public. Our actions are answerable to many parties and are subject to civilian oversight and control, whereas companies are restricted only by law and strategic decisions. The lack of strict control gives them more flexibility in their strategic decision-making. Not being subjected to civilian control allows for more stability in making and implementing long-term strategic plans. They are not beholden to leadership that changes every several years and is not influenced by politics. This flexibility allows the industry to implement actions that may be ethically questionable in the public eye but still benefit the company. Examples of such actions include outsourcing American jobs to cheap overseas labor markets with lesser ethical work environment requirements. While this could be seen as political suicide for a congressperson, this simply increases a company’s profit margins.

H. OBJECTIVE III: CONSTRAINTS ON AIR FORCE READINESS PREVENTING BEST PRACTICES IMPLEMENTATION

Our third objective in this project was to research what constraints prevent the Air Force from implementing and adopting industry best practices. These findings were generated from interviews. Information was generated by asking interviewees if they know

of any industry best practices. We then asked if they knew of any constraints or LIMFACS to the Air Force adopting those best practices. Information was also generated via conversation where constraints arose from different topics.

1. AFFORGEN Implementation

The AFFORGEN Model is the Air Force's replacement for its twenty-year-old expeditionary force presentation model (Air Force, 2023). Coupled with this implementation is the roll-out of other readiness initiatives, such as Agile Combat Employment (ACE) and Ready Airman Training (RAT), each steered towards increasing our forces' capability to meet mission needs. The implementation of this new system has been challenging. One interviewee described it as the Air Force building the plane as it flies, with the first release being just the concept of the system itself, with later releases projected for implementation. AFFORGEN aims to break away from the typical approach of presenting forces for deployment. It will place Airmen into a four-phase, twenty-four-month cycle. It will also give commanders more flexibility in utilizing forces under their command. However, the structure of AFFORGEN itself presents a constraint in the Air Force's ability to achieve readiness objectives.

Currently, a unit may have all members showing as current—or green—in DRRS and the medical reporting system, which are used to track individual and unit readiness, with the expectation of not deploying all of them simultaneously. However, with the new AFFORGEN system, installation commanders can pull all members showing as current. This could deplete a unit's home station manning below acceptable levels to meet expeditionary mission needs. The AFFORGEN participants also highlighted another LIMFAC in the Air Force's ability to achieve readiness effectively. Though members may be current in the system, they may genuinely not be ready to deploy as other factors, such as mental well-being or family issues, prevent them from deploying.

The AFFORGEN roll-out highlighted LIMFACs in how we have been determining the readiness of individuals and units. It identified that there may be more efficient means of tracking Air Force Readiness than simple medical readiness tracking. It also identified that we have been reporting readiness inefficiently because all personnel cannot be

deployed—some will be needed to sustain garrison missions. While medical reporting presents a LIMFAC, medical readiness plays a significant role in Air Force Readiness. Airmen need to be physically and mentally prepared to accomplish mission objectives. Though we may always be effective in meeting mission needs, we may need to be more efficient in our approach and execution.

2. Capacity vs. Capability

When capable Airmen operate in capable, functional areas, we can achieve a high state of readiness. Both the Airmen and the organization must be capable. Airmen must be capable of filling the required roles, and the organization must be able to equip the Airmen with the tools, training, and resources needed to achieve objectives. In the past, the Air Force trained to the requirements of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) combatant commanders instead of training to the Unit Type Code (UTC) description. Our focus for many years has been the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which has limited our capability to respond to other threats (Department of Defense [DOD], n.d.-a). UTCs are the units of capability needed to deploy to support mission objectives (Snyder & Mills, 2004). The type and number of UTCs needed are determined based on the destination's current infrastructure condition, the type and number of aircraft bedded down, the base population, and the level of threat exposure. Interviews highlighted that little consideration is placed on the capability of the forces being selected to fill the UTC. Instead, the focus is on the destination, which for a long time was USCENTCOM.

Multiple organizations that affect the capability of our forces present another LIMFAC. Career Field Managers (CFMs) are focused on developing and maintaining the capability needed for their specific career field (Omari, 2000; Outsey, 2023). In contrast, Air Force Major Commands (MAJCOMs) are focused on meeting the functional or geographical mission objectives levied on them with fulfilled capacity (Air and Space Force Association, 2013). These differing objectives exemplify how the Air Force's organizational design is structured for function rather than capability. For ideal implementation, both parties (CFMs and MAJCOMs) need to be synchronized. Interviewees believed that by focusing on the capability of our forces, we may be able to meet our mission needs with less but more qualified personnel. Our current procedures

hinder this from being realized. However, strides are being made through AFFORGEN and Multi-Capable Airmen (MCA) initiatives. AFFORGEN allows Base commanders to conduct certification, verification, and validation (C2V) of their forces. They can now take more risks and validate that a smaller capacity can meet mission objectives. They can also leverage MCAs to do more with less, allowing more agility in implementation. This signals a transition from a capacity approach to a capability approach, which is currently a constraint on Air Force Readiness.

3. Lack of Flexibility

The Air Force lacks the flexibility to implement real-time changes. Our policies and procedures affect our ability to be more efficient in executing objectives. Like many federal agencies, it takes a significant amount of time to execute a policy change due to the bureaucratic nature of the Air Force. One department may have a beneficial change but must rely on actions from other departments. This delay may result in the change never coming to fruition due to risk aversion within the bureaucratic structure.

Additionally, there needs to be more flexibility in allowing action at lower levels. The Air Force empowers its leaders to make decisions. However, this does not apply to making changes. High-level changes like policy and regulation take a lot of time and coordination. Interviewees highlighted that leaders must consider the level of risk they are willing to take in terms of making changes. As such, we must caution vast changes as it could break the bureaucratic system.

The Air Force follows laws, implements regulations, and incorporates DOD instructions. Our regulations and laws tell us what we must do, and the instructions tell us how we should do it. We stand responsible for executing numerous legislative requirements, including old policies and regulations that have been outdated for several years. This results in Air Force personnel operating with old instructions. Another critical constraint with old legislatures and outdated regulations is that they require us to maintain multiple systems to satisfy their requirements. The Air Force currently has over 1,200 HCMS. Some of which provide or support only superfluous information.

4. Differing Goals

The basis behind person-organization fit is the alignment of personnel with an organization's culture. Aligning individual values with those of the Air Force would result in a better fit and strengthen Airmen's commitment to the organization. This fit aligns the focus and goals of individuals with the organization. When Airmen's goals do not align with those of the Air Force, this creates tension between the two objectives, never able to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. The entire DOD struggles with achieving this due to operating with an all-volunteer force.

Interviews found that Air Force personnel do not fully understand readiness at the individual level. Some do not understand that Air Force policies and regulations are developed to achieve higher-level strategic objectives. While at the higher levels, leaders may not fully understand or grasp their personnel's individual needs and desires (IN&D). Those who do may need more support to make positive changes due to the bureaucratic structure of the force. This differing understanding and goals create further divide and set back the Air Force from achieving readiness objectives.

5. Multiple Missions at Different Levels

Though all units aim to meet readiness needs to achieve the mission, the mission may vary at distinct levels. There is a collective mission objective at the DOD level, followed by each component down to individual units. LIMFAC emerges in synchronizing the different missions to ensure they align with the collective mission. Figure 13 is a diagram of a readiness framework in which each unit's mission contributes to the collective mission.

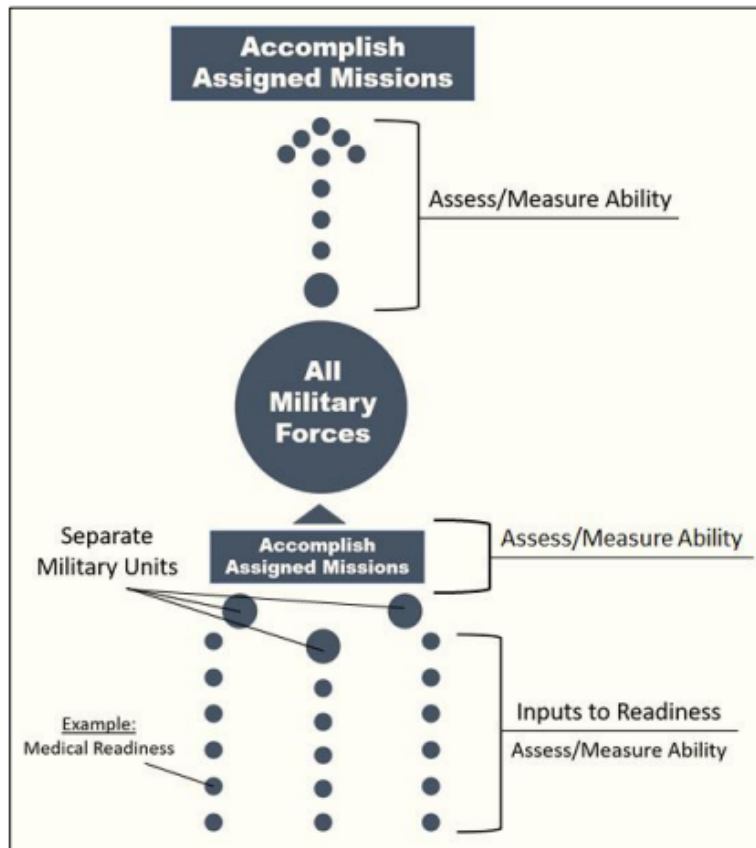


Figure 13. Readiness Framework. Source: Herrera (2020)

Some interviewees highlighted that we have the best minds constantly tackling and fixing these problems. We struggle at anticipating what and when problems will arise. We also need help with our agility and flexibility to quickly and efficiently react to new problems due to our structured policies and procedures. Our lack of agility to react is partly because of how we are structured and controlled.

6. Civilian Control of the Military

Civilian military control was enshrined by the founding fathers (Marion, 1986; McInnis, 2020). Civilian control of the military means the military is subordinate to the civilian authority. The military is subordinate to civilian authorities' priorities, principles, objectives, and ideologies. The thought behind this structure is Convergence Theory—by having civilian leadership, the military will become more civilianized, infused with societal norms and expectations, ultimately creating the product of a citizen-soldier (Bledsoe, 2023;

Carter, 2019). Civilian control can result in inconsistencies, a lack of flexibility, and a lag in implementing changes due to increased bureaucracy. For example, each year, the United States Armed Forces goes through end-strength authorization to determine the maximum number of personnel authorized for the DOD (Kapp, 2023). This ebb and flow of authorizations could result in the DOD's inability to conduct predictive human capital management in pursuit of readiness.

Though the military is non-partisan, the civilian authorities dictating laws and policies governing the subordinate military are partisan. This dynamic is displayed in a PBS News Hour episode, where they showed military leaders pleading to lawmakers about how the downsizing of the military will impact effectiveness and ability to provide national security (PBS NewsHour, 2015). Many scholars argue that effective civilian military control must first have effective leaders in place. However, the pool of leaders is consistently shrinking, resulting in inexperienced, novice civilian leaders and increased loss of confidence in leadership (Schmidt, 2023a, 2023b; Szayna et al., 2007). The public still has much more confidence in the military than in Congress. A Gallup survey conducted in 2023 found that 60% of Americans had either a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the U.S. Military (Gallup, 2023). This percentage is astronomical compared to the poll results for Congress, where a mere eight percent had either a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence. This extreme difference in public confidence demonstrates the lack of legitimation in Congressional actions and regulations—thus decreasing confidence in civilian control of the military. In the next section, we discuss the MVPs developed in this project.

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VI. AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. RECOMMENDATIONS (FINAL MVPS)

Our research objective was to define Air Force Readiness, identify industry equivalents and best practices, and identify constraints to implementing those practices within the Air Force. We accomplished these objectives with the intent of developing MVPs to solve Air Force Readiness issues. The below MVPs were developed and refined throughout the project as we gained knowledge and conducted validated learning by testing them with interviewees.

1. Talent Marketplace Pushing Opportunities

The Air Force's Talent Marketplace provides a one-stop-shop assignment system platform for all Air Force and Space Force personnel (Whaley, 2021). It is an HCMS and can be improved to increase Air Force Readiness while meeting personnel IN&D. Talent Marketplace focuses on achieving a top Air Force talent management priority by blending mission needs and requirements with the science of assignment policy. According to the lead Talent Marketplace developer, Senior Master Sergeant Christine Johnson, the aim for the platform is to provide increased flexibility and transparency while at the same time, not sacrificing the Air Force's focus on the mission's requirements (Whaley, 2021). It is a pull-architecture application programming interface (API) that personnel can apply for, and leaders can view candidates for positions. Talent Marketplace is a step towards bringing the Air Force into the twenty-first century. However, it still has room for improvement.

Our interviews revealed the need to have the system provide a push capability. A platform with a pull API is request driven. Users request information, and the server responds with the data accordingly. On the other hand, a push API is event-driven, sending data to users as it becomes available faster than a request submitted to the system (Singhal, 2022). Currently, requirement owners can pull information from the system, with candidates only being able to view, add information, and apply for positions. With a push

capability, the system could notify candidates of positions they may be eligible for based on their profile and identified, validated skills.

Interviews found that the Air Force often struggles to fill positions, partly because candidates are not aware that they qualify. Examples of such positions are joint and special-duty positions. Having the system show candidates the positions they are eligible for would increase the system's effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency. This benefit is because all users—not just those with higher-level access—would have more information to make better career and talent decisions.

However, the increase in transparency itself presents a potential issue for its reception by the force. Transparency of vacant positions could allow personnel to experience expectation disconfirmation. The basis of the Expectation Disconfirmation Theory is that if individuals have expectations for a product or service that are not met, this will affect their performance (James, 2009; Van Ryzin, 2004). Applying and not being selected for a position without feedback could cause members to lose confidence in the system. They would be reluctant to use the system again because of prior letdowns. Not being selected could also result in members losing confidence in their leadership. A study done on the effects of expectation disconfirmation found that it affects employees' satisfaction with the support they receive from their supervisors and the organization (Penning de Vries & Knies, 2023). Having Talent Marketplace push information to candidates stands to benefit Air Force personnel, but at the same time, it has the LIMFAC of potentially causing disruption in trusting the process.

2. Implement Readiness Training

Our research found that readiness is not completely understood throughout the Air Force, as it varies by experience. Readiness is taught at Basic Military Training (BMT) but is not a focus throughout one's career. The lack of exposure to and familiarity with readiness contributes to the need for more understanding of it as a concept and its definition. Through more exposure and training on readiness, the force, as a whole, would better understand what it is and the importance of readiness in meeting the Air Force's strategic objectives. We also believe that implementation of readiness training would result

in the force having a better understanding of the “why” we must do what we do to achieve mission objectives and readiness goals.

A study in the National Library of Medicine found that when a topic is learned by repetition, personnel remember the topic better and retain the information longer (Zhan et al., 2018). The Air Force should implement training by repetition, thus increasing the retention and understanding of the information. We propose accomplishing this by embedding the training into established training platforms such as Professional Military Education (PME) and Professional Enhancement Seminars (PESs). PMEs are formal courses designed to develop leadership principles and military doctrine understanding and prepare Airmen and Guardians for positions of greater responsibility (Air Force, n.d.-a). PESs are informal leadership courses designed to augment information taught in other training platforms such as BMT, PME, on-the-job training, and Air Force Manuals (Kingery, 2022). By adding readiness training to these courses, the Air Force would increase its personnel exposure to readiness and foster holistic understanding.

This implementation could present potential setbacks. Specifically, for PMEs, these are structured classroom curriculums with a set number of hours. Interviewees highlighted the LIMFAC; there is always a struggle with updating the curriculum as there are always individuals looking to add information, while gatekeepers are trying to restrict the total amount of information included and minimize total training hours. As such, interviewees mentioned there would be pushback on implementing this MVP into PME. On the other hand, PES is informal and is managed at the installation level, making it easier to implement Air Force Readiness training into the PES curriculum. The path of least resistance we developed for implementation was to have Air Force Readiness implemented at the unit level, that is, have supervisors train their subordinates on readiness and its importance. Further recommendations are to have units implement readiness into their squadron training program to ensure that all members understand why we do specific actions and why we must have a warfighter mentality.

3. Leverage Airmen Skills

The Air Force can leverage Airmen who already possess multiple skills to achieve agility. The Multi-Capable Airmen (MCA) concept is part of the new Air Force training framework to provide a consolidated approach for Airmen to receive training to conduct a wide range of military operations globally (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 18 Sep 23). The basic concept of MCA focuses on agility. Airmen receive training on multiple skill sets or trades, to be able to provide more capability to the force. Commanders could use a smaller force to achieve the same effect. Many Airmen possess self-attained skills outside of their AFSC. Additionally, the Air Force provides a process for members to retrain from one AFSC to a new one. These members, known as re-trainees, are often experts in multiple trades. However, the MCA framework is not actively developed to leverage these untapped resources effectively.

The AFFORGEN framework places control with Wing Commanders for preparing and generating forces. Currently, there is not a system that pulls and queries prior AFSCs for developing MCA teams. Additionally, there is no way to track and validate Airmen's self-attained and self-identified skills. Leaders can manually pull Airmen's prior AFSCs and their prior skill levels in those AFSCs, but this is time-consuming. Our MVP proposal is for the system to query and provide leaders with a list of Airmen who have possessed AFSCs with specific necessary skills at a specific time. For instance, if the need is for Contract Management (Contracting) and Materiel Management (Supply) Airmen, leaders could query Talent Marketplace for a listing of all personnel possessing both AFSCs in the past. Instead of training Contracting personnel on Supply operations and procedures, leaders would realize the needed capability faster by giving a current Contracting Airman—previously a Supply Airmen—refresher training as needed. Doing this would reduce training time, along with increasing readiness and force generation capability.

This recommendation comes with possible drawbacks. One highlighted in interviews is that the ability—for installation commanders to pull individual prior AFSCs—already exists. In short, we are advocating a better and more efficient solution to an existing capability instead of filling a gap. Another LIMFAC highlighted was that Wing Commanders would be opening themselves to risks of accomplishing a shorter training

period for re-trainees. In addition, what if a re-trainee does not want to perform prior AFSC duties? What if they left that AFSC due to dissatisfaction, and the Wing Commander now requires them to perform it again? This situation could result in dissatisfaction and losing trust in the Air Force. However, the benefits outweigh the potential LIMFACS, as we stand to have better trained and capable MCA for mission employment.

B. AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

We suggest other researchers build upon this study to continue studying Air Force Readiness. Readiness is a massive, complex concept. The DOD is actively rebranding readiness and splitting it into ten different dimensions. Each of the ten new dimensions of readiness warrants new research initiatives. We suggest researching all ten dimensions as one comprehensive endeavor. Our review of the HC dimension partially touched on several other dimensions, highlighting that the readiness research would provide a better understanding and show how each dimension relates to and affects others.

We were not able to review the HC dimension in its entirety. Further research should focus on manpower policies and allocation regarding those policies. Future researchers could perform a deeper analysis of the process for implementing a change to HCM readiness policy at the DOD and Air Force levels. Doing this would map out policy change pathways, identify barriers to overcome, identify the offices that must approve, concur, or require situational awareness of the change, and develop a timeline from conception to implementation.

We suggest further research into the Air Force's new AFFORGEN model. This new model is replacing a twenty-year-old model, and its concept encountered a lot of problems immediately after initial implementation. Researching this model and other Air Force initiatives, such as MCA and RAT, which play directly into AFFORGEN would determine if the new model is more effective than its predecessor at achieving Air Force readiness for mission accomplishment. Readiness is a vast topic with many different areas, deserving further research to leverage it for better mission effectiveness.

C. CONCLUSION

This report is the culmination of a qualitative research project aimed at reviewing Air Force Readiness with a focus on human capital management and IN&D. The objective of this research was to define readiness, learn what the industry equivalent to readiness is, what the existing industry best practices of readiness are, and identify constraints that prevent the Air Force from implementing these practices. We found that readiness involves multiple domains and needs to be more easily understood, defined, tracked, reported, and implemented. We found multiple issues within Air Force Readiness surrounding how it is understood, its personnel's mentality, and the culture and existing constraints affecting making changes to it. Through interviewing industry leaders, we found that industry does have an equivalent to readiness. We discovered that the industry equivalent to readiness is agility—the organization's ability to meet objectives effectively and respond to customer needs efficiently.

We found that the Air Force and industry shared a similar outlook on readiness but differed in how it is implemented. This difference in implementation is due to who the organization is responsible to, the allotted flexibility provided, and existing policies and regulations that hinder certain actions. To help improve Air Force Readiness, we developed three MVPs. These MVPs were developed from our interviews and tested on later interviewees to conduct validated learning. We found that though each MVP has some form of LIMFAC that would affect implementation, they would still greatly benefit the Air Force. Readiness is a beast! It is crucial for the Air Force to remain effective at meeting mission needs, and much more must be accomplished to improve our abilities in this realm.

APPENDIX: FIGURES AND DATA TABLES

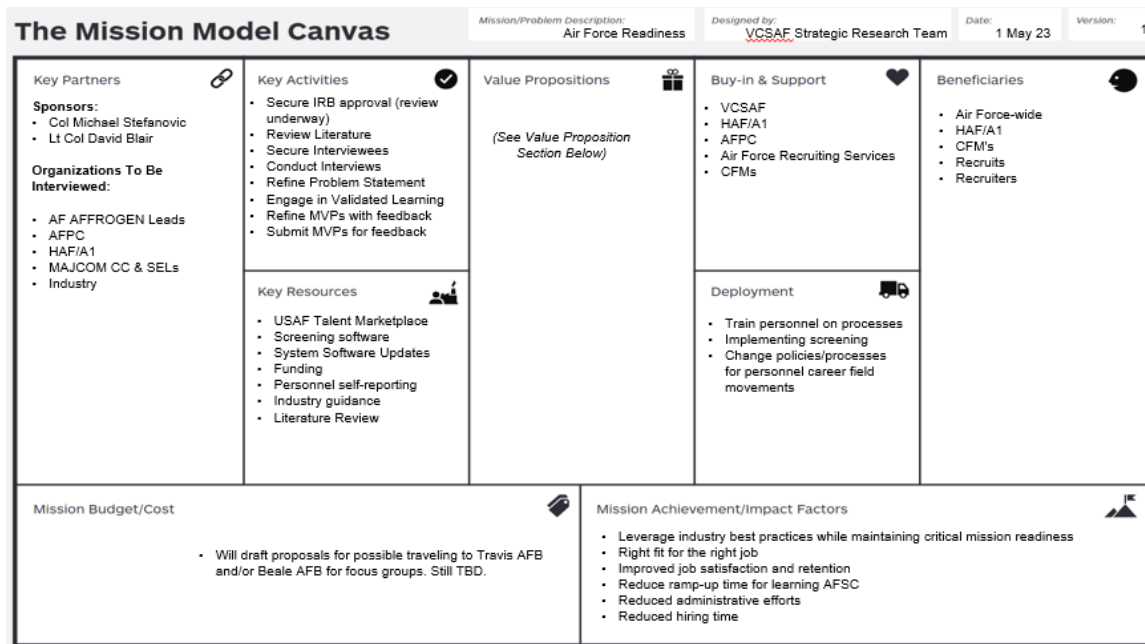


Figure 14. Mission Model Canvas. Adapted From: (Blank, 2019)

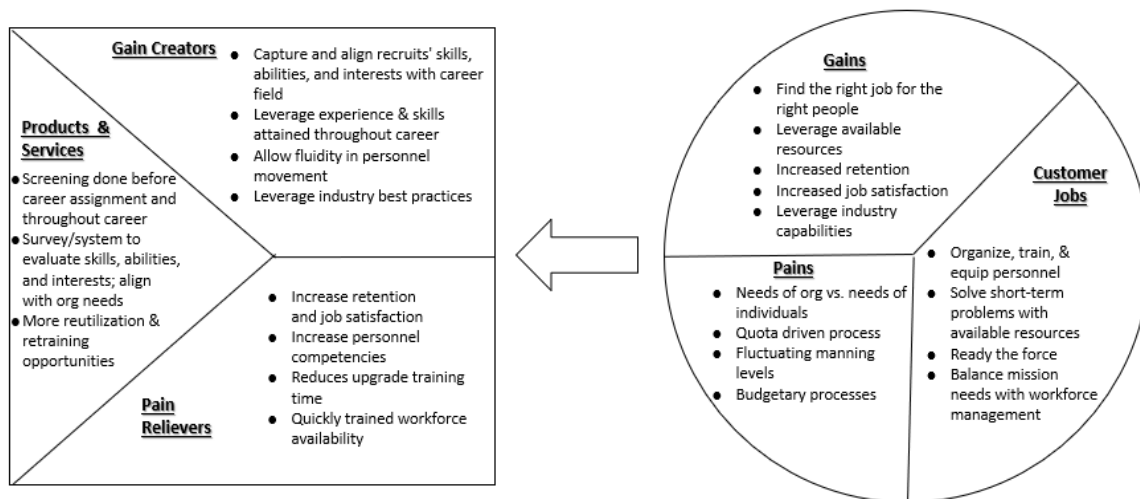


Figure 15. Value Proposition Canvas. Adapted From: (Blank, 2019)

Table 6. ChatGPT Prompts: Transcript Analysis

Initial Prompt	I am an MBA grad student working on a thesis. The topic is human capital management and how it pertains to military readiness. Further research will compare readiness between the Air Force and Industry. We have interviewed several people within the government as well as industry leaders. We want to analyze our interview transcripts using ChatGPT. I will be giving you interview transcripts as part of this analysis and will be looking for summaries and themes. I will also give you the interview questions which i will have you answer solely based on the transcripts.
Second Prompt	Here is the first transcript
	*Uploaded Government Interview 1
ChatGPT Response	I have reviewed the transcript of the interview conducted on May 31, 2023, with a focus on understanding the context and key themes related to human capital management and military readiness. The interview was part of a strategic study for the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force and involved questions about defining readiness, the integration of human capital into readiness initiatives, cultural and structural challenges in implementing new readiness initiatives, and comparisons of military readiness with industry standards.
	Summarizes key points in bullet format
Third Prompt	Please perform thematic analysis
ChatGPT Response	To conduct a thematic analysis of the interview transcript, I will identify and describe the major themes present in the text. This process involves reading through the transcript, extracting significant ideas or topics, and grouping them into themes based on their relevance to your research on human capital management and military readiness. I will now perform this analysis on the provided transcript.
	Lists relevant themes and descriptions based on transcript
Fourth Prompt	Can you provide any specific quotes that back up the themes you found?
ChatGPT Response	Certainly, here are specific quotes from the transcript that support each of the identified themes:
	Lists each theme from previous output but adds specific quotes from the transcript that supports each theme

Fifth Prompt	I will now provide you with the interview questions. Please use the information present in the transcript to assist in answering. If the question was not asked directly, please note that. If there is not sufficient information to answer the question, please note that as well. add any relevant quotes as well.
	Uploaded Government Interview Questions
ChatGPT Response	Based on the information present in the transcript, here are responses to the interview questions. If the question was not directly addressed or if there is insufficient information in the transcript to answer the question, I will note that as well.
	Lists questions in order and answers them based on the transcript
Note	This was used for thematic mapping as well as a basis for manual validation
Sixth Prompt	in 2–3 paragraphs, please summarize the interview in terms of themes and answers to the questions.
ChatGPT Response	*Provides summary of transcript*
Note	This summary was later combined with the summary of Interview 2 for subgroup analysis
Seventh Prompt	Please create a list of themes you are able to extract from the transcript with relevant details or quotes that support the theme. I will be comparing it to a future interview transcript to find similarities and differences
	The output matches the formatting in the report, with the theme name, details, and support quotes
Eighth Prompt	Should i start analyzing a new transcript in this same session or start a new one?
ChatGPT Response	You can certainly start analyzing a new transcript in this same session. I’m here to assist you with the analysis, and continuing in the same session will allow us to directly compare any new insights with the information we’ve already discussed from the previous transcript. If you have the new transcript ready, please feel free to upload it, and we can begin the analysis right away. This approach will help maintain the context and continuity of our discussion, especially if you’re looking to compare and contrast themes across different interviews.
Note	The chat session became saturated after the 6th interview analysis. A new chat window was started following this same process for Government Interviews 7–12. The process was repeated for the industry interviews.
Note	Each iteration was saved to an “Interview N Summary” document which was later ingested back into ChatGPT for Subgroup Analysis

Table 7. ChatGPT Prompts: Subgroup Analysis

Initial Prompt	I am going to now feed you the AI analysis from each government interview. It will contain the themes and summaries of each individual interviewee. I would like you to synthesis both files into a Subgroup Analysis. 3–4 paragraphs maximum. We will first start with Subgroup 1 which contains Interviews 1 and 2. Then Subgroup 2 which contains Interviews 3 and 4, and so on until Subgroup 6, which contains Interviews 11 and 12. Ready?
ChatGPT Response	Absolutely, I'm ready to assist you with synthesizing the analysis for each Government Subgroup. Please go ahead and provide the themes and summaries for each individual interview in Subgroup 1 (Interviews 1 and 2), and I'll start with creating a synthesized analysis for that subgroup. Once we're done with Subgroup 1, we can proceed to the next subgroups in the same manner.
Second Prompt	*Uploaded Interview 1 Summary and Interview 2 Summary*
ChatGPT Response	For Subgroup 1, we have summaries from two government interviews, Interview 1 and Interview 2, focusing on readiness in their respective areas within the Air Force.
	Summarizes both files individually then synthesizes them both into one paragraph
Third Prompt	Please remove names and refer to them as Interview 1 and Interview 2
Note	ChatGPT pulled the names of the individuals from the transcript and initially added them to the summaries
ChatGPT Response	*re-generates and replaces names with Interview 1 and Interview 2 or other pronouns*
Fourth Prompt	Please note overlapping themes between Interview 1 and 2
ChatGPT Response	Upon reviewing the thematic responses from Interview 1 and Interview 2, here are the overlapping themes identified:
	Lists themes that were present across both interviews
Note	We continued this process until all Subgroup Analyses were completed for Government and Industry Subgroups

Table 8. ChatGPT Prompts: Thematic Consensus

Initial Prompt	I am going to give you the entire section of my thesis that deals with the government respondents analysis and individual and overlapping themes. Please analyze the entire section and provide a 3 paragraph summary, consolidating and synthesizing the entire section. the audience should be able to read this summary and get an idea of what the government side talked about, what they all agreed on (overlapping themes), and the general sentiment regarding readiness and human capital management.
	Uploaded entire government analysis section from report
ChatGPT Response	*Provides comprehensive summary*
Second Prompt	I am trying to identify a thematic consensus among my government interviews. Please identify the themes that one could consider as being true across all interviews, that is, themes that all government interviewees could agree with.
ChatGPT Response	Based on the comprehensive analysis of the government interview responses, the following themes emerge as key areas of agreement among all respondents:
	Identifies key themes for consensus
Third Prompt	please provide the same type of summary/ synthesis of the Industry Interview Section of the thesis as well as the overall consensus of themes.
	Uploaded entire industry analysis section from report
ChatGPT Response	The analysis of the Industry Interview Section from the thesis reveals a multi-dimensional understanding of organizational readiness, emphasizing agility, human capital management, and strategic alignment.
	Provides comprehensive summary and key themes for consensus

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