

Rebalancing Retention: Organizational Solutions for the Marine Corps Career Planning Program



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Abstract

This thesis investigates the structural and organizational challenges facing Marine Corps Career Counselors and the Career Planning Program amid increasing enlisted retention demands following the publication of Talent Management 2030. Using grounded analysis approach, it analyzes 25 in-depth interviews with active-duty Career Counselors across multiple billet types to identify key drivers of performance and systemic barriers within the Career Planning Program. This research informed the development of the Human Performance Drivers framework with two core dimensions: Workload Management and Resource Allocation, and a Systematic Approach to Retention. Findings reveal a disconnect between growing performance expectations and available institutional support, including staffing, training, and administrative resources. To identify actionable recommendations, the thesis also includes a comparative case analysis of the Marine Corps' recruiting and retention structures, highlighting transferable practices from Marine Corps Recruiting Command that may enhance the Career Planning Program.

Methods

Phase I:

- 25 Semi-structured interviews with active-duty Career Counselors
- Grounded analysis of interviews
- Developed Human Performance Drivers Framework

Phase II:

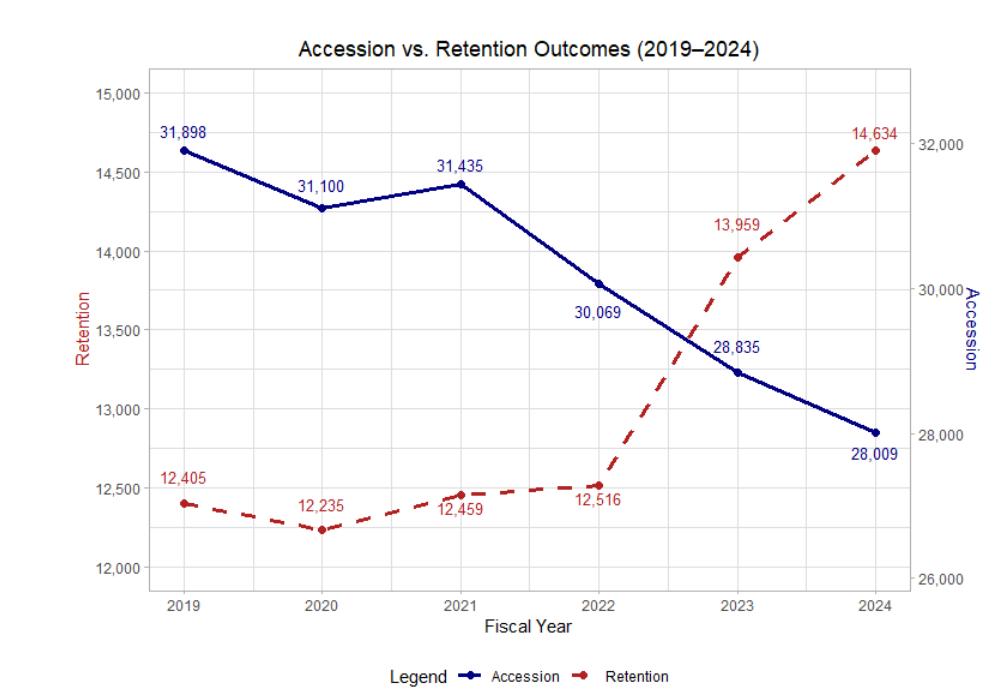
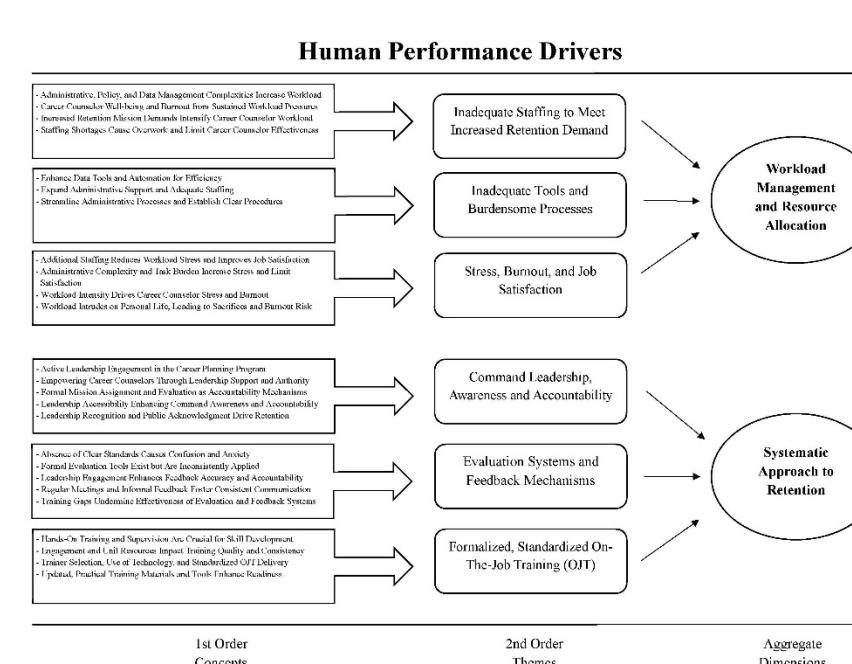
- Comparative case analysis of MCRC and the Career Planning Program
- Examined structures, mission, training design, and statistical trends

Interview Highlights:

"Great command leadership is the bread and butter of whether the retention mission is going to survive or die" – Sgt, USMC

"I don't think it's negative on retention...It's negative in nature to me because I feel like I'm always working...I didn't have that before." – SSgt, USMC

"We're Marines, right, we adapt...but I think having an extra guy or girl there is a tremendous help." – SSgt, USMC



Conclusion

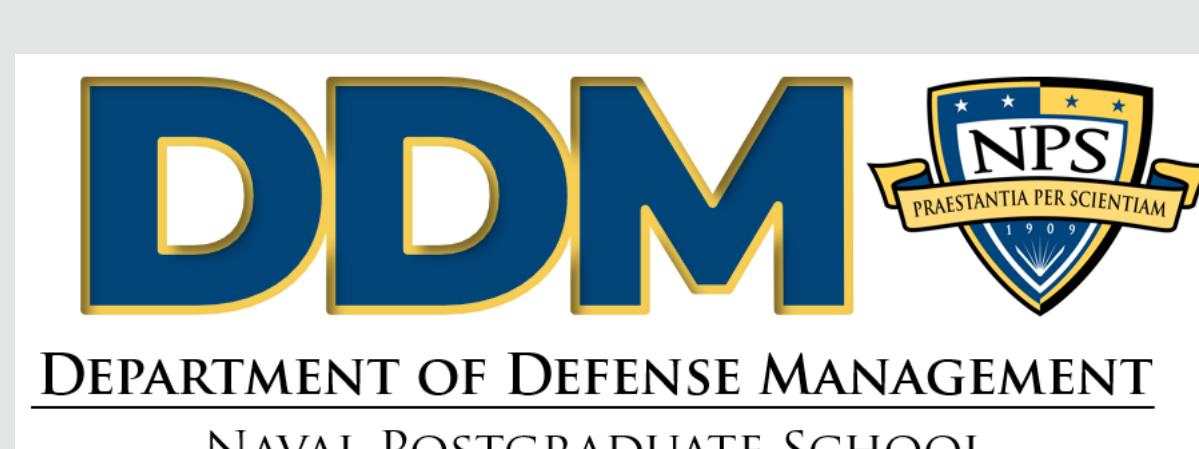
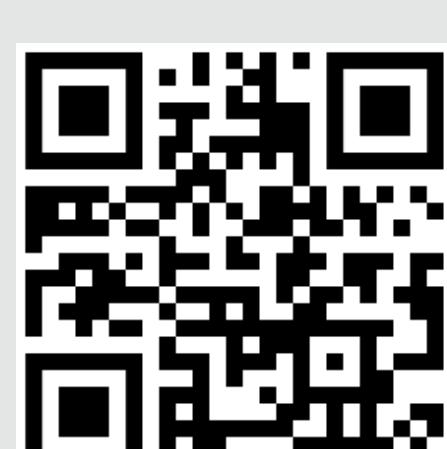
- Retention demands have increased in both volume and complexity since 2022
- Despite greater command engagement, program resources remain stagnant, straining the retention workforce
- Improvement is needed to sustain a Career Counseling force capable of meeting rising retention demands

Recommendations

- Create a service-level retention leader to provide greater program advocacy
- Increase Career Counselor staffing for large commands
- Develop structured training to fill identified gaps

Future Research

- Evaluate how best to implement recommendations
- Evaluate the administrative processes in the retention enterprise to develop process improvements



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