

## **RAF Culture and Ethos in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Kate Haysman & Dawn Johansen**

**Command Scientific Support Branch**

**Headquarters Royal Air Force Personnel & Training Command**

**United Kingdom**

The 1998 UK Strategic Defence Review aimed to modernise and reshape the British Armed Forces to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It recognised that the pattern of demands on our military was very different from that of the Cold war, and that the international environment in which Service personnel operated was in many ways more demanding. The Royal Air Force's (RAF) organisational structure and working practices have changed to meet the needs of joint expeditionary warfare and the emphasis on defence diplomacy. In particular, the use of our armed forces to support diplomacy in efforts to deter or manage crises, from humanitarian missions to UN embargos and peacekeeping. These aspects, combined with the continuing need to recruit, train, sustain and retain high quality personnel have resulted in raising the importance of issues such as; what attitudes and behaviours the military expect from their members throughout their careers and, how these should be inculcated and developed in recruits. In effect, the RAF is attempting to identify what it expects of its members and to make those expectations more explicit to its recruits upon joining and throughout their Service career. Consequently, a number of studies have been undertaken concerning RAF culture and ethos in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In particular, the RAF has recently issued the 'Core Values and Standards' booklet to all personnel and is in the process of formally defining RAF ethos and developing a strategy for reinforcing and maintaining it.

Like many other countries whose military are volunteers, the majority of UK recruits are from the younger end of the British population. These groups, generally known as generation X (i.e. individuals born in the 1970s) and generation Y (i.e. individuals born after 1980 –81) have experienced and are affected by a wide variety of societal changes. Although there are differences between the two groups, it is accepted that there are also commonalities. They are 'permissive' with the emphasis on individual rights rather than responsibility towards the community or collective organisations; they are unimpressed by formal authority, demanding a greater autonomy than in the past; they accept as normal a greater mobility of employment; they are well educated and comfortable with technology and finally they tend to have the attitude of 'working to live' rather than 'living to work'. Although the RAF can and does encourage certain aspects which the potential recruit values, such as being seen as a well educated, highly technological force, the military ethos is based on social cohesion, the supremacy of the group interest and the values of community and of service to the Nation.

As Sir Richard Johns, the previous Chief of the Air Staff stated:

“ As a member of the RAF, you are required to make a level of personal commitment to the Service which is not asked of those in other walks of life.”

In order to prevent a mismatch between what recruits value and what the RAF wants from its members, it is important to ensure that the attitudes and behaviours expected of its personnel are made explicit and inculcated at an early a stage as possible. We at CSSB were tasked to undertake a study to investigate this area. Mike Court explained our initial study plans to identify and measure the essential/desirable behaviours needed to be shown by personnel in his presentation at Split in 2000 and I will now focus on the next stages of the project.

Just to remind those who attended the 36<sup>th</sup> IAMPS conference, and to inform those who were unlucky enough not to be there, the original tasking was to investigate methods of assessing behaviours in order to evaluate underlying attitudes at a specific training squadron. A review of research into attitudes and their measurement indicated that it would be more valid to concentrate on defining ‘essential/desirable’ behaviours and to identify and develop tools for measuring them directly. In addition, in view of the importance of explicitly describing what behaviours the RAF expected of it members, as mentioned earlier, the project was extended to include measurement of behaviours exhibited by RAF airmen in general and not just those in training.

As Mike explained two years ago, a number of methodologies were examined and 2 techniques, namely critical incident and repertory grid were seen to be both applicable and practical. A trial study of the two techniques indicated that the repertory grid was more useful than the critical incident for eliciting examples of desirable behaviours and was therefore the methodology used.

128 interviews were conducted with a range of RAF personnel who were considered to be subject matter experts, namely Officers and NCOs who had line management responsibility for airmen. This resulted in 118 attributes being given as examples of differences between good, average and poor airmen. As I have limited time I will just present the top 10 list of characteristics that were seen to be desirable to the RAF. These were that a good airman was reliable, hardworking, committed to the RAF, worked well in a team, had trade skills, was motivated, smartly dressed, had justifiable self-confidence, was intelligent and honest.

The next stage of the research was to produce a usable list of common actual observable behaviours. Content analysis of the interviews was carried out which produced a list of over 200 separate behaviours. Obviously, this number would be unworkable for the purpose of designing a tool to measure behaviour and needed to be reduced. Therefore similar behaviours were clustered into groups and then an overall title given to each group. Table 1 gives one example of the behaviour clusters and those observable behaviours, which illustrate it.

Table 1 Behaviour Cluster and Examples of Behaviour

<b>SHOWS RESPECT</b>
Respects others eg private space, views etc
Does not have or show personal biases
Knows not to cross the rank line
Doesn't talk about others behind their backs
Stands up when senior ranks enter the room
Will use title ('Sir/Rank') appropriately
Knocks on the doors of seniors
Respects age
Uses salute appropriately
Will stand by chain of command's decision and explain it to the troops (even if disagrees)
Accepts boundaries set by others even if does not agree

In order to identify whether the list generated would be a useful list of behaviour clusters and whether the specific behaviours given would distinguish between good, average and poor airmen, across the whole of the RAF, a further 34 one to one interviews were carried out with a range of personnel. Participants were asked to comment on the clusters and rank them in order of importance. They were then asked to think of real airmen and indicate how frequently a good; an average; and a poor airman demonstrated each behaviour on the list. The results were then analysed to see if the frequency of behaviours correlated with whether an airman was thought of as good, average or poor. The behaviour cluster list was refined following this validation study. This list was then used as a basis for an instrument to measure behaviours of recruits. The prototype is being called the Behavioural Assessment Tool (BAT) until we can think of a better title!

The BAT is currently being trialled at the Recruit Training Squadron at RAF Halton. Instructors are using it to assess the behaviours of around 180 trainees. These trainees will be followed through their trade training (e.g. engineer and medical training) onto their first posting. Results from the BAT and performance markings from the normal RAF appraisal procedures will be compared to establish whether the BAT has predictive validity (i.e. whether it can predict which trainees will become 'good' airmen). Comparisons will also be made between the different trade groups (i.e. engineers and medics) to establish if the behaviours identified are consistent across the RAF or whether they are trade dependent. Statistical analyses will also be undertaken to identify any areas in which the behaviour cluster list can be reduced.

Hopefully, this research will provide a list of common behaviours that are seen to be important throughout the RAF. To modify Reber's definition of organisational culture, this would provide a **common** system that codes the manner in which RAF personnel interact within their social and physical environment.