SOCIETAL FACTORS, ATTITUDES AND DESIRABLE BEHAVIOURS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL

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ABSTRACT

As with any major organisation, the Royal Air Force must recruit its personnel from a population of young people which has been subject to greater societal changes in recent years than has been the case in the more distant past. Recruits' expectations of what is expected of them and of what they, in turn, expect from their employer are also changing. In particular, we need to be clear about what attitudes and essential/ desirable behaviours we wish our personnel to exhibit. A review of the literature on research into the link between attitudes and behaviours suggested that the most fruitful way ahead would be to concentrate on essential/desirable behaviours and to develop tools to measure them directly. There has been extensive research on work behaviour, much of it focusing on the identification of critical skill areas relevant to collective success in the workplace. How generalisable the findings of these studies are to other organisations, and in particular to the UK military, however remains questionable. This paper will describe our initial study plans to define and measure the essential/desirable behaviours to be exhibited by RAF Personnel. These behaviours are those which should be displayed throughout a successful individual's entire service career, after being inculcated during initial periods of training.

1.	The Royal Air Force needs to recruit, train and retain high quality personnel. As such, it must consider both the expectations of its recruits upon joining and, in turn, what it expects of its members. This view was reinforced in the recent Strategic Defence review by the strong commitment to 'people' issues. This paper focuses upon recent and ongoing work in the Command Scientific Support Branch on the elicitation of attitudes and desirable behaviour in the context of a wide range of changing societal factors.

2.	The Services must accept that the population from which they recruit is, and has been, subject to a wide range of societal changes over the past 10 to 20 years. There exists a growing culture of individualism, with society being more 'permissible' leading to a far greater emphasis on individual rights, and less on responsibility towards the community or collective organisations. The Services, by contrast, have a ethos based on social cohesion, the supremacy of the group interest, and the values of community and national service. At the same time, we need to encourage individualism in leadership, initiative and self-confidence.

3.	Finding the right balance between the rights and expectations of individuals and the collective needs of the Services will be a major challenge as the latter seek to maintain their operational effectiveness. Although some potential recruits will find the ethos of the Services to be incompatible with their individual expectations, there is, on the other hand, evidence that it is the somewhat different ethos and values of the Services which draws many high quality recruits.

4.	Life-long learning is a trend, which seems likely to continue with more people pursuing full-time education at some stage in their working life. In general, these trends match the requirements of the Armed Forces for improved cognitive skills and greater individual responsibility, but present the Services with new challenges for meeting increased expectations. To attract and retain high quality recruits, the Services will have to match the career aspirations of an older and better-educated workforce. This in turn will mean the provision of progressive training and career opportunities in competition with other potential employers.

5.	In summary, the Services will need to ensure that those values and behaviours which it expects of its personnel are made explicit and inculcated at as early a stage as possible in our recruits' service. This training can only be effective if we understand what attitudes and behaviours are being bought in by our new recruits, in order that essential and desirable behaviours are then acquired and reinforced throughout our personnel's careers.

6.	We, therefore, need to assess the attitudes of our new recruits, at an early a stage as possible, to assist our training staff to inculcate the values and ethos which are necessary for an efficient and effective force. Our preliminary research on attitudes and attitude measurement lead us to the conclusion that there are a number of significant problems associated with relating behaviours to attitudes. Although evidence has been found to support a link between attitudes and behaviours, the relationship appeared not to be reliable. The study was therefore refocused to attempt to measure behaviours directly, rather than linking them to specific attitudes. Our task is to identify the core 'essential/desirable' behaviours vital to success, both in initial recruit training and throughout an individual's Service career.

7.	Our initial requirement was to develop tools to measure these 'core behaviours'. A wide range of techniques for identifying behavioural dimensions was reviewed and evaluated. Most of these came from job analysis and performance appraisal techniques. Two examples of those reviewed and discarded are:

a.	The Position Analysis Questionnaire: a structured job analysis questionnaire. This was rejected since, although it would provide a broad job picture, it was felt inadequate to define specifically effective and ineffective behaviour.

b.	The Working Group Technique: this would involve an open discussion, between senior management and other personnel, to arrive at a consensus of which behaviours were considered

to be effective/desirable. This approach was rejected as being unsystematic, and heavily influenced by the seniority of the group members. Further, its output would be unlikely to be based on observable and quantifiable data.

8.   The 2 techniques which are being adopted and critical incident and repertory grid. Both seek to identify observable behaviours from individuals who are familiar with the job, and enquire directly about the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of those behaviours. Analysis of the information from the critical incident technique should identify the behaviours which make the difference between success and failure in a particular job setting. The repertory grid technique elicits bi-polar dimensions which are important to an individual's perception of the job. The technique is particularly versatile, for example, it has been used to investigate how a newly introduced organisational culture, aimed to improve the organisation's competeness shifted values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours within the work force. It clarified 5 main issues contrasting the established 'old' cud at improving the success of work behaviour can be evaluated and it can also find applicability in both selection and recruitment processes.

10. Our future work programme will take the form of a phased approach, as follows:

a. Initial interviews to explore the effectiveness of both the critical incident and repertory grid techniques in eliciting desirable behaviours for RAF Personnel.

b. The identification of desirable behaviours by extensive interviewing of trade Sponsors, supervisors and staff from both front-line and training units. This should generate a representative view of what are the 'effective/desirable' work behaviours. Once these behaviours have been identified, measurement methods will be investigated and, if necessary, developed.

11. This paper draws heavily on the work of past and present CSSB members. In particular, contributions from Gordon Neil and Karen White are gratefully acknowledged.