

## ALLOCATION OF THE NEXT JOB FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL

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### ABSTRACT

*Military personnel in the Royal Netherlands Army (RNLA) change jobs (within the organization!) every three years. Until 1995, the following job was chosen by the organization. Since 1995, military personnel is responsible for getting a new job. To qualify for a job, military personnel have to fill in an application form and send it to a central department.*

*This central department takes care of the preselection of candidates. All preselected candidates are invited for a job interview with the potential new manager. The manager is responsible for the final selection.*

*In 1999, when this new system was operational for almost five years, we evaluated this system of job allocation. Parties with different points of view were involved in the evaluation. We interviewed employees who are responsible for the preselection, managers who are responsible for the final selection and of course military personnel who is responsible to find a new job every three years.*

*The results of the evaluation make it possible to answer the following questions:  
To what extent has the RNLA succeeded in realizing the purposes of this system of job allocation?*

*What side-effects are caused by this system of job allocation?*

*To what extent are managers and personnel satisfied with this system?*

## **Introduction**

The Royal Netherlands Army, or RNLA, also has to deal with a changing environment. The RNLA has faced far-reaching reorganisations over the past decade, whereby the personnel complement has been reduced. These changes make new requirements of the personnel policy. Part of that personnel policy is the job allocation process for subsequent functions. The job allocation policy ensures that military personnel fulfil several functions during the course of their careers. After all, military personnel are appointed for a career, not for a specific function. In the RNLA, it is usual for military personnel to change functions every three years. The method for allocating the next function was changed radically five years ago.

Until 1995 the organisation appointed personnel to their next functions. Military personnel had a little say in the procedure. Since 1995, however, that has changed: military personnel are now themselves responsible for finding a new function: they have to apply for a function. Commanders have also been given more responsibility: they must ensure that their unit remains manned.

The new system of job allocation was evaluated in 1999. This was done using a large-scale study performed by the RNLA's Behavioural Sciences Division.

This study forms the core of this paper. In view of the scale of the study, we have decided to only look at part of it. This means that of the four sub-studies, only two will be discussed here. These are the studies into the opinions of the major players: the commanders and the individual military personnel. The opinions of these players have been mapped out using various methods. The commanders study was of a qualitative nature; the study into the opinion of the individual personnel was chiefly quantitative. Together, the two sub-studies provide a good insight into how the job allocation process is structured, how it works in practice, what its weaknesses are and how satisfied both commanders and personnel are.

In order to place the two sub-studies in context, a description is first given of how the system of job allocation is applied within the RNLA. The process is described in outline; it would be going too far to look at individual steps in the process in detail.

### **The job allocation process**

The new RNLA philosophy prefers decentralisation to central implementation. The personnel policy is therefore implemented decentrally as much as possible (by personnel services for the units) and coordinated at organisation level. The job allocation process is also decentralised. This means that commanders have been given many responsibilities which used to lie with the organisation.

The new responsibilities mean that the commander describes how he wants to man his unit with regard to quality and quantity, and how to keep it manned. He also indicates when vacancies are to arise for which military personnel can or have to be posted and the degree of priority attached to filling that vacancy. The name and functional requirements of the vacancy to be filled are passed on to the central service, which publishes the vacancy in an internal vacancy bulletin.

Individual military personnel can then apply to the functions published in the bulletin. The central service makes a preliminary selection from the applicants. The commander then has to choose from the candidates by holding interviews.

In exceptional cases, it is still possible for the organisation to appoint personnel to a function, just as in the past, without the military personnel having to give their approval. This occurs, for instance, in the case of special functions or for functions for which no (suitable) military personnel have applied.

Commanders and military personnel are the key to the new job allocation process. The sub-studies map the opinions of the commanders and military personnel. The method of data collection is described below.

### **The methods used for the two sub-studies**

#### Sub-study 1: inventory of the opinions of the commanders

As the job allocation process is complex, it was expected that commanders would be able to give a great deal of information which the researchers would not think of in advance. It is for this reason that it was decided to hold semi-open face-to-face interviews with the

commanders. The use was made of a checklist containing a number of important topics which definitely had to be dealt with. The idea was to allow the 25 commanders to talk as freely as possible about the job allocation process. The topics from the checklist were discussed with all the commanders, but not always in the same sequence. Furthermore, many topics which were not included in the checklist were also discussed. Whenever new, important topics<sup>15</sup> were brought up, the opinion of the commander was then 'tested' against that of the next respondent. Thus, we were ultimately able to chart the entire process from the point of view of the commanders. After about 15 interviews, no new aspects were brought up. After holding 20 interviews, we were able to establish that we had a complete picture.

#### Sub-study 2: inventory of the opinion of the individual military personnel

It was decided to hold a quantitative survey of personnel using a representative random selection, in order that statements could be made about the entire military population. We wanted to use a quantitative study in order to express the opinions of the military personnel in figures. It was decided to interview 1,000 military personnel by telephone. The actual interviews were contracted out to an external opinion poll company. The questions for the interview were developed by the RNLA. The survey consisted largely of closed questions. In view of the large number of personnel we wanted to include in the study, this was necessary in order to be able to process the answers quickly and thoroughly.

### **The results of the sub-studies**

#### **The results of the study of commanders: what do commanders think of the job allocation process?**

The most important change for commanders is that they have gained many more authorities than before thanks to the introduction of the new system. This means not only that they are able and allowed to do more, but also that they must do more. Commanders are now able to choose their employees themselves, but they are also responsible for the quality of personnel in unit and they can be made accountable for this.

Commanders themselves are positive about the influence they have been given by the job allocation process. They can determine themselves which requirements are made of a function, they can make a choice from different candidates by means of an interview and they can hold onto good employees for longer by offering them extensions to their contracts. They are, however, dependent on others in this. In particular the availability of (suitable) candidates is a crucial factor.

In general, the commanders succeed well in guaranteeing the manning of their units with respect to quality and quantity. They therefore fulfil their responsibilities. However, many temporary gaps are created as replacements have not always been selected when old employees leave.

For certain functions there is under-capacity. This is chiefly due to the personnel complement: non-existent personnel cannot be conjured up out of thin air. Unpopular functions are also difficult to fill. These functions receive no or few applications.

Although commanders would not want to lose these new responsibilities, they are not totally positive about the job allocation process. This is due to the side effects which the process has according to the commanders. I will deal with these side effects later.

#### **Sub-study 2: personnel**

Personnel appreciate the system as they have influence over their own careers. Most military personnel succeed in finding their next function themselves. Those who do not succeed are found a new function by the organisation. This occurs after the six-month period in which the personnel should have found a new function.

The study shows that personnel are satisfied with the allocation of current functions; the average figure given is 7.4. Three quarters of the personnel like being able to find their next function by means of applying for functions. Military personnel in the lower ranks (younger personnel) particularly like being able to apply for functions. They can thus influence their own

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<sup>15</sup> New aspects were earmarked as 'important' if they were not unit-specific, but could apply to several units.

careers and make choices based on issues they consider important. Older personnel prefer the old system (in which they were appointed to their next function).

A negative aspect of the job allocation process is the experience of being rejected. Being rejected is an inherent part of the system: 70% of military personnel have been rejected at some time or other. 67% of them thought the reason for being rejected unfair (but is it not 'healthy' to believe that you are really the best candidate for the function?).

The table below gives the figures and percentages of unsatisfactory scores (average of lower than 5.5) for some aspects of satisfaction with the process.

**Table 1**

**Satisfaction on various aspects of the job allocation process expressed in an average figure (on a scale 1-10) and percentage of unsatisfactory scores (average lower than 5.5)**

	<i>Average figure</i>	<i>% unsatisfactory</i>
The fairness of the job allocation process	5.2	54%
The speed of the job allocation process	6.3	23%
The way in which the job allocation process generally occurs	5.9	30%
The influence of the commander on the job allocation process	6.0	33%
The supervision of the job allocation process by the organisation	5.8	30%

#### **Side effects of the job allocation process**

Both sub-studies highlighted side effects of the job allocation process. These side effects are often undesirable. Not all side effects are equally serious and, furthermore, most side effects are in principle solvable.

The most frequently cited side effects of the system are summarised below:

- **Compartmentalisation between the sectors and result-responsible units**  
This is the effect whereby military personnel have great difficulty in moving from one sector to another. As commanders prefer familiar candidates (from their own unit), candidates from other sectors have less chance of getting the function. Consequently, military personnel continue to work in the same sector. This results in military personnel who work in a sector which sends a lot of personnel on missions abroad experiencing greater pressure as a result of missions than those who work in sectors which hardly send any personnel on missions abroad. Compartmentalisation also means that military personnel are less widely deployable as they have not gained experience in different sectors.
- **Manning problems**  
As military personnel may accept a new function after 2½ years, there is a risk of personnel leaving before a replacement has been found. As a result, gaps move through the organisation. Long-term vacancies arise because military personnel only apply for popular functions.
- **Unfairness**  
The fairness of the system is doubted by individual military personnel: 54% give an assessment of unsatisfactory to the fairness of the system. The old boys' network is named as the most important reason for the unfairness of the process. According to commanders, military personnel experience unfairness in different ways. The process itself is fair, but the way in which it is used is not always fair. In addition, military personnel do not always have insight into how job allocation occurs, sometimes resulting in a sense of unfairness.
- **Promotion to higher ranks is more difficult**  
The idea is that candidates who already have the required rank have priority over those candidates who do not yet hold that rank. This means that promotion is the most probable if there is no competition from candidates who already have that rank. In order to gain promotion, military personnel sometimes sometimes apply for unpopular functions and then move on as quickly as possible to a popular function in the rank which has since been obtained.

### **Finally**

The new system fits in with the changing circumstances; not least because military personnel make different requirements of their career than in the past. They want to have a say in their next function (and the location). We presented both commanders and military personnel with three different options. One of the options was the current system of job allocation. The younger military personnel in particular opt for the system as it currently is. Commanders are divided on their preferences. Some prefer the current system, others want to return to the old system when the organisation sorted everything out. Commanders do agree on one thing however: they do not wish to lose their newly acquired authorities. Viewed in this light, the evaluation shows that the system, in spite of a few side effects which could be improved, has sufficient support within the RNLA. Furthermore, the objectives are achieved. This means that:

- The organisation is well manned;
- Commanders ensure quality in functions within their own units;
- Military personnel find their next function as much as possible under their own steam.