

LTC Richard Tarnoczi

**Developing the selection system for the staff of peacekeeping missions on duty
(The possible aspects of usage of Assessment Centre for military personnel
selection within the HDF)**

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Judit Bolgar
University professor

Introduction

The Hungarian Armed Forces have undergone several organisational changes since the Change of the political system, and nowadays they are also characterised by dynamic change. The changes in the organisation raise also questions concerning the management of human resources, so issues of the personnel selection as well. The Hungarian Armed Forces have become part of NATO, we are required to accomplish offerings; the biggest part of these offerings is on the field of actions (among others in form of participation in NATO and UN missions). Above the fulfilment of military technical buyings and developments we have to care for the selection, training and keeping of highly qualified workforce that disposes over the right skills and competences.

Questions of nowadays' personnel selection

The **motivational background** of applicants has changed. The advancing benefits, the early age for retirement, duty abroad and the financial benefits connected to it build a strong motivational basis. The applicants can show a picture of themselves towards the organisation that supports their ability and hides their illnesses (dissimulation). The not real picture won in this way is taken into consideration in the recruiting process, bears risks concerning the human resources management as well as concerning financial questions of the Armed Forces.

The **frame of approach** has become crucial: is a test for ability versus disability feasible? As selection nowadays is a clearly economic question we can state that operating the personnel selection process effectively in the case of the Armed Forces leads to reduction of costs and superfluous losses. With the usage of the earlier ICD criteria the aim of testing for ability was to make correspondent with the criteria of disability. In our present days a modern selection approach foremost in a profit oriented organisation can not be satisfied with the result of a selection that is based on the elimination of ill characteristics. The profit in case of the HDF is in first line diminishing the losses; develop the level of the armed services as well as the keeping of the workforce for a long period of time. We need to change our approach concerning selection strategy to reach that. Our approach should in first line be expanded in case of selecting for special tasks or for leading positions – as these are high invest positions for the organisation.

To apply competences, and to use a competence-based personnel selection provides us opportunities to increase effectiveness. The **competence** [2] is such a basic, determining characteristic for a person that is in causative connection with the effective, outstanding performance corresponding with the level of criteria (requirements). Competence is also to be understood as something that is done by the best performers in a field of work the most often, in most situations, with the best results, and those distincting best performers from the average.

The legislative background for a competence-based selection is partly elaborated. There is the map of the scope of work at disposal and on the base of this the general special psychological requirements of leadership are composed. It raises so the question of the **selection methodology**. Tests, questionnaires, instrumental measurements and interview are used to decide about the suitability. These tools can also be effectively used in the suitability analysis of the men, as to numerous people. Though in the case of more special positions they had to fulfil selection criteria of a higher level. The suitability analysis is done by the same organisation, the same selection set of tools are applied for the more special positions, although in the selection of these later positions the basis for the suitability decisions can be competences that can hardly or not at all be measured with the required accuracy. In the application for a scope of work that requires in first line behavioural competences (e.g.: special military operations) are the competences like communication-skills, co-operation or tolerability against criticism during the combat effectively measurable by the present set of tools at disposal? The literature concerning personnel selection proves of a higher theoretical redeem with the usage of measuring tools with that we are able to watch behavioural competences. As a result we can state that the development of selection set of tools at the HDF is actual. In my present study I deal with the selection methods in the HDF.

Purposes of the research:

1. *The adoption of Assessment Center for the purpose of personnel selection is more efficient than other currently applied methods.*
2. *The usage of precisely worked out competencies results better fit in the competency based personnel selection system of units.*
3. *Running of Assessment Center is realizable at the level of Units with the employing trained staff under control of psychologists.*

My hypothesizes are verified by an empirical study at the HDF 34th ‘László Bercsényi’ Special Operations Battalion

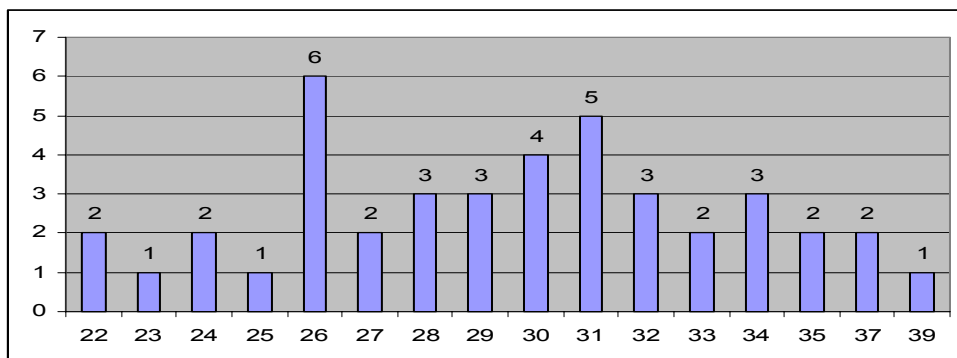
Introducing the Application of the Assessment Centre

The experimental group:

The methodological experiment of the Assessment Centre for selection was carried out at the HDF 34th ‘László Bercsényi’ Special Operations Battalion formed in 2005, in due course of a personnel selection between the 8th of March and 14th of April 2006. 42 men applied for operations positions in to the personnel of the battalion. The distribution of age and rank of applicants is shown in Figure 1 and Bar chart 1. All of the participants were at the same troop in service. The precondition to fill in the special military operations position was to participate in a 3-week long drilling, that was a testing according to aspects of physical, professional and psychical eligibility, too. There was also the opportunity to reveal the earlier determined competences.



Figure 1.: Distribution of the personnel’s rank categories applied for the selection (person)



Bar chart 1.: Distribution of the personnel participating in the selection according their age ($\bar{X} = 29,59$ s= 4,15).

The process of the Assessment Centre

Survey of the aims of organisation, analysing the organisation

On the 1st of September 2005. the HDF 34th 'László Bercsényi' Special Operations Battalion was formed. In the analysis of the organisational goals and the organisation itself the regulation of the functioning of the organisation was at my aid. The required skills of the personnel (practically the competences) for the defined tasks in peace and war are anchored in the 7/2006. (III. 21.) HM decree, attachment No5 now in effort.

Collecting the features of duties (work process and job analysis)

The first step to form a selection system is to have the right amount and high quality information concerning the scope of work at disposal. Because of the short time and the high workloads of the personnel in the Special Operations Battalion I used a thematic questionnaire for this purpose. The questionnaire was filled between 9 and 12 o'clock on the 23rd of June 2005. The scope of work analysing questionnaire was filled in by the soldiers working in detection at the predecessor formation of the battalion. During the exploration the participant filled in the questionnaire by indicating skills and characteristics being necessary for doing the work in their position. These were treated further as competences. After the summary of the questionnaires I had a list of 166 competences in front of me. After the first evaluation the differentiation of the competences was needed. I did this by using the method of a T-group. The aim of asking for the opinion was to define the basic competences that are determining regarding the performance and redeem of soldiers for special military operations. The most important in this phase is, that the leadership of the organisation determines the dimensions for the selection.

The conciliation and increase of accuracy of the summarised competences by the leaders

From the competences won by questioning the personnel 10 basic competences (teamwork, communication skill, creativity, presence of mind, stress-tolerance, task-orientation, ability to learn, independent task-completion, motivation) were accepted, as well as one further basic competence was conceptualised by the leaders of the battalion in the group-evaluation. After that step the 11 defined basic competences buildd the further direction of the selection.

Defining the exact competencies and levels of competences

Hereafter we need to define each competence in details. This is a crucial element of the system, then at different phases of the selection process (at the observation, at the final consensual evaluation) the question “What do we examine?” is raised. After the determination of the competence levels, each level of competence has to be defined as a next step. In the case of each competence we composed a 5- rank-scale. The elaboration of the scale also happened with the participation of the troop leaders, in a session on the 6th of July 2005. Participants were psychologists and officers being in commanding positions. At the conceptualisation an essential aspect was to be unambiguous and comprehensive, for the aim was to form an applicable system to work with hereafter.

Defining the criterions of Assessment Centre

For a competence-based selection is not always happening according to the highest value, it was necessary to define what competences are to develop and what not to develop. This was determined on one hand by the developing capacity of the battalion and on the other hand by psychological principles. The next distinction of competences was made:

- a) **Eliminating competences (not to develop):** such competences at the measurement where the criterion level is equal with the suitability.
- b) **Competences to develop:** such competences, where a deviation from the defined criterion can be allowed.
- c) **Competences for information:** such competences, or assessment data denoting the presence of a competence, that do not dispose over eliminating validity.

With the elaborated competence-dictionary we gain the opportunity to work out a special Assessment Centre for the troop. As the question “what” is answered, we have to deal henceforth with the question “how”, and the stress now is laid on the selection methodology.

Designing of the Assessment Centre

As a next step we have to determine which tool can measure what competence. The battalion participating in the selection planned to carry out the selection for the special military operation positions with an almost 3-week long (19 days) drilling. This was held between 27th of March and 14th of April 2006. It was an important factor that the observations should be made towards the middle and the end of the selection process, as the evaluation of the

competences can be more accurate when the participants are more tired or exhausted, than being fresh and relaxed.

Composing the tools for revealing competences

The venues and situations to observe the competences are obviously up to the nature of the competence. The observation of the determined competences happens at the given task. The assessment is done by more assessors. The planning was set by the officer of the troop in charge of the selection, by one deputy commandant of the troop and two psychologists participating in the assessment on the 16th of February 2006. According to the meeting material we can mention following venues, situations and tools:

- a. **FG** (fire-group)(planned date: 5th of April 2006.): the smallest unit at a special operation battalion is a fire-group. In the selection the goal was to choose situations that can reveal the existence of the competence needed for the position at the applicants.
- b. **TEAM** (two fire-groups) (on the 6th of April 2006.): the people evaluated here have to take up the role of a team-leader and as such fulfil the task.
- c. **Classroom group** (10th of April 2006.): the participation in a larger team and the task completion within a larger team can be observed and the relevant competences can be revealed.
- d. **The Drilling officers' evaluations** (between 4th and 7th of April 2006.). The assessment done by the drilling officers provides the possibility to evaluate for a longer period of time, within the everyday tasks, so the involvement of these observational assessment results enhance the accuracy of the assessment.
- e. **Tests and Questionnaires.**

The selection and training of the assessors

The training of the delegated professionals was needed, that provided at the same time a good opportunity for the trial of the tasks. In the assessor's training I aimed at developing the methodology of the observation and the assessment, as well as at reaching consensual decisions. For the preparation of the drillers and same time assessors we had 2 days at disposal.

The conveying of the Assessment Centre.

The Assessment Centre was carried out at the time planned in the selection objectives. The drilling-assessors trained were to this time at disposal. The earlier planned number was diminished during the selection. By the end of the selection from the 42 applicants 25 were

completing the selection. The dropout was because of some health problems, but two people had given up the selection.

Assessment on the plenary

The assessment on the plenary was held according to the selection plan on the 13th of April 2006. This last period of the evaluation was less dynamic than the previous ones. Practically, the evaluation lasted from 14:00p.m. until 4:00a.m. the next morning for almost 14 hours, interrupted by shorter breaks. The participants of the assessment were 8 Drilling-Assessors, 2 psychologists and 1 writer. Here we discussed all the competences of each participants taking part in the selection (25 persons). The assessment was carried out person by person. The evaluation started with the listing of the part-results of the participant reached in the Assessment Centre. This was followed by a consensual decision on the base of the results. The argumentation had to stick to the positive and negative proofs (that were taken down in writing during the tasks). The results were taken down when all the assessors agreed to the final result. While the evaluation was going on ahead in the night the assesses participated on a route march from Táborfalva Drilling Base to the casern of the troop. The planned arrival was latest 6:00 o'clock on the feedback day.

Feedback

In the feedback 25 people participated. The assesses arrived on time after a route march to the object in Szandaszőlős. Meanwhile the feedback sessions was held between 06.30a.m. and 11.00a-m, the deputy commandant of the battalion, the commandant of the drilling centre and one psychologist were the participants. The psychologist participating in the evaluation gave the feedback about the competences that were outstanding during the selection process, as well as about the competences to be developed.

In the empirical study the first usage of the Assessment Centre was introduced, that happened at a newly formed military organisation. Over the fact that the selection was executed with success there are more conclusions to be made.

Conclusions:

Hypothesis No. 1

The carried out selection could be integrated into the drilling plan of the troop, with an effective organisation it allowed next to the fulfilment of the professional tasks to observe and to assess the determined competences. The three most often used arguments against Assessment Centre are its expensiveness, providing of personnel selection experts and its time-consuming character in comparison with another methods. The selection was characterised by effective time-management, the applicants only spent only the testing (4,5 hours) and the classroom tasks (approx. 3 hours) beyond the drilling. The arising costs at the completion are the transportation, accommodation and catering of the executive men, and the cost of the basic logistics. These are in the volume far less than in the case of an Assessment Centre of the civilian sphere. The HDF possesses the staff of personnel selection experts, who has the experience of running of Assessment Centers, this way no need to pay for civilian experts.

Hypothesis No. 2

The method ensures to reveal such behavioural competences that take the observation in situations (basically in war-like situations characteristic for the given position) in order to determine the level of the behavioural competence.

The applicants were assessed by such special competences like stress-tolerance, presence of mind and communication skills. These above are a proof for the fact that also nowadays beyond the general used set of tools with the application of new selection methods we gain the opportunity to satisfy more specific organisational selection needs and as it is described in the literature we can reach higher values on the redeem indicators.

At the definition of the level of the criteria it has an enhanced importance of the exact definition of the competences, furthermore the exact formulation of the competence levels. The basic document in the selection process is the competency-vocabulary. It contains precisely defined competencies and each of competencies has five scales from 1 to 5 based on the requirements of HDF 34th 'László Beresényi' Special Operations Battalion. A precondition is also that we determine the basic competences (eliminating competences), the complementary competences required in the position (not eliminating competences), as well as the criterion-level of above. With the use of this method a part of the eligibility examination can be delegated towards the troops.

Hypothesis No. 3

With my empirical study I proved that the revealing of behavioural competences are also “out of the laboratories” possible, with the co-operation of the drilling officers and psychologist working with the troops when they are satisfactorily prepared. The evaluation of results with Spearman correlation method also shows that the situational exercises and the drilling assessment-observations were determining in the evaluation. So we can state that well prepared but not psychologist assessors can be effectively applied in the Assessment Centre.

Recommendations for the usage of Assessment Center

The application of the method provides to realise a new two-level up-to-date personnel selection system. The not congruence with the criteria of the basic competences means disqualification. This should be stated by the central organisation for eligibility studies. At the level of the troops the tool Assessment Centre can be refined with the co-operation of the military psychologists and the additional competences being important for the positions can be determined. Hereafter, among the soldiers assessed eligible on the base of the basic competences the troops could search for the best fit between organisation and man (Person-Job-Fit model). From the point of view of the organisation the application of this approach can bring advantages, for this way it gains the opportunity to develop the work performance and efficacy, and these bear also possibility of the increase of the work satisfaction as well as the mental health. Above all the strengthening the loyalty towards the company is highlighted, so we can eliminate fluctuation (together with targeted measures of the human policy), and can reach a cost-cut. The method can flexibly featured to any scope of work; it can even take the different requirements of competences of battalions into consideration. According to these I would recommend to apply this method in the next fields:

- special force occupations
- occupations of NATO and UN missions at level of leaders and subordinates.
- military college students
- candidates for individual NATO occupations
- bomb-disposal experts
- attachés
- personnel selection for seinor officers

New contributions to the knowledge:

1. I have carried out a Assessment Center personnel selection method for the purpose of selection for special occupations at the first time within the HDF.
2. I have conformed the usefulness of aplication of Assessment Center with competencies for the special occupations of HDF, providing a higher rate of predictive validity.
3. I have conformed the feasibility of the personnel selection on the base of not eliminating competencies, delegating towards the troops with the employment of trained, non psychologist staff.
4. I have worked out a personnel selection system based on special behaviour competencies and a competency-vocabulary for HDF 34th 'László Bercsényi' Special Operations Battalion.

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Curriculum Vitae:

Qualifications

- 2003 Work and Organizational Psychologist
- 1998 Qualified Psychologist
- 1991 Anti-aircraft graduate engineer
- 1998 Relax trainer
- 2000 CHEF drog- és alcohol-prevention program trainer
- 2004 NLP practitioner
- 2005 NLP Master Practitioner

Schools

- 2001-2003 Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, Department of Ergonomics and Psychology
MI/O Pscichology
- 1994-1998 Lajos Kossuth University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Psychology
Psychology
- 1988-1991 János Bólyai Military Technical College
Anti-aircraft graduate engineer
- 1998- Miklós Zrínyi National Defence University, School of Doctoral studies
- 2004- University of Pécs, School of Doctoral studies

Military experiences:

- 2005 Health Protection Institute of HDF, Department of Health Psychology
Head of department, Budapest
- 2000-2005 Health Protection Institute of HDF, Conscriptionmedical Department
Head psychologist, *Nyíregyháza*
- 1999-2000 Health Protection Institute of HDF, Conscriptionmedical Department
Psychologist, Nyíregyháza
- 1995-1999 Suitability Examiner Institute of HDF Conscriptionmedical Department
psychologist, Nyíregyháza

Professional membership

- 1996- Hungarian Psychological Association : I/O psychology section
- 1998- Association of Hungarian Organizational Developers

Languages

English – advanced „c”

English STANAG 3.3.3.3.

Italian– elementary „c”