CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SELECTION PROCESS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: The selection process in any domain embraces different principles and various strategies but has the same ultimate target: acquiring the best-equipped candidates for the envisaged jobs. In Intelligence (not exclusively), the personnel selection is centered on the applicants' skills and traits, personal and professional background, transversal expertise, or technical abilities, as well as development potential – with an outlook on further professional development. Recruitment and talent retention in the military (including Intelligence organisations) reflect the trend of civilian (un)employment. It means motivation and job attractiveness (competing with the civilian job market) are critical elements in selection and performance quality, with variables related to the characteristics of the target audience and/ or the employment's features. This article provides an assessment of the current approach in the human capital policy in Intelligence and makes a parallel with the competing civilian organisations' efforts to make use of the best prepared and reliable human resources.
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1. Introduction

Intelligence is a multidimensional discipline, with various particularities and niche specializations – thus, a nightmare in matters of building up a homogenous concept for the selection and professional development of its professionals. Identification of core qualities defining the Intelligence employee is the first line of effort, whilst effective selection processes are compartmented according to the labour division at the level of the Intelligence organisation.

Further, the HR management in Intelligence is a complex enterprise that should properly address aspects of career development projection and planning, starting from the selection process, professional development, performance assessments/ evaluation, and ending with welfare aspects (to include health, security, etc.) that can affect individual and group performances.

Developing a well-trained and skilled Intelligence expert means the subject would be able to manage a lifelong educational process in different areas of know-how (not only military/ Intelligence but also interconnected disciplines featuring particular expertise and competencies). This is the basis for further professional progress, to senior/ leadership positions, or possible shifts to other disciplines.

2. Common selection processes

At the organizational level, dealing with qualified and skilled personnel is dependent

on two dimensions: the selection process of the new employees, and the personnel development plans and programmes for the existing staff, doubled by talent spotting and appointment within organization.

The selection process can be defined as a step-by-step assessment and short-listing of the candidates list, to facilitate hiring on the designated job. First, it is a complex and methodological collection of information about an individual, in order to determine factors of suitability, proof of the desired profile, demonstration of personal and professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as capacity to evolve. Further, the selection process involves analysis and ranking of the applicant's fitness for the job requirements. In general, the selection process consists of several steps, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Steps in the selection process
Source: https://iedunote.com/selection-process

A common model used by military intelligence organisations is the Assessment Centres method, either as part of the recruitment process or for internal promotion and staff development (when it is usually known as a development centre). An Assessment Centres method consists of a standardized evaluation of behaviour in multiple exercises: job-related simulations; group exercises; role-play exercises; leadership exercises; technical/ problem-solving exercises; aptitude tests; psychometric assessments; motivation/ values-based questionnaires. Some character traits and skills' proficiency have to be equally assessed in regular living conditions and under duress (solving time frame issues, lack of sleeping, self-control in crises, etc.). The results are pooled and further analysed and rated, contributing to the evaluation of the applicants' performance based on several variables [1].

In any case, the design [2] of the assessment center is of paramount importance for the outcome; blended or virtual [3] assessment centers are more and more common, taking the advantage of modern communication technologies and overcoming mobility shortfalls (as it was the case with the COVID restrictions).

Assessment Centres are typically used after the initial stages of the selection process (initial screening based on application forms, security check, medical check,

physical training preparedness, interviews, and psychological tests that are usual for admission in the military) because of the large amount of time and expenditure in conducting them.

An example of basic entry requirements in Intelligence (Human Intelligence/ HUMINT) is offered by the US Department of Defence (DoD) (Table 1).

Table 1 Basic entry-level requirement for US DoD HUMINT Enterprise [4]

Basic entry requirements	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps
U.S. Citizen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ASVAB	GS + VE + MK + MC (ST score) = 101	WK +PC + AR = 107	WK+PC and AR = 33	VE + AR = 110 waiver based on performance
Age	18 years old	21 years old	21 years old	21 years old
Years experience	Specific HUMINT MOS selected upon enlistment	No specific HUMINT MOS, assigned HUMINT duties after enlistment	No specific HUMINT MOS, assigned HUMINT duties after enlistment	CPL or SGT with 1 year time in grade; selected from other MOS; selection based on interview
Language requirement	DLAB	DLAB	DLAB	DLAB
Clearance (TS/SCI)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Polygraph	Submit	Submit	Submit	Submit

LEGEND: ASVAB - Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (includes GS/ General Sciences, AR/ Arithmetic Reasoning, WK/ Word Knowledge, PC/ Paragraph Comprehension, VE/ Verbal Expression, NO/ Numerical Operations, CS/ Coding Speed, AS/ Auto Shop, MK/ Mathematics Knowledge, MC/ Mechanical Comprehension, and Electronics EI/ Information); TS/SCI - Top Secret Sensitive Compartment Information

Generally, in the selection process in Intelligence, we can identify two philosophies:
- Selection of a talented person: centred on the candidate's potential, the selection is focused on his/her profile, which has to fit a pre-designed generic model; further, once involved in the Intelligence organization's business, specialization courses are envisaged for particular activities/ missions and enduring professional development. In this case, we can talk about long-term investment in skilled/ talented human resources (Intelligence as a vocational profession).
- Selection for Intelligence jobs vacancies: the selection is focused on particular skills and knowledge of the candidates, based on specific job requirements. It may be the case for short-term involvement of pre-specialized persons (outsourcing/ contracting), or gradual career evolution

(Intelligence-related job as temporary occupation).

Thus, depending on the enrolment approach, we can identify two design frameworks in the selection process: focused on the employee model, or focused on professional standards retrieved from the job description. However, the current practice shows that parameters of both references are included, to various degrees, in the overall selection strategy.

Considering the existing cultural differences presented by candidates in various countries, concerning national recruitment programs, we refer to customized professional profiles (based on existing common models) that consider the job expectations, psychological profiles, and the Knowledge/ Skills/ Attitudes (KSA) spectrum.

3. The employee model – a key reference in the selection process
So, we have a process ready to filter candidates. To whom are we looking?

It is hard to affirm there is such thing as a typical Intelligence professional, if we consider the variety of staff positions in Intelligence organisations and the share between leadership functions, data storing and processing functions, intelligence requirements management and collection management, etc. Moreover, at the level of the collection disciplines, required aptitudes largely vary from technological skills (for technical sensors collection) to human interaction abilities (in HUMINT). Even more, focusing on HUMINT, operators (collectors) must immerse into the local communities in theatres of operations and interact with a large array of human sources, where they have to open compatible channels of communication and build rapport, processes requiring different backgrounds, cultural empathy, specific skills, professional know-how, or fair life experience.

From this perspective, the selection process should be not only strict and extensive, but also specific in its ability to demand specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes from applicants, who should demonstrate the capacity to use their intellectual capacity in normal and crisis situations, alongside cognitive abilities, self-regulation mechanisms, interpersonal skills, individual and teamwork. It should also help to identify the level of loyalty, reliability, attitudes, compliance to the organisation's values, and possible risks correlated to vulnerabilities of the applicant. Additionally, the potential to develop high-level professional skills should be equally tested.

The results of various assessments of the real performance and behaviour resulting from tasks during the selection process are compared with psycho-diagnostic - psychology exams, to develop a complete pattern of the applicants' personalities.

However, it is unrealistic to look for a perfect candidate, who matches exactly the selection specifications or would fully fit expectations after a basic training or course.

The main idea is to identify the most suitable persons, who are as close as possible to the requirements and desirable traits of the Intelligence professional, assuming a certain degree of uncertainty and vulnerability.

Anyway, at the level of Intelligence specialised areas we can identify fruitful efforts in developing employee models, as is the case of the NATO HUMINT Centre of Excellence (HCOE), which focused on the HUMINT operator's comprehensive profile [5].

Talking about the selection pool, it may vary based on the appointment level. In this respect, we can consider selection on the military channels [6], but also performing talent spotting in universities or other centres of expertise. Even more, Intelligence services can offer Student Internship Programmes and Graduate Study Programmes allowing a recruit to continue his education with funds from the organization and later join it. Yet, recruiting Intelligence staff is nowadays widely advertised online, in the vacancy sections of various services' websites, and available for any prospective candidate who fulfils the prerequisites.

Another dilemma is posed by the option to recruit short-term employees or rely mostly on long-term professional staff [7]; this predicament can be further extended to the duty duration in the Intelligence service across the career development of the servicepersons. Short-term contracting (with its advantages and disadvantages) is also a topic for outsourcing and the use of Intelligence reservists in the current business/ specific projects.

The candidate's profile resulting from the selection process offers the necessary information for the individuals' fitness for an Intelligence-related generic appointment. In addition to this traditional approach, the development of social media and the exposure of the private and/ or professional life on social media provide valuable data on the applicants. Social networks are

commonly exploited for various purposes in human resources management – recruitment/ talent spotting, sequential assessment during the selection process and institutional integration, etc. However, the use of data obtained from social networks requires special care from legal and ethical standpoints.

From this perspective, we observe that some online platforms are dedicated to job enrolments, freely exhibiting profiles and connections of the candidates' pool, as well as employers' bids. In this context, CVs usually display the best image of the applicants; further, professional or academic platforms are relevant for the candidate's expertise and contribution. By contrast, usual platforms used for social interactions reveal the candidates' presumably uncensored lifestyle, interests, or beliefs, which may confirm or contradict information reported during the formal selection process [8], contribute to the profile's refinement, and ultimately influence the decision regarding the admission.

4. Job description requirements

Job descriptions are valuable references in designing selection processes, or in building professional development programmes.

In the job definition, the required competencies are decomposed into various abilities (the KSA model) that are further scored/ assessed in the selection process. In this respect, Fleishman's Taxonomy [9] is commonly used as a reference for building up a table of the fundamental abilities of the desired profile, with common or specific items, and variable relevance.

As example, the most important abilities for HUMINT are detailed in Table 2, based on an HCOE survey having as reference Fleishman's Taxonomy. These abilities are further addressed in the psychological and behavioural tests, besides other elements.

Table 2 Fleishman Taxonomy – selected abilities for effective HUMINT activities [10]

HUMINT collector	HUMINT analyst
Oral comprehension	Written comprehension
Oral expression	Written expression
Fluency of ideas	Fluency of ideas
Memorization	Problem sensitivity
Speech hearing	Deductive reasoning
Speech clarity	Inductive reasoning
	Information gathering
	Selective attention
	Time-sharing

Other elements of the job descriptions are relevant for the general knowledge and culture, linguistic competence (based on various standards), digital competence (foundation skills, problem-solving abilities, communication, information handling, transacting) and specific software operation (technical and programming skills, for related jobs), or professional experience (previous education and training, participation in relevant activities, etc.).

All these elements are either part of the preliminary selection (based on the application forms compliance) or are included in the follow-up assessments.

A specific mention is addressed to the complex work of quantifying the required abilities (the KSA packages) associated with the candidate's psychological profile, to set up a competent filter.

5. The motivational dimension in Intelligence-related jobs

Motivation is very important for projecting the level of ambition and the potential for a future, enduring professional path of the candidate. This is determined by compiling

the candidate's profile with the result of an interview designed for this purpose. It should cover relevant elements, like:

- the reason to apply for an Intelligence appointment;
- what the candidate knows about the employment, and where from;
- which is the candidate's projection regarding his professional evolution in Intelligence;
- availability for deployment in various areas and for different timeframes, and exposure to risk;
- the candidate's self-assessment related to its capacity to face Intelligence operations' challenges;
- self-consciousness in the identification of his/her weak and strong points, and potential for improvement;
- intellectual focus;
- technical/ digital skills;
- sports (individual/ team sports, aptitudes, and performance);
- personal questions of the candidate addressed to the commission (revealing his concerns/ worries about the appointment).

For example, common motives for enlisting in the U.S. Armed Forces include factors such as "*money for college, technical training, and security of steady employment, travel, patriotism, discipline, [and] pride*" [11]. As everywhere else, there is a balance between pragmatic reasons and personal aspirations, and a common acceptance turns toward favouriting those with innate willingness (vocation) to become a member of the Intelligence community, seeking professional satisfaction.

However, some nations face issues in attracting candidates to fill in vacancies, and various incentives have to be used a priori to entice and recruit personnel – e.g. housing and food allowance, health care, educational benefits, promotion potential and bonuses, life insurance, or retirement programmes. In any case, these do not guarantee the recruitment of talented and qualified individuals capable of performing the roles of an Intelligence professional [12].

Moreover, Intelligence employment may not always be appealing to the general population (local culture may also influence perceptions), and incentives may not be effective recruiting tools unless supported by the family/ community and complemented with a positive perception of the military. In this respect, advertising intelligence-related activity remains a problematic point and the approach is prominently different at the level of various nations, ranging from no public advertisement and exclusivity for military channels to open media commercials (to include proactive programmes like showcasing in recruiting chat rooms, online recruiters, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media outlets).

6. A global shift in the required professional skillset. So what?

Associated with the technological advancements, the change of the required skills in the labour market is axiomatic. The Future of Jobs Report of the World Economic Forum (October 2020) elaborates on the emerging changes, pointing out:

- growing skills (critical thinking and innovation; active learning and learning strategies; creativity, originality, and initiative; technology design and programming; emotional intelligence), and
- declining skills (manual dexterity, endurance, and precision; memory, verbal, auditory, and spatial abilities; management of resources).

Organizations are equally oriented toward improving the qualifications obtained in the formal educational context. A useful perspective regarding a reference framework in education and training (thus, in evaluation, too) is the panel of recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning adopted by the European Council, to help reinforce key competences and basic skills: literacy; multilingualism;

numerical, scientific and engineering skills; digital and technology-based competences; interpersonal skills, and the ability to adopt new competences; active citizenship (focused on the common values); entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression [13].

If we summarize the emerging skills, we will end up with the profile of a technology-savvy employee, able to equally operate online and in regular (physical) jobs, with a high level of interpersonal skills (multilingualism, cultural awareness, empathy, ethical values) and possessing a high self-management capacity (active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility).

Mr. Klaus Schwab, the chairman of the World Economic Forum, has also observed the accessibility of "*the means to reskill and upskill individuals in unprecedented numbers […] and to create bespoke maps which orient displaced workers towards the jobs of tomorrow where they will be able to thrive*" [14].

If we limit this scenario strictly to the Intelligence domain, it remains equally factual. The Intelligence discipline must evolve at the pace of its operational domain. From this perspective, we have to observe the changes in the human character and behaviour, communication habits, motivational elements, etc., as well as the technological advance, with its dual face – support vs disruption.

7. From selection to professional development

Globally, organizations/ corporations are heavily interested in developing their human resources, as a guarantee of business endurance and success. Personnel upskilling is a trend in transformational organizations, where jobs evolve in complexity as they serve emerging customers' requirements and are conditioned by complex environments. It relies on the projection of the (future) skills needed, and the design of personalized, multimodal learning paths. Modern organizations focus on building a modern learning ecosystem that enables navigation across formal learning, informal learning, collaboration, social learning, coaching & mentoring, communication tools, content search & discovery, etc. accommodating the concept of learning in the flow of work.

For the Intelligence professionals, learning is paramount, and it has multiple dimensions to be addressed:

- the learner character (transversal skills, motivation, capacity of self-direction, curiosity, and capacity for innovation), from selection to personal and professional development paths;
- learning delivery (multimodal, adapted to the learner's needs, incorporating modern technologies);
- return of learning investment; in Intelligence, correlated metrics can refer to trainee satisfaction (positive perception of acquiring the training objectives), learning new elements (growing competence), workplace behaviour (operationalization of the new competences), outcomes (impact on the activity/ organization as a result of the training), stakeholders' expectations, production enhancement (quality & quantity), customer feedback, increased employee retention, etc. [15].
- learning culture (human resources policies, information knowledge management. The policies, procedures, and incentives that an organisation embraces reflect the values system of the organisation. Living by the workplace values takes a conscious choice on aligning the own personal values to the organization's ones. It is highly reflected in the learning culture and staff development approach.

Retaining talent in governmental Intelligence agencies is a valid issue for many nations, as long as there are various policies for staff development and career evolution which, in many cases, are constrained by authorized strength,

vacancies, limited promotion opportunities, and professional mobility. This aspect, added to the inherent risks of operations and reduced quality of life resulting from the hardship of family separation because of multiple deployments, can contribute to professionals seeking career opportunities outside of the Intelligence organization – in other military branches, governmental organisations, or the civilian life.

The human capital in Intelligence has to be tracked for long-term employment, to preserve experienced human resources in organization. A prospect for professional development should help increase the performance and offer valid options for progress, to effectively orient and motivate the personnel.

In this respect, direction and counselling in professional development are related to quality assurance and continuous improvement, ensuring a mutually beneficial approach in building blocks of expertise at the level of the employee and expecting a return of investment for the benefit of the organisation.

8. The professional value of the Intelligence reservists/ veterans

Intelligence reservists/ veterans hold a considerable amount of expertise in the moment of leaving the active military status, accounted through professional formation, on-the-job activity, and participation in various exercises and operations. However, disconnection from the professional world and discipline's transformation may lead to a fading relevance of this expertise in time, even though the retention and the value of some principles and tactics, techniques, and procedures are well preserved.

Keeping Intelligence reservists/ veterans close to the active business by involving them in various communities of interest and Intelligence related development programmes is a solution to preserve a lasting resource for mentoring new generations of professionals, support research and knowledge development initiatives, concept development and standardization, lessons identified analysis, and education and training events (as course designers, observers/ trainers or supporting speakers).

Formal recognition of these competencies would ensure the formation of a pool of readily available experts, whose value resides in their mobility and transfer of know-how across the allied nations.

Formal veterans' organizations are active in many states, but with countrywide relevance and generic focus [16]. On the other hand, private initiatives of retired Intelligence professionals, launched in various forms of businesses based on their expertise, can be globally accessed by customers on the labour market.

So what? We see a valid point in building a specialised framework (a military social-professional platform similar to LinkedIn) where individual Intelligence reservists/ veterans to display their professional competencies and express availability to work in support of various projects/ initiatives at the national level or in support of larger security frameworks (e.g. UN, NATO, OSCE, etc.). Of course, this is just a primary idea, and there are many challenges related to security and counterintelligence aspects, legal settings, etc., but the value of networking and cloud contribution marks a step forward in the functional effectiveness of the Intelligence business. This service may cover a large array of activities, from mentorship, activity as an instructor, reinforcement of mobile education teams, role-playing or observer/ trainer in exercises, participation in research programmes, concept development and experimentation programmes, etc.

9. Conclusions

Designing selection strategies for Intelligence organisations is challenging, but equally exciting through the diversity of variables and the multiple dimensions accounted for.

For military Intelligence, a primary filter is represented by the prerequisite conditions for admission to the military forces; further, these requirements are refined and adjusted to more specialised functions, requiring efforts from multiple fields of expertise, notably Intelligence professionals, psychologists, linguists, security staff, etc.

The sequential evaluation of mandatory requisites, coupled with the Assessment Centres method, enables a complex evaluation of the candidates. While eligibility is counted in the primary phase of the selection process, the candidate's fitness for jobs in Intelligence is further assessed in a complex environment. In this process, the candidate/ employee model and job descriptions play an important role as reference points in the assessment strategy.

As professional development and career evolution are linked to selection processes, more and more weight is placed on candidates proving self-development capacity and learning appetite. This is a must, having in mind the pace of societal evolution, the emergence of new technologies, and fluidity of the security challenges that fall under Intelligence interest. Moreover, talent-spotting and retention would have no sense without sustained efforts to creatively exploit the human resources represented by Intelligence reservists/ veterans, either at the national level or in support of relevant international organisations. It entails building a system for the formal recognition of competencies, a platform with marketplace function, establishing security parameters, clarifying contracting aspects, setting quality assurance requirements, and so on.

The article proposes several elements of interest related to the selection strategy in Intelligence. Starting from these landmarks, we can design a comprehensive framework for a scientific-based methodology for assessing candidates, building staff development programs, and enhancing the interaction with retired professionals in order to maintain an inclusive and effective human resources pool.

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