1. Abstract:

The ideas of a *learning organization* have become accepted as a generic concept and it has grown into a well defined management domain (Senge 1994). The expression *learning organization* has almost become a mantra, but in this article we try to be concrete and specific about an application for staffing with a public network organization.

The general idea of promoting generic competences and to have those better described in CV and in requirements specifications were accepted and elaborated in an earlier project for the Swedish defence. (Agrell 2006) Having had this feed-back the project went to theory for further advice.

We then identified the following necessary steps towards a design rule for staffing:

- to negotiate with international partners about our Swedish styles of command and organization,
- to match individual competences with agreed command styles,
- to model requirements specifications for troop and personnel and to express the requirements in adapted formats along the process of staffing,
- to strike the balance of immediately operational abilities with abilities to learn and adapt,
- to find and recruit those who supposedly would learn abilities and attitudes in due time.

This text is essentially a report from an applied project, but there may also be a more general interest in the specification of kinds of factors to consider for staffing in a network organization.

Key words: Competence, recruitment, learning organisation.

1. Résumé.

Les idées liées aux organisations apprenantes sont acceptées aujourd'hui comme concept générique qui s'est développé dans un domaine bien défini du management.
L'expression « organisation apprenante » est pratiquement devenue une incantation, mais dans cet article nous tenterons de concrétiser et de spécifier les choses en relation au recrutement dans le cadre d’une organisation publique en réseau.

L'idée générale de promouvoir des compétences génériques et de les décrire mieux dans les CV et les profils requis fut acceptée et développée dans un projet récent pour la défense Suédoise. Fort de ce retour du terrain, le projet vient vers la théorie en recherche d’améliorations.

Nous avons identifié les étapes suivantes comme nécessaires vers l’établissement de règles de référence pour le recrutement :

1. discuter avec les partenaires internationaux à propos des modes suédois de commandement et d’organisation
2. compatibiliser les compétences individuelles avec les styles de commandement retenus
3. modéliser les spécifications pour les troupes et le personnel et exprimer les prérequis sous des formes adaptées tout le long du processus de recrutement
4. prendre en considération l'opposition entre les habiletés immédiatement opérationnelles et les habiletés à apprendre ou à adapter
5. identifier et recruter ceux qui sont susceptibles d’apprendre ces habiletés et attitudes dans un temps admissible

Ce texte est avant tout un rapport tiré d’un projet appliqué. Il permet cependant de tirer quelques conclusions intéressantes sur les facteurs à prendre en compte pour recruter dans une organisation en réseau.

Mots-clés: Compétence, recrutement, organisation apprenante.

1. Resumen

Las ideas relacionadas a las organizaciones que aprenden tienen hoy en día mucha aceptación. Se trata de un concepto genérico desarrollado en un campo específico del management (Senge, 1994). La expresión “organización que aprende” se ha vuelto en una casi-incantación, pero en este papel intentaremos concretizar y especificar las cosas en relación al reclutamiento en el marco de una organización publica en red.

La idea general de promover competencias genéricas y de describirlas mejor en los CVs y los perfiles requeridos se aceptó en un proyecto reciente para la defensa sueca. Desde esta experiencia de terreno, este proyecto necesita ahora teoría en busca de mejoras.
Hemos identificado los siguientes pasos como necesarios a la definición de unas reglas de referencia para el reclutamiento:

- discutir con los socios internacionales en relación a los modos suecos de mando y organización
- compatibilizar las competencias individuales con los estilos de mando definidos
- definir los requisitos para las tropas y el personal y expresar estos pre-requisitos bajo formas adaptadas en toda la duración del proceso de reclutamiento
- tomar en consideración la oposición entre habilidades inmediatamente operacionales y las habilidades que hay que aprender o adaptar
- identificar y reclutar los que son susceptibles de aprender estas habilidades en un tiempo admisible

Este texto es antes de todo un informe relacionado a un proyecto aplicado. No obstante trae algunas conclusiones interesantes sobre los factores que hay que tener en cuenta para reclutar en una organización en red.

**Palabras-claves:** Competencia, reclutamiento, organización que aprende.

### 2. Background:

The Swedish defence offers a variation in tasks and styles of missions, and there is also a sequence of different administrative phases to run through in the staffing procedure for those. Brussels and the Swedish government who have the overriding control express requirements of troop performance before each mission. That will in each case of a mission be the starting point for a competence modelling which results in descriptions of individual competences’ requirements. Then there shall have to be a translation of these expressions of individual competence into formalized search questions for the personnel data base. This procedure shall have to be performed differently before each mission, certainly supported by more than one piece of computer software. Sweden is making this procedure a design rule for a modern net-work defence and this creates not only new troop for each mission but also a completely new more flexible defence organization.

The start of the actual project was a request from the Swedish military headquarters to the consultant Ekelöw InfoSecurity ltd about a language and a taxonomy for the identification of relevant competences in the recruitment of personnel for international missions. This was a part of an important organizational change connected to the new defence doctrine. The main focus was no more to survey and defend the frontier of the country. It became peace-keeping and peace-making with the United Nations in different other parts of the world.
The spectrum of possible operations and the required personnel qualifications then also had to change. Elements of diplomacy and qualified international cooperation had to enter on all organizational levels with all soldiers and all sailors as a supplement to the strength in military fight. This change led us in the project to put focus on the individuals’ generic characteristics like learning, co-operation, decision and other general cognitive properties, and it helped us away from the former paradigm in which the language of competence was more about direct abilities. The interest in cognitive abilities would probably have developed in this direction in any case, but the political and doctrinal changes accelerated our changes in the recruitment’s policy and methodology.

The initial request from the military HQ was expressed in a vein of engineering or natural sciences believing that the concept of competence could be the object of a generally valid ontological analysis. We were to modify a recognized obsolete conceptual framework for personnel management based upon the HR-XML(2007).\(^1\)

An effort of this kind was also presented to the client (Agrell 2006) but is was also explained that such an analysis could not be done without imposing a subjective framework, let us say a basic metaphor or world view. We then made James Miller’s theory of “living systems” the framing reference without saying that it would be a one and only true view of the problematics. It had to be made sense of in another way.

To use explicit references in planning and assessment may have specific advantages. It is a way of controlling the entirety of overviews. It helps co-operation and participation in complex bureaucracies. It is and it was a way of organizing to set priorities so that the options eliminated become visible. These are ways of making sense and by making sense we do not mean only the possibilities of a description being true, probable or false. We rather think in terms of literary science where different ways of making sense define different genres. (Agrell & Nilsson 2003) This inspiration from a humanities’ science came timely. Many of us had had enough of the more simplistic fashions to make sense of models in management.

3. Immediate feed-back:

Concretely the mission in the first project was to include descriptions of talents for cooperation and flexibility in learning organizations. This was easily done within the framing of a recently developed new flexible routine for staffing with computer support since the search engine of the latter admitted search in free text. So these improvements were introduced but the methods development had to continue by expanding into a comprehensive design rule for a design process in several phases and by a fine granularity for concrete and specific personnel requirements specifications.

The final report in the present case was to be useful with the personnel managers present, and it was. New requirements specifications were written, but at the same time it also became clear that those had to be expressed differently for the different parties in the complex recruitment and staffing process.

The study was included as a part of the HQ current developments of a new defence oriented network and it was mentioned in most internal presentations of a new

\(^1\) The project was presented at a conference with the ESTIA/Graphos, ERIMA 07 (Agrell 2007).
personnel policy. It was completely accepted as far as it elaborated competence
descriptions into psychological and sociological dimensions and it also gave an
appreciated test that the computerized staffing routines could digest an enlarged
spectrum of competence requirements.
The conceptual developments were appreciated as a piece of language to fit into the
new enterprise architecture (Johnson & Ekstedt 2007) for the Swedish defence
though it also became clear that international negotiations were to follow to unify
formats for the descriptions of personnel. The latter will not be so easy, it may be
guessed, since the basic ideas of cooperation and individual’s initiatives do differ
between countries.

Moreover, discussions were initiated about how to use the verified staffing
procedure in new contexts for physical resource logistics and in different civilian
contexts. So, the continued project discussions diverted into two lanes. The
original staffing interest was not restricted to how to organize and express items in
the personnel data base, but the interest in a diversified use of the software grew
into a project of its own with big prospects. This spin-off became a big thing. Do
compare with Moisdon and al. (1997) which offers other examples of how foci and
sense may change during a process of learning and development.

However, in the sequel we shall stay with the personnel management theme
trying to sketch a design rule for staffing. It was presented to the Projectics
conference in ESTIA, Bidart, France, in order to improve before launching another
proposal to the clients.

4. Relevant theories

Peter Senge (1994) is obviously relevant with his concept of the learning
organization. He generously quotes earlier thinkers, but he may still be
considered as the inventor and promotor of the learning organization concept.
Personal mastery, mental models and systems thinking are the keys to synergetic
cooperation (p. 48).

Per Albinsson (1998) is faithful to Senge and he adds precisions about kinds of
leadership. It is not enough to recognize the authoritarian, the democratic and the
laissez-faire, he writes. Not only styles but also ways to classify leadership differ.
Marika Hansson (2004), another Swedish researcher, is precise and specific
about it that different kinds of organization require different kinds of individual
competencies. Mismatch leads to real unhealthy stress, not only to escapism and
strange politics as Eric Fromm (1945) stated it.

Jean-Michel Larrasquet (2004) and Antoine de la Garanderie (2006) expand on
the willingness to make sense of learning as a dominating prerequisite for
competence. Several other authors like Eric Albert (2005) and Marion
Saumonneau (2006) were quoted in Agrell (2006) for their contribution to
specifications of competence and learning modes for modern learning
organizations. Saumonneau for instance proposes three fundamental aspects of
competences: technical (i.e. related to the technical aspects of the job and its
environment), behavioural (i.e., aspects mainly related to relational skills and
abilities related to cooperative and group work, etc.) and metacognitive (i.e.
competences related to the ability to conceptualize, model and understand situations and problems using complex approaches and complex epistemologies: systemic approaches, life-cycle-based approaches, dialogies (e.g. trade off discussions), paradoxical approaches, etc.). Noticing the importance of situations, makes her able to propose “best ways” for learning and developing such competences, with a respectable reference to their nature and to the kind of situations faced.

Yves Lichtenberger (2003), like Le Boterf (2005) or Zarifian (2002) offer the concept of management by competence, which is not, as most others, competence for management, but the idea that the management of persons must be focused on the skills and competences they have or they are able to develop, learn and improve. This gives strength and variety, since at the same time their perspective on the concept of competence is rich, even in its epistemological dimensions.

As a conclusion of such a survey, it is clear that real competence not only shows itself, but is created by the situation, in the sense that it is only in the situation, in the application, that the competence appears. Competence is else the ability to self-create and this creation creates itself. With this thesis as a general direction, the following advice to the clients in the defence establishment is suggested.

5. Advice

The mentioned theories guide us by an abstract language while the personnel departments need something more concrete and specific, related to a solution of the problems they face. We propose the following suggestions for the benefit of the actual client which is the Swedish defence HQ with its complex dynamic network organization. Similar organizations performing similar staffing tasks may be similarly interested.

- The old way to describe competences is by abilities to perform individually and directly. The modern complementary concepts go into generic properties as well. So we may describe competence and competence requirements on different levels. And these levels of abstraction are also a salient reality and they represent a difference in ways to act, e.g. to recruit and staff. Theory shows that a learning organization needs competence from other levels than a Weberian or Taylorish one. In this aspect, a mismatch will obviously be detrimental, as Hanson (2004) teaches us, unless you can make competence the parameter in control (Lichtenberger 2003). But then, in such a case, the organization would probably be changed or changing and the mismatch would disappear. Experience from a series of passed missions and exercises has also showed that such mismatch creates stress, accidents and inefficiency. Swedish staff being used to independence in mission oriented tactics do not adapt automatically to the American more regulated culture. That might be the best example. So, individual recruitment can not be well done unless the hosting culture will be taken into account from the beginning.

- To minimize risks, staffing for international missions should also be done with a direct concern towards the kind of organization the troop shall be able to develop by its own group dynamics, considering the organization not as a static concept but like a process with emergence and self-organizational
dynamics. That is to say that in the recruitment and staffing procedures the managers have got to be locally experienced about competence development, so that they may judge, arbitrate and implement in function of and in the frame of a recent day to day experience. Recruitment- and staffing officers must also learn about possible future and intended organizations, more or less learning-oriented!

- Following Lichtenberger (2003) we should mainly shape the organizational style of troop by staffing and training; definitely not only by traditional instruction in elements of operations and techniques. Moods of learning and cooperation, and other motors of development, could be shaped this way. However, short time lags and differing partners in international co-operation may oblige to face diversity and to make compromises. On the one hand Sweden wants to create learning organizations, also in its defence. On the other hand there is the severe complication that not much time is offered for learning after Brussels calls for action. What makes situation still more complex is that many partner countries would organize under classical top down paradigms, that is to say in more hierarchic and Cartesian styles. In this context, a balance has got to be struck, by way of discussions and negotiations, between learning and operational abilities. The result of such processes must affect the staffing! That is why the question of the balance between operational efficiency (short term exploitation) and learning (long term improvement) must be managed as a key issue with reference to the urgency in the actual culturally heterogeneous milieu.

- Design needs to be based upon views of the intended future activities. That is axiomatic in occidental thinking and more concretely for us, it is called job analysis. Some recent references are Howick et al (2006) and Meschi (2006). Not much is said however about possible time tables for this analysis. So in each case a trade-off has got to be struck between the needs to perform defined tasks immediately and to adapt to a vaguely estimated future of surprising new situations. The outcome of this balance as well as the set of recruited competences will have to depend on this time factor which is not the same as in the former paragraph. We shall have time issues depending both on delays in the proper organizations own cultural turbulence and upon requirements coming from a future more unknown turbulence. The latter issue may be generally seen as another key-question in the management of complex situations.

- From Jean-Michel Larrasquet (2004) we may deduce a precise requirement: “Those people should be recruited who have, or may be able acquire, relevant attitudes to learning in the actual environment and in the time-space available.” Staffing would follow the same rule but start from the abilities of those initially recruited. In this staffing however each person must be understood both as a person in a process of her own development and as a person able to produce, e.g. to innovate and to participate, in the creation of a future troop. Both aspects must be understood together in dialogue and as two views of the same progressive transformation. We would then have a kind of a dyad in each individual case: the person and her predicted dynamic context. By this context has to be understood the more or less homogenous culture of the troop with its collaborating people and equipment like computers, networks and virtual environments and the relationships between all these elements.
considering this totality from a kind of extended ethnology perspective. For a continued methods development and research the existing ethno methodological approaches may be applied. This systemic way of thinking should not come as a surprise for any professional in the Human Resource field. Staffing is complex and it serves a complex process of design and development on several levels.

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- The requirements specifications in the design rule for staffing must be written in many versions since the staffing process passes through different, and differing, milieus. Post-modern linguistics (by Foucault 1966 for example) becomes real, even obliged. Political levels, administration and troop speak differently about competence. Some kinds of translation in requirements’ specifications shall have to be done between levels and organisations in the staffing process, also between the troops’ and individuals’ required abilities. Here again we may recognize Foucault. The translation will not be directly one to one nor will it be a successive specification. The different actors’ perspectives are too different. This part of a design rule for staffing will not be a precise sequence of translations; rather will it be pragmatic, very much decided bottom up in the respective managing organizations.
These paragraphs are offered for a handbook for staffing. They were requested as a part of a design rule for shaping international interventions by an existing network organization.

Nevertheless, we also address a scientific community by an effort to specify the theoretical backings of a real case, thus trying a mutually rewarding dialogue between theory and practice. We strengthen some theories still under debate and we define issues which ought to be deepened by further research. Some interest in this report may also come, as with all empirics, from a report of the possible. This will then help other designers of staffing methods to find their relevant distinctions, correlations and procedures.

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