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ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN THE POLISH ARMY

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Abstract:

The article describes the basic problems of periodic evaluation provided by their superiors, which is the main factor determining the direction and pace of their careers. A research sample was characterised and the goals of periodic evaluation were described. The research results were presented and errors made in the periodic assessment of service officers were diagnosed.

Keywords:

soldier assessment, periodic evaluation, Polish army

INTRODUCTION

The main goal of rational selection of human resources is nominating candidates for commander and security positions according to competence criteria and requirements set down by various activities. Staff periodic assessment plays a very important role in this system. It supplies information on work quality and forms the basis for decisions related to movements of employees, dismissals and promotions. Unfortunately the currently used evaluation system in the army does not guarantee this. It is often treated as a "ritual cosmetic procedure". The organisation (the army) should develop promotion mechanisms in which the key role would be played by the soldier period assessment. The article makes an attempt to diagnose the system used in military forces.



1. THE DIAGNOSIS OF THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

One of the most important elements in assessment systems is the way their results are used [5]. From the most general perspective one can say that the obtained assessments can be used in nearly all task areas of personnel functions in an organisation. A cyclical evaluation procedure fosters employee development [2]. The evaluation is related to staff development, movements, integration, motivation and it also plays a special role in development plans.

A. Suchodolski states that employee assessment is one of the key tools supporting efficient and effective human resources management [10]. Assessment results are used for:

- analysis and diagnosis of management potential which is later the basis for the determination of company strategy;
- planning human resources related changes;
- personnel function control;
- shaping required attitudes and behaviours;
- staff motivation;
- determination of training needs;
- diagnosis of the development potential of individual employees;
- decisions related to staff movements (lateral movements, promotions and degradations);
- control of staff professional development;
- informing superiors about the quality of work of their subordinates;
- communication between a supervisor and a subordinate.

For the purpose of diagnosing how well the management subfunction, namely the periodic assessment, is performed in the army, in 2013 a survey was conducted among services officers. A sample was selected “in a convenient way”. The participants were the service officers of Land Forces.

The sample encompassed:

- junior officers: 265 (including: 65 second lieutenants, 65 lieutenants, 135 captains);
- senior officers: 86 (including: 53 majors, 26 lieutenant colonels, 7 colonels).

The total number of officers participating in the survey was 351, which is 5% of the investigated population. A large part of the investigated population: 75% – were junior officers (2nd lieutenants, 1st lieutenants, captains). The structure of the tested group of service officers in terms of their military rank is presented in Figure 1.

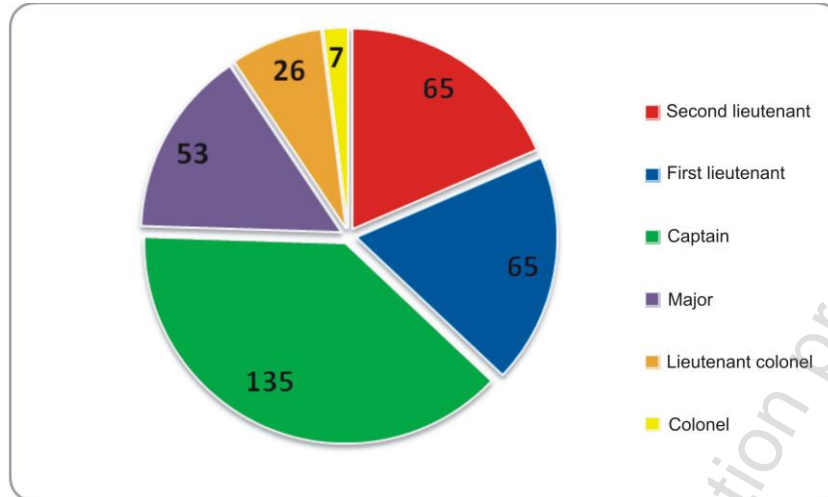


Fig. 1. Military rank distribution in the investigated group

Source: Author's own research

The first question referred to the officers' opinion on the extent to which the assessment system was adjusted the needs and reality of life in a military organisation (Figure 2). The question: Do you think that the current assessment system is adjusted to the needs and reality of life in a military organisation? received a positive answer from 25% respondents. Only 1.7% chose the "definitely yes" answer and 23.3% of the respondents chose "yes". 28.2% had no opinion on this subject and 47% chose the negative answer.

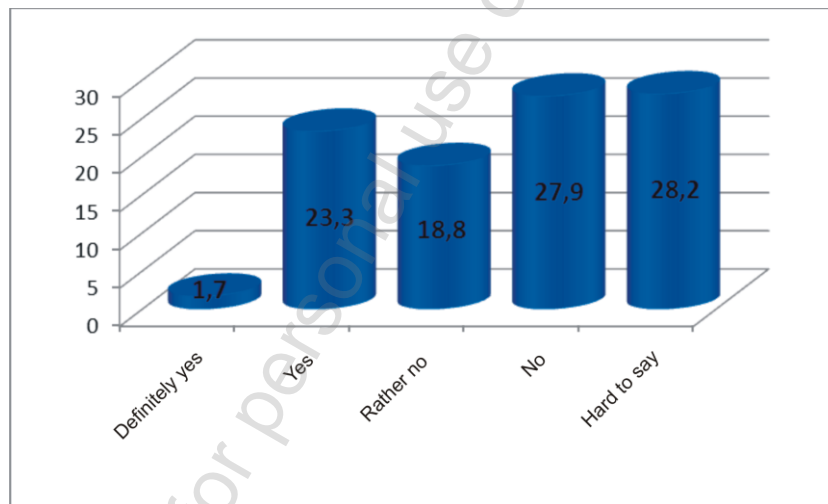


Fig. 2. Compatibility of the assessment system with the needs and reality of life in a military organisation [%]

Source: Author's own research

Among soldiers holding commander positions as many as 55% of the officers expressed a negative opinion about the binding assessment system in the army. Taking into account the military rank, 35% of second lieutenants gave a negative answer

about the current system. The most dissatisfied group were captains – 55% of the respondents.

The fact that the assessment system is not applied correctly is confirmed by a declaration made by 65.8% of the officers that superiors support a “safe” grade – good (Figure 3). In the group of soldiers with the professional experience of less than 5 years as many as 76% expressed the same opinion. A similar opinion was expressed by officers holding a commander position (69.4%). Hence, at lower levels of command (platoon and company commanders) such an approach to assessment is standard. Only a small number of the respondents (19.9%) expressed a different opinion and 14.2% of the respondents had no opinion on this question.

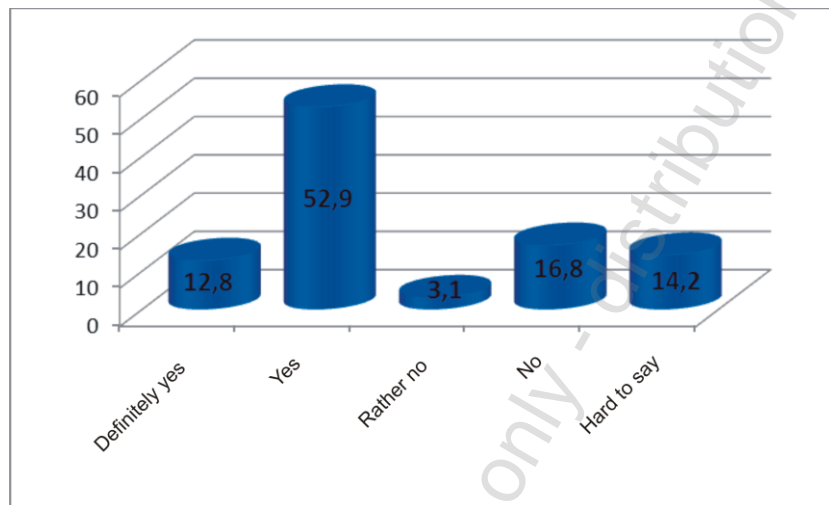


Fig. 3. Opinions on assessment offered by superiors [%]

Source: Author's own research

Probably there are numerous reasons for such a situation. Firstly, the person performing the assessment does not bear any consequences of the provided opinion. This refers to both situations when a highly assessed subordinate is promoted and cannot confirm their qualifications at a higher position and the opposite situation. Secondly, there is no difference between assessment criteria and methods depending on a professional position. The criteria should be measurable. Currently all service officers are assessed according to the same criteria. This results in frequent overassessment due to a fear that in case of a complaint about the assessment it will be hard for the superior who made the assessment to justify it. Thirdly, assessment hardly ever has a decisive influence on promoting soldiers. On the other hand, a certain justification for the latter can be the defective assessment system itself as it leads to a reduction of the range of grades and a lack of an explicit expression of opinion on the competences of assessed employees.

When asked the question if periodic assessment should influence a promotion to a higher rank 49% of the respondents said “yes”, thus declaring their approval for attaching more significance to assessment. 11.3% of the respondents chose “definitely yes” when answering this question.

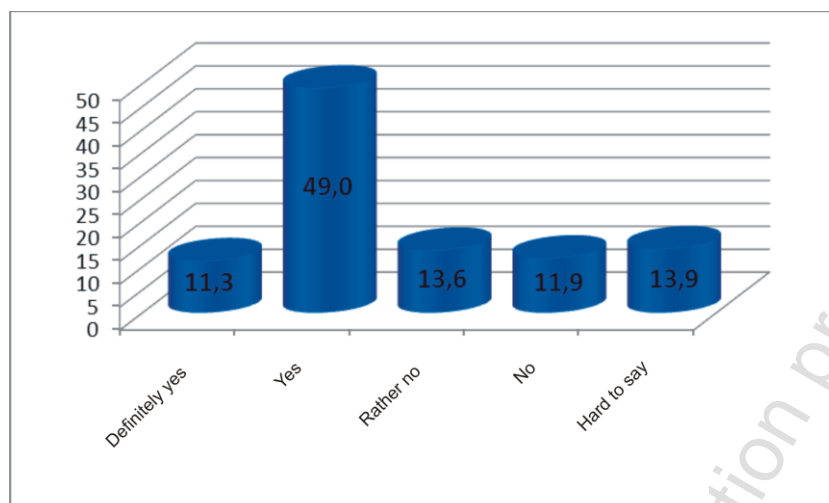


Fig. 4. Opinions on the influence of assessment on promotion [%]

Source: Author's own research

The longer the service, the stronger the conviction of officers that it is necessary to take into account assessment results in promoting soldiers to higher military ranks. Nearly half of the respondents (43.9%) with over 10 years in service supported this view, in the group with 10 to 15 years of service 63.6% expressed such an opinion, while in the group with 15 to 20 years in service nearly 80% of service officers thought so. Nearly the same percentage of the respondents (62%) working in logistics and administration require taking into consideration the obtained assessment grades in pursuing career paths. The reason for this is the fact that soldiers have a feeling that they experienced in their careers the unfairness of HR departments and superiors recommending employees for vacancies.

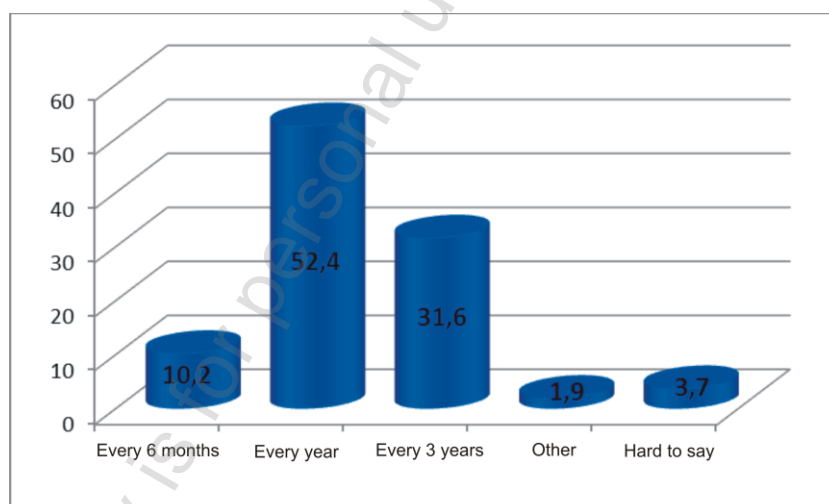


Fig. 5. Frequency of periodic assessment according to the respondents [%]

Source: Author's own research

Their opinions can be treated as a postulate to introduce clear and transparent rules and criteria in nominating employees for higher positions. However, one out of four

officers (25.6%) expresses an opinion that the grade received in periodic assessment should not influence their career. Probably these people either are underestimated in their job or are aware of the imperfections of the current assessment system.

Hence one can conclude that it is necessary to focus on selection when recommending employees for vacancies. First of all there should be clear promotion criteria stating who can be promoted, how and why. Currently there are not any such clear rules because the hierarchical structure and its promotion mechanisms are vague to say the least.

In the question relayed to the frequency of the periodic assessment of soldiers nearly 52.4% of the respondents thought that the formal assessment procedure should be conducted every year and 10.2% of them declared that the assessment should be performed every 6 months. Nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ (31.6%) of the soldiers claimed that the optimum assessment period would be three years (it is used currently). One out of ten respondents had no opinion on this subject.

On the basis of these results one can conclude that the respondents would like to be assessed and would like to assess their subordinates much more often, although it is related with additional work. Probably assessment is a way of obtaining information about the quality of work and in if grades are low also a way of improving their performance. In relations with subordinates, superiors want to have yet another motivation tool apart from the system of rewards and penalties. Such an annual assessment could have to functions a corrective and motivational one.

Probably the officers cannot see systematicity in the way the current system is used. Offering assessment once during a three-year period one cannot speak about a systematic approach, it is more a kind of campaign. Moreover the respondents probably think that the current system is not very fair. More frequent assessments would decrease a chance of a harmful decision and will allow the assessed to improve or will motivate them to self-development.

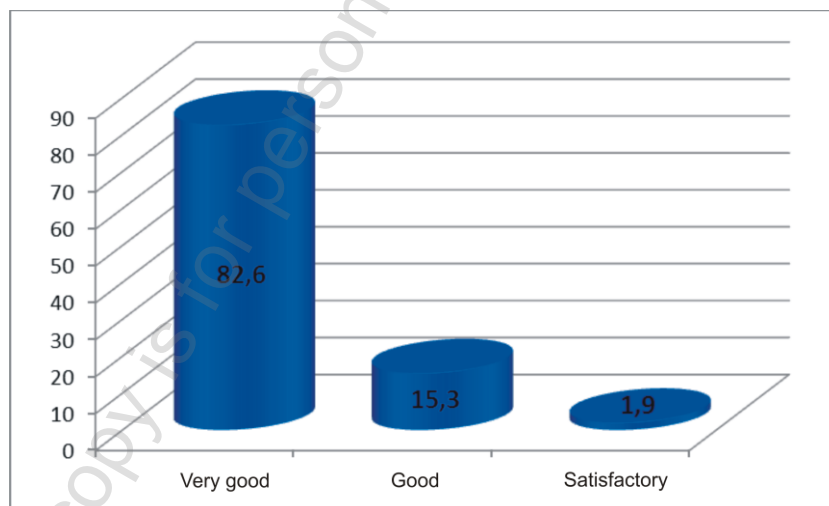


Fig. 6. The level of grades received in the last assessment [%]

Source: Author's own research

A good solution would be implementation of IT systems (electronic databases with the most important information about the assessed) in the whole assessment system. Development of such tools would improve the process but it would also mean additional investments.

The confirmation of the fact that the employee assessment system does not function well are the data presented below. A large percentage of employees (82.6%) assessed in the latest assessment received a very good result, a small percentage received a good result (15.3%). One can observe that in the group of soldiers with 15 – 20 years of service, 94% of results were very good, all the others were good. The situation is similar if one takes into account the current military rank. Starting with the mayor, all respondents received a very good grade. Very few respondents received a satisfactory grade (1.9%) and those who did were soldiers with less than 5 years of military service. 75% of soldiers who received a satisfactory grade were second lieutenants. The fact that the periodic assessment is not conducted correctly is confirmed by the grades obtained by second lieutenants. 73.8% of them received a very good grade, 20% – good and only 6.1% – satisfactory. The position of a platoon commander should be used to verify soldier's leadership skills. The research showed that according to the results of the periodic assessment, 73.8% of staff have such skills. With high probability one can state that this is not true. In practice only a much smaller fraction of commanders possess such skills. Besides, the same superiors, when expressing their opinion about the graduates of the Military Academy of Land Forces, claim that they are completely unprepared for professional service. Hence the question arises why they give such high grades during the periodic assessment. Probably the reason for this is the fact that numerous superiors do not know the purpose of this assessment. For them the assessment is conducted for the sake of assessment only because eventually they still think it does not have any practical purpose. Apart from this the assessment forms are constructed in such a way that it is hard to draw any conclusions from them, e.g. there is no information what professional tasks were performed by the assessed at the time of the assessment process.

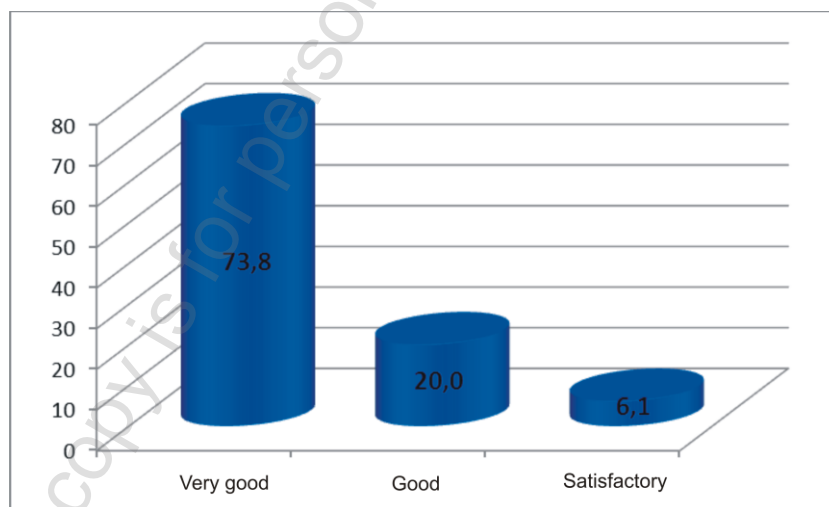


Fig. 7. The level of grades obtained during the latest assesemnt of second lieutenants [%]

Source: Author's own research

One can observe that a large number of service officers received a very good mark. Since the assessment tool is not compatible in this case with a bonus, promotion or a professional development course, etc., then it becomes only a standard procedure, a ritual without any purpose. There is no comparison with previous assessment results and their analysis as well as conclusions, which would allow to show the weaknesses of some military organisation architecture (and not only this).

Taking into account the responses to all questions related to the assessment itself and career development included in the assessment form, the author claims that people expressing a positive opinion about the current assessment system have no idea what the assessment system really is and what it should be used for. Analysing the answers given in the survey, one can conclude that the assessment does not meet two basic goals. It does not provide reliable information on the quality of work and does not facilitate the decision on employment prospects (remaining in service, dismissal or promotion). Apart from this, the final effect of the assessment procedure should be mapping out a career path for subordinates. Without the knowledge of the assumptions and the rules of assessment, one cannot use it correctly. Hence the respondents giving a positive opinion on the assessment system, use it thinking they are doing it the right way while in reality this is not true. The problem with reliable and adequate assessment does not occur only in the army; similar difficulties are experienced by civilian organisations.

On the basis of the conducted research a number of errors has been diagnosed in the assessment system of service officers:

- the assessment result is influenced by events taking place shortly before the procedure and not the ones from the whole assessed period;
- grades are given on a “friendly basis” and not on the basis of achievements, skills and professional qualifications;
- the assessment form is too complicated;
- the service plan proposed by a soldier is not reflected in his/her career path;
- superiors do not assess their subordinates objectively;
- complaints about assessment results frequently become the reason for regression in professional career;
- a good grade is considered safe;
- a grade is given by an accidental person after a short cooperation period;
- the assessment procedure is conducted too rarely (in practice every three years);
- the obtained assessment result has no influence on the professional career;
- assessment criteria have nothing to do with reality (no criteria differentiation for various positions).

Taking into account the specifics of the army and its role, the current assessment system requires modification, new solutions which would eliminate the errors in the described sub-function of human resource management. Changes in the assessment system will facilitate forecasting careers. It will be easier to make decisions related to which officers should take particular positions, for what term of office, on what conditions and what predispositions are necessary. This will also result in the introduction of clear promotion regulations. The above actions will also mean that officers holding particular positions will be specialists in given areas.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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