

Is it Possible to Increase the Share of Military Women in the Norwegian Armed Forces?

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Ever since Norway introduced general conscription for men in 1897, the participation of women in the Norwegian Armed Forces (NorAF) has been an issue for discussion. In 1984 the NorAF introduced occupational equality for men and women. This means that women have the same possibilities and rights as men in the whole organization. However, the share of women in the NorAF (9%) has not increased over the years, and the goal of 20% seems to be hard to reach. Based on data from the project “Research on age cohorts for the NorAF”, this paper presents the concept, theory and empirically based hypotheses behind nine initiatives that I believe will contribute to a substantial increase in the number of women in the NorAF. The initiatives are a combination of short-term, long-term, preventive and drastic measures. The author argues that the suggested measures will affect future recruitment, retention, military (masculine) culture and the selection process of military personnel to the NorAF.

Keywords: gender, diversity, recruitment, selection process, retention, turnover, military culture, measures

Introduction

Ever since the general conscription for Norwegian men was introduced in 1897 (Johansen, 2000), women’s participation in the military has been discussed (Værnø & Sveri, 1990). Despite a great contribution by Norwegian women during the Second World War and positive experiences with women in both officer’s training school and boot camp for the army communication units in the first period after the war, the Norwegian Parliament debated and decided in 1953 that women could not serve in the military (Værnø & Sveri, 1990). However, they did settle on an interim solution to establish new military “female inspector positions”, within which women would primarily focus on mobilization procedures for women into the NorAF.

In 1976 the Norwegian Parliament reconsidered its decision of 1953 and decided to allow women into the military in non-combatant positions on a voluntary basis. The first female ever to start officer training in the NorAF was enrolled in 1977 (Værnø & Sveri, 1990). As the first women started on various educational and career paths at the different non-combatant schools, the politically sensitive debate concerning female participation in combat positions continued (Værnø & Sveri, 1990). In 1984 the Norwegian Parliament introduced the so-called military occupational equality for men and women. This means that women have the same opportunities and rights as men, on a voluntary basis, throughout the organization and in all functions. At this time Norway was a pioneer in NATO and in decisions concerning organizational gender equality, especially when it came to allowing women to participate in all military functions (only Belgium and the

Netherlands were earlier in taking this decision).

However, Norway has not maintained its status as a pioneer for women in the military. The proportion of women has not changed significantly over the last 30 years and in recent times it has fallen below the average for NATO, together with Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy and Poland (Cawkill, Rogers, Knight, & Spear, 2009). In the United States, where women are soon to be accepted for elite combat training, the share of women is about twice as high as in Norway (Cawkill et al., 2009).

The NorAF effort on gender equality and increased diversity within the NorAF can be described as a fragmented series of initiatives and measures. Since 1984, 199 unique measures have been suggested to raise the share of women (Sand & Fasting, 2012). There are 75 publications on the subject (Sand & Fasting, 2011). However, despite these efforts, few of these measures have been implemented with success. Yes, the share of military women has risen a few percentage-points since 1984, but whether this is due to the outcome of effective and active measures, or the outcome of a natural variation in preferences for the military service among Norwegian women, is difficult to verify.

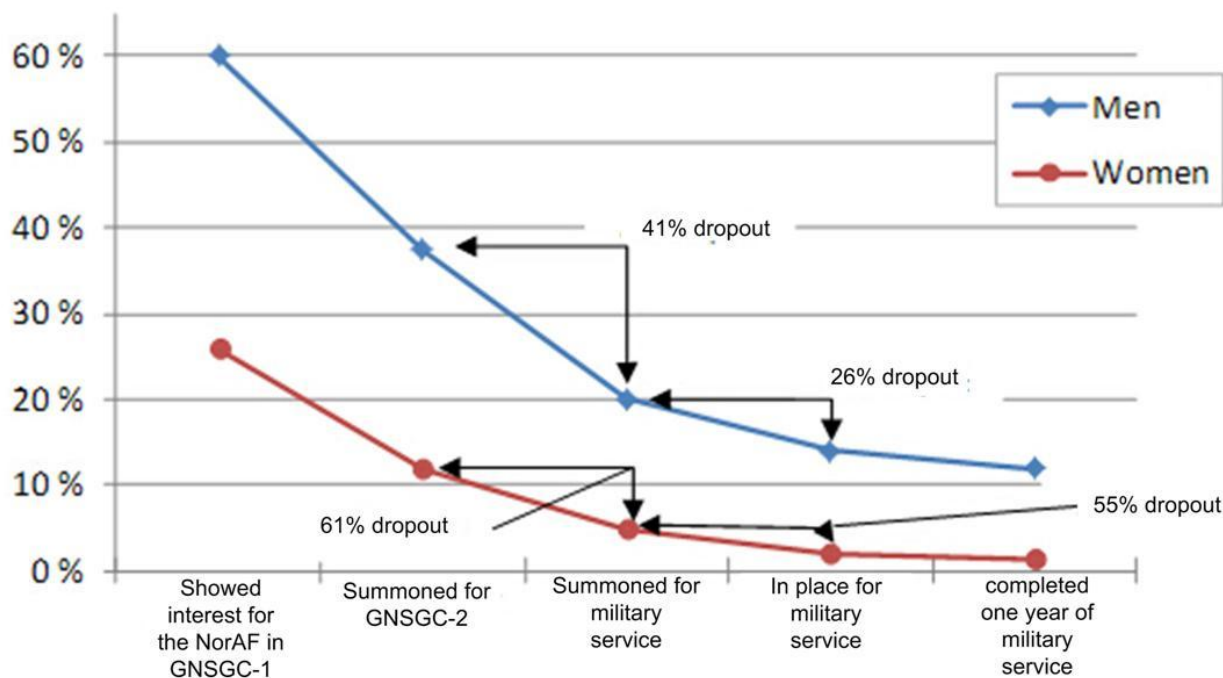


Figure 1. The share of 92-age-cohort-group that completes one year of Military service.

One of the latest measures (and the first research measure) has been put forward in Parliament White Paper # 36 (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2007), leading to the successful implementation and initiation (Sand & Fasting, 2012) of the FFI project “Research on age cohorts for the NorAF”. This article aims to summarize and promote nine effective measures suggested by the research of the FFI project to improve gender equality and greater diversity in the NorAF. The suggested measures are relatively comprehensive and emphasize the need for a basic and continuous holistic effort and insight to raise the share of military women. Before the measures

are presented, I will present a brief summary of the NorAF's ability to recruit and retain personnel, especially military women. Such a brief summary highlights the need for preventive and drastic measures to reach the ambitions described in the Parliament White Paper # 36.

The NorAF's Ability to Recruit

If one looks closer at NorAF's recruitment, there are some significant gender differences. Based on quantitative population data from the new Gender Neutral Selection Process for General Conscription (GNSGC) to the NorAF¹ it is possible to illustrate the apparent gender differences; the huge difference in dropout rates between women and men entering the military (see Figure 1).

The main reason for the large difference in motivation and interest in the military among 17-year-olds are probably due to the fact that the NorAF still practice voluntary conscription for women and general conscription for men.

The GNSGC Part 1 is an annual online survey sent out to all 17-year-olds in Norway (about 60,000). This population survey states that only one in four 17-year-old women show interest in military service (Fauske, 2011; Fauske, 2012). Furthermore, only half of the women who are interested in military service are being summoned for GNSGC Part 2. The main reason for this relatively high dropout rate is explained by the NorAF's physical requirements (good state of health), formal education and the NorAF's zero-tolerance for criminal records. In GNSGC Part 2, where candidates in addition to the information meeting and conversation with different selection officers, go through a variety of theoretical examinations, physical tests and a medical examination, additional dropout occurs. Based on the NorAF's demand for soldiers, and a varying number who have applied for a postponement from earlier age cohort groups, about 60% of women and 40% of men are summoned for military service. Only half of the women who are summoned choose to (voluntary) meet for military service. The corresponding figure for men is about three-quarters (general conscription).

There is no gender difference regarding how many complete the military service—about 85% of those who are summoned complete their one year military service. Hence, for a given age cohort of women one can expect that less than 2% to complete the military service. This does not include those who apply for deferment. The corresponding figure for men is about 13%. If one looks closer at the different age cohorts over time, which includes those seeking postponement from the selection process, the figures are somewhat higher, especially for men.

The main reasons for women who are qualified and summoned for military service to change their minds, include changes in personal motivation, illness, admission to college and likewise. Another factor that explains the high dropout rate is that many women are uncertain whether they will achieve satisfactory results on the physical tests. The physical dimension and the physical requirements are of significance for the individual and personal formation of expectations about the military service and the first meeting with the NorAF.

The main reason for not pursuing a military career, given by approximately 75% of the 17-year-old women, is simply that they lack interest in the military. This is supported by my qualitative research where one

¹ Since 2009, the age 1992 cohort group—both men and women have to meet the NorAF for an comprehensive evaluation process.

finds typical statements such as “The NorAF has no place in my life plans” or “I’m not a military person” or “The NorAF is too physically demanding” (Hennes, 2009).

The NorAF’s Ability to Retain

Previous work shows that the variation in tasks/job functions, wage levels and wage dispersion is greater among military men than among military women (Steder, Hellum, & Skutlaberg, 2009; Steder, 2010; Steder, 2007). The gender based difference in wage level and wage dispersion is primarily explained by men’s inclination to seek out a wider range of different tasks, especially in operational service. Most women tend to work within logistics, support and personnel functions where the wage level is lower and wage dispersion is narrower. Other issues that the author has found to be interesting include differences in preferences and interest in work content between women and men, where women tend to be more altruistic than men (Schanke, Lauritzen, & Leirvik, 2008) and that men tend to be more concerned about their future career, salary level and operational tasks than women (Schanke et al., 2008). Moreover, there are fewer men working part-time than women (Steder et al., 2009; Steder, 2010).

This identified gender-based variety in choice of tasks/functions implies that the NorAF is in many ways a mirror reflection of Norwegian society. Women and men have different interests, and they seek out the tasks and functions that they are most comfortable with, according to individual preferences about during different life phases, status, according to personal interests, and so forth. From a macro perspective both men and women are encouraged to seek non-traditional jobs and functions, but most Norwegians still make the traditional gender-based choices. In general Norway is one of the most equal-status and gender-balanced countries in the world. However, Norway also has one of the most gender-segregated labor markets. This is also reflected within the NorAF, where military women are more likely than military men to seek positions in logistics, support, administration and personnel functions. One of the reasons the NorAF fails to raise the proportion of women can be explained by the tilted effort to increase the share of military women—the aims and efforts are mainly aligned towards the communities where the percentage is at its lowest—the military communities that Norwegian women traditionally do not apply to or leave first (operative sector).

Turnover, or access and departure of personnel to/from the military positions in the NorAF, also varies with gender. Women exit the NorAF to a greater extent than men, especially in the younger age groups (under 30 years). The young women who exit the military are more commonly exiting from positions in the operative sector, where the share of military women is already at its lowest (Steder et al., 2009; Steder, 2010). The NorAF, already perceived as a masculine organization with relatively few women in the first place, seeks not only to convince more women to start, but they seek to persuade women to start in the typical masculine part of the NorAF (the operative sector) where the pressure to maintain typical masculine values is at its greatest (Kristiansen, Boe, Bakken, Skjæret, & Granlund, 2008; Kristiansen, Boe, & Skjæret, 2010).

Nine Preventive and Drastic Measures to Increase the Share of Women

Based on the work of the FFI-project “Research on age cohorts for the NorAF” this paper will present nine selected measures to improve gender equality and greater diversity in the NorAF. These measures are not necessarily new or different from those that have been suggested over the past 30 years, but they represent what

The author believes that it is necessary to raise the share of military women from the current level (about 9%). Some of the measures have a greater cultural influence and can thus be perceived as somewhat extensive and drastic measures. They will probably face greater resistance in the NorAF than other measures. After I have described the suggested measures in more detail, the article will briefly refer to a risk analysis related to the uplift of military women in the NorAF. The measures are presented in a non-prioritized order of importance or preference.

Improved Rationale for More Military Women

Many military women in the NorAF claim that the rationale being used to increase women in the military is superficial, minimal and at times provocative. To many military women, the rationale is portrayed as a goal in itself; the NorAF need to increase the share of military women—no matter what! When the strategic level is addressing why it is important to increase the share of women, three campaigns-like arguments are used: The right's, utility, and diversity arguments. Typical statements from the strategic level are as follows:

The low proportion of women in the NorAF is not in accordance with the Government's gender equality policy, as embodied in the Soria Moria-Declaration. At a time when women have great opportunities for education and there is female participation in virtually all arenas of society, a NorAF consisting of 93% men is not representative of the development of society at large (Minister of Defence in Dagbladet, August 3, 2007).

The demand for more women in the NorAF is not exclusively Norwegian antics. The international community recognizes the unequal distribution of power between men and women and requires change. Norway cannot and does not want to withdraw from this development. Hence there must be a connection between the objectives we set ourselves at home with what we're doing out there (Minister of Defence, speech in People and Defence Annual Meeting, March 8, 2012).

Although this rationale is "intelligible" and "right" in itself many military women perceive that the only reason for the NorAF to increase the share of military women is because there are too few of them in the first place (Lauritzen, Leirvik, Schanke, & Ellingsen, 2009; Ellingsen et al., 2008).

The most commonly used argument for why there should be more military women in the NorAF is the justice and democracy argument for equality (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2012). An equal society is created when benefits and burdens are evenly and fairly shared between men and women. Hence, a NorAF that is has an even distribution of men and women will contribute to improved decision-making in the organization.

This argument/aspect suggests that men and women, as far as possible, should have equal rights and duties in society when power is exercised. In the exercise of power the NorAF is in a special position, and therefore both men and women should be able to influence this.

However, despite the fact that these two arguments are understandable, it is still not sufficient for many military women for explaining why the NorAF requires more military women.

Hence, the typical resource arguments (Hernes, 1984) were also used when arguing for increased diversity. In the resource argument there is a difference between men's and women's experiences, values, interests and priorities. More women in male-dominated areas will provide new insights, perspectives and solutions that could improve both efficiency and productivity in the organization.

The utility aspect derived from these three arguments indicates that the NorAF benefits when recruiting

from the entire population – it ensures that all values and experiences in society are reflected in the NorAF. Furthermore the diversity aspect says something about how the military develops values, attitudes and behavior so that the organization better adapts to changes in tasks and functions (Forsvars-departementet, 2007). In addition to the fact that the latter aspects are somewhat overlapping, they complement the justice and legitimacy aspect.

The basis of a desire to increase diversity is that diversity is better than equality/uniformity, although it “produces” both advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, it should be obvious that the variation in military tasks and functions requires variation in intellectual and physical capital. This is not the case! Prevailing recruitment and selection processes should reflect this principle, not be based on a gender-differentiation as today, but rather a task or function-based differentiation in the recruitment process. In short, the NorAF seeks diversity in gender, ethnicity, age cohorts, skills, knowledge, physical and mental capital because it is the best for the organization.

The value of diversity is well presented in welfare theory, migration theory and organizational theory (Hong & Page, 2001; Leonard & Levine, 2006; Llopis, 2011). It is also prominent in educational theory (Gurin, 1999). All theories conclude that inequality affects productivity and the development of a given community, both positively and negatively.

The biggest challenge of inequality is the increased risk of conflict (Hong & Page, 2001; Leonard & Levine, 2006; Gurin, 1999; Öberg, Oskarsson, & Svensson, 2009). However, this must be viewed in the context of the clear advantages that are produced by inequality, especially the level of improved knowledge, creativity, management and cognitive skills in a given group (Leonard & Levine, 2006; Llopis, 2011). A high level of intellectual engagement, motivation and skill level is also reducing turnover (Leonard & Levine, 2006).

The arguments used in NorAF’s recruitment and retention efforts should be communicated more understandably, with an easier, more varied, timely and comprehensive approach. By this I mean that the NorAF’s public arguments for increased diversity should vary in content and expressed outwardly, reflecting the desire of diversity– because it has a value in itself.

Furthermore, the arguments about the desire to retain military women should reflect that military women are valued for who they are, not who they are perceived to be. As Defence Minister Anne-Grethe Strøm-Eriksen said in a speech at a discussion evening in Oslo Military Society (October 30, 2006):

The most important factor is that women are women, and thus have a complementary competency that men do not have, or can get, even if they train ever so much. Being a woman is a skill in itself, and I’m certainly not sure everyone sees this value .

Take Better Care of the Advantages From the GNSGC Part 1

In general a questionnaire should be as specific as possible and satisfy the primary purpose given to it—selection of “the best” in this case. The secondary purpose (in this case)—to recruit more women—must also be achieved in the same questionnaire.

The main purpose of GNSGC Part 1 is to select the best candidates for further evaluation in GNSGC Part 2, where they are finally evaluated and selected for military service and/or military training (Fauske, 2011; Fauske, 2012; Køber & Strand, 2013).

The content and appearance of a given questionnaire signals different values and important properties to the respondents. When a 17-year-old sits before his/her computer answering GNSGC Part 1, it is usually one of the first meetings ever with the NorAF. The design and content of the questionnaire gives them an impression of what properties are emphasized by the NorAF, and perhaps also what criteria the NorAF value. It is likely that many respondents are uncertain about “their own priorities” when they answer the GNSGC Part 1. Given that women do not have general conscription, the questionnaire should be designed so that it motivates the “doubters” and those who have no knowledge of what it actually means to be in the NorAF.

The questionnaire in GNSGC Part 1 begins with a comprehensive set of questions about the respondent’s health (about physical fitness, diseases and other health problems as well as issues related to school and social skills). At this time it is likely that the respondent has been influenced by the questions asked so far. Following these basic questions of requirement she or he is asked about their motivation and interest to serve the NorAF.

The NorAF has, through GNSGC Part 1, a unique opportunity to inform respondents and identify the interest and motivation in the entire population of 17-year-olds. There are no other institutions that have the capacity or the right to carry out such a population survey. It is of great significance that this opportunity is taken well care of as an active instrument and initial selection tool into the NorAF. To date, I still believe that this possibility is not fully utilized.

This article only illustrates some initial considerations related to the changes that I believe can improve the questionnaire. But the main recommendation is that a proper review and evaluation of the questionnaire design, content and level of conveying information about the NorAF is needed in the GNSGC Part 1.

Evaluate the Effect From Gender Based Measures

In many contexts it still appears to be an adopted truth that girls are weak! However, different statements from male soldiers in their conscription service convey that women on their platoon/team are as strong, or even stronger and/or tougher than men (Batt-Rawden & Skåholdt, 2010). When talking about, or when evaluating measures to recruit/select women to the NorAF, the allegeable “truth” about the weaker sex appears frequently. According to our research this “truth” is one of the reasons the majority of the military women are not unconditionally positive towards measures aimed specifically for women, for example, women-camps or other preferential treatments in the selection process (Lauritzen et al., 2009). When designing measures aimed at a specific gender, there is a risk that the stereotypes about who or what gender fits better in a function is being reproduced, rather than that measure actually contributing to a change of culture and/or increased recruitment/retention. Some military women argue that preferential treatment in the selection process is good because women tend to exclude themselves, partly because they do not think they will manage to carry out the physical requirements: “It is typical of girls to have poor confidence regarding the physical requirements. Women-camp can help women gain more confidence in their physical capacity”. Others argue that when separating men and women in the selection process women will be confronted to a greater extent with wrongful claims later on, claims such as they are only accepted into the NorAF through unfair measures of affirmative action. The trend in the NorAF is that young military women do not want preferential treatment! All they want is to be treated equally, to be a part of the group/unit on equal terms and not stand out from the crowd. The aim is to be “one of the guys” on equal terms and conditions as men.

Preferential treatment has good intentions, but it is a measure that increases and points out the difference

between men and women which suggests that women are not naturally fit for service in the NorAF.

However, it is important that the NorAF is aware of the recruitment and retention of women, although not by being as explicit as preferential treatment, affirmative action and the like. The NorAF should give women and men equal opportunities, equal rights and equal obligations, although it may involve unequal treatment of women and men, or unequal treatment within gender, ethnicity, age cohorts, physical capacity, etc..

Make Better Use of the Public School as an Effective Arena of Recruitment

Every year the NorAF visits 500-600 of the nation's public schools and informs large groups of students about the military, the military education and the day-to-day service in the NorAF (Forsvaret, 2011). According to a survey conducted in 2005 by the NorAF Media Centre, school visits are one of the arenas where many girls have their first personal contact with the NorAF (Kristiansen et al., 2008). However, there is little or no evaluation of these visits. We really don't know how they are executed or how the students respond to the information or their actual level of knowledge about the NorAF.

In short, we don't know the effect/outcome from the school-visits. What are the students wondering about at the different school-visits? Do they consider applying for an education in the NorAF? These and many other questions were most likely asked at the different school visits, but the questions, answers, reflections, level of knowledge concerning the military, interests, motivation, etc., are not recorded anywhere. We simply don't know the effect of school visits other than it is one of the most important and primary introductions (on a personal level) about the NorAF.

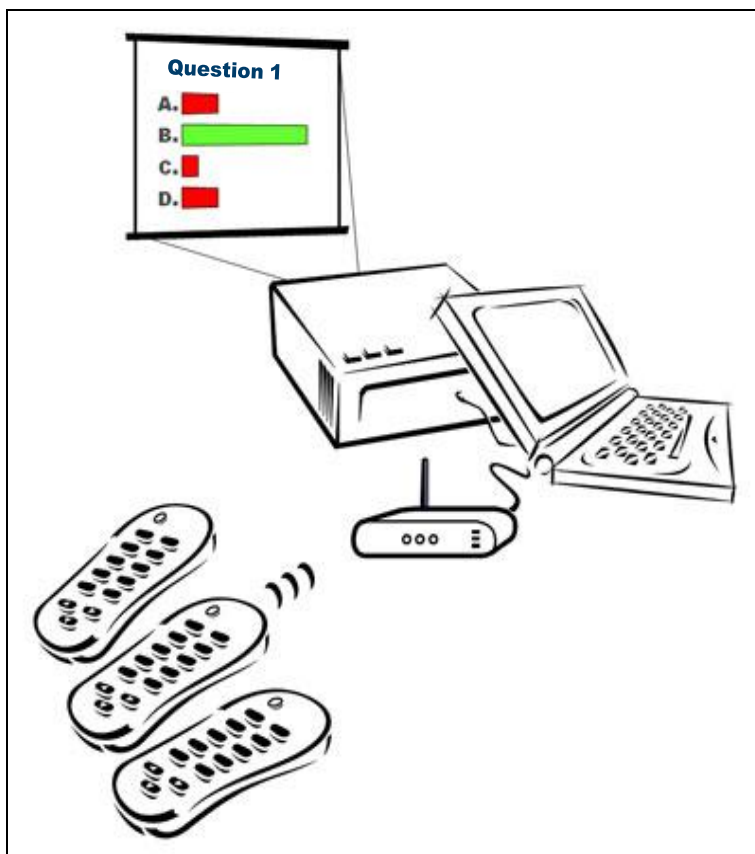


Figure 2. The use of audiences' response system is regarded very useful for collecting data at different school visits.

However, a relatively efficient way to follow up school visits and measure the variations in level of knowledge about the NorAF, military education, etc., is to use an audience response system. This is an easy to use and fairly inexpensive method for recording different variables at the school visits.

Most audience response systems are primarily based on a simple slideshow (i.e. in PowerPoint), and results can be stored in a preferred database. If one has two sets of questions at each school visit, some questions are repeated every year, at every school visit, and some are more appropriate time and case sensitive, one gains easy access to studying longitudinal trends concerning the NorAF, motivation for service, etc., in younger age cohorts. This is a great opportunity to interact with the students, evaluate the outcome of the visit and record data. Actual data from younger age cohorts, a few years before they are eligible for service, is regarded very valuable for both recruitment officers, the further development of the current recruitment strategy and for preparing different marketing campaigns.

Another area within the public school system to consider for better recruitment to the NorAF is the “business deployment program”. Through the Knowledge-Promise (Ministry of Education and Research, 2004), all students (ages 14-15) are entitled to choose the adapted teaching and discipline subject “educational choice”. This practical hands-on subject program provides a personal insight into working-life through deployment/internship at a local workplace. All schools and institutions/employers in Norwegian society are encouraged to form a closer dialogue and better practise concerning this practical 5-day exchange program between public schools and local businesses (Andreassen et al., 2008; Andreassen, 2009).

There are several reasons for this encouragement. One of the main reasons given is to affect the traditional choice in education and future occupation. Norwegian youths’ choice of education and employment is still strongly linked to traditional gender-roles and social background (Schanke et al., 2008). In the subject “educational choice” students can meet others who have chosen non-traditional roles and they build personal and perhaps better individual based knowledge of what it actually means to make an unconventional choice (Watts, 2006). The student need is the primary basis for this cooperation with local industry. A bonus and secondary objective with the arrangement is the local business’s need for recruitment (EU, 2004).



Picture: Ola Tomter (reklame@east.no)

Figure 3. Happy youths at a NorAF deployment program.

If the NorAF chooses to further exploit this “business deployment program” as a local and/or national partner, the military organization could aid the public school in their national goals of “educational choice”. The NorAF will also improve its own recruitment by utilizing the public school as an active recruitment arena. A British study (Brown et al., 2003) showed that different business deployment programs or business-visits are one of five strong predictors/initiatives that have a positive effect on youngsters’ future career choice. Other studies (Watts, 2006) show that personal experience, and temporary placement in a work place, provides experiential learning and first-hand knowledge of the labor market.

Today’s utilization, practice and exploitation of the “business deployment program” is relatively unstructured and random. The deployment is usually an outcome of the parents’ network or the school counselor, rather than active military promotion for a placement in the local military camp or base. With a relatively modest effort, about the same or less than using in gender-based measures mentioned in chapter 4.3, the North may achieve a better recruitment tool and structured deployment period for the secondary school students. Unlike the gender-based recruitment arena, the deployment exchange program is offered to both young men and women, in a period where they, especially the young women, already have begun to consider future career options (Schanke et al., 2008).

Improved Selection Process for the Officer’s Cadet School

There is a relatively higher dropout rate among women than men in the first week of selection for Officer’s Cadet School (Stornæs, 2011; Værnø 2012). This is mainly explained by the difference in physical performance.

Among women who have completed the physical tests in the period 2007 to 2011, on average, 19% have failed the physical tests during the first week (Stornæs & Fasting, 2011). The corresponding figure for men is 6% (Stornæs & Fasting, 2011). However, this is not necessarily explained by the poor physical performance of women. It could also be that today’s physical requirements are too low for men (or too high for women). According to the results of physical tests and the actual outcome for new cadets in the selection process, the gender-based difference in physical requirements is skewed towards men. Hence (relatively speaking) the tests are easier for the average man compared to the average woman.

Military women are often met with attitudes that they are physically inferior and do not meet the physical requirements of combat or close-combat roles. It is true that men’s physical strength and endurance are different from women’s—but that does not mean that women are physically unsuited for a close combat position.

The modernization of the NorAF for the past 20 years has run its course—towards a more capital-and technology-intensive organization. The number of officers and soldiers is reduced, and the demand for skills, organization, combat techniques, strategies and military tasks has changed. One would think that the formal physical requirements have changed in line with these technological, organizational and procedural changes, but they have not. In essence, it is still the same gender-based differentiated requirements and tests that have been conducted since 1984—the year of introducing and allowing women into all positions within the NorAF.

Based on empirical data from the selection process to the Officer Cadet School, where 19% of women and 6% of men fail the physical tests (Stornæs & Fasting, 2011), I recommend not to continue with the current gender-based practice. If one is to maintain differentiated requirements the physical requirements should reflect

the actual biological differences that exist.

The author recommends that the importance of formal physical requirements decreases in the overall assessment of the candidates. Given the change in demand for military skills, capital intensity and tasks, the author recommends an increasing importance of psychological and cognitive testing in the overall assessment of the future candidates.

Furthermore it is also recommended that the physical tests no longer are gender based—but function and position based—that is, the tests are equal for men and women but differ with position, function and the (objective) physical requirements needed. This will also ease the commonly held notion that women are unfairly selected based on affirmative action.

Another area within the selection process for Officer's Cadet School is the rather subjective evaluation process of the candidates. In my opinion the selector's personal interpretation of the "occupational code" and the selector's professional identity, creates a bias in the current selection process. The candidates are more or less selected on biased subjective attitudes, not the NorAF stated values and formal requirements for leadership and core values (Rones & Fasting, 2011; Kristiansen, 2011). In short, there is a risk that the selected cadets are production of the current officers, current informal culture and thus an obstacle to greater diversity in the NorAF.

Implement a Life-Cycle Oriented Personnel Policy

It should be obvious that the need for balance between work, leisure and family varies with age. One of the findings from the FFI-project is that the main differences among the employees in the NorAF are not necessarily based on differences in gender, but on differences in age (Steder et al., 2009; Steder, 2010; Kristiansen et al., 2010). A life-cycle oriented personnel policy implies recognition of the career-related phases across different age cohorts—acknowledging that needs, requirements, limitations and opportunities vary with age, not gender.

A good life-phase policy at all levels and for all age groups implies that both managers and employees are flexible in their everyday life and that individual arrangements to balance work, leisure and family, are accepted. In many instances it is not necessarily formal or costly barriers that prevent the facilitation of a good life-cycle-phase policy, but simple administrative regulations and cultural obstacles (Kristiansen et al., 2010). If one aims for higher retention in the NorAF one must consider facilitating a proper life-cycle-phase policy.

Practice a Targeted Awareness of Diversity in the Education of Soldiers and Lower Ranking Officers

Knowledge and practice of diversity at lower ranks are highly variable in the NorAF. A practical and systematic knowledge-based execution of awareness concerning the idea of diversity, which is anchored at all levels in the organization must be monitored continuously.

It should not be implemented as a project next to daily operations. Diversity is a perspective and an idea that should be included in the tasks undertaken by the NorAF—at all levels and at all functions. Efforts and measures to retain critical and unique employees must be integrated into the individual function and different military units.

The vast majority of today's soldiers and junior officers are educated and trained by relatively young officers with relatively little variation in education, work and life experience. Many young leaders in the NorAF

are still completely unprepared for different gender and diversity issues in their own units and handle challenges as they arise, often without foundations in past experience or in education (Kristiansen et al., 2008). In my opinion, it should be a level-consistent subject in leadership and management at the different academies, based on military education, sociology and/or psychology that examines and reflects upon different attitudes, behaviors, power and language, awareness of gender-related challenges in a given military unit. The subject and the knowledge-conscious education/reflection should be coated with empirical examples from daily life in the NorAF. Furthermore, I recommend that the issues in the course run from the individual aspect (psychology and sociology) towards the organizational level as personnel receive higher education, rise in military rank and gain expanded responsibilities.

The strong need for a knowledge-based subject, and efforts to increase diversity and improve formal education in the NorAF, are illustrated by describing two typical statements/situations that especially military women experience more or less every day. The first example is based on a typical attitude and accusations that military women are often confronted with, and the second example is based on the negative employment relationship that often occurs between military women and men.

Close Combat Roles and Team Cohesion

Military women are often confronted with stories and allegations about their role and performance in a military unit and its context. One of the allegations they frequently hear is related to women's performance in combat positions. Some of these closely related stories are directly misleading and are often gratuitous regarding further service in the NorAF.



Picture: Lars Magne Hovtun, NorAF

Figure 4. A female soldier at a NorAF exercise.

The allegation is that women's presence in an operational combat unit, especially under "hostile pressure", affects the team morale and cohesion among the male soldiers in a negative way—they focus more on their female team mates than the fight itself. These allegations are based on a myth from the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 that the presence of women has had a devastating impact on the effectiveness of men in battle (Dougherty, 2001). The Israeli women were never allowed in combat—hence women's presence could not have affected the

male soldiers. They were simply not there! Israeli women were actually not allowed in close combat positions before 2000 (Cawkill et al., 2009; Israel MFA, 2009).

In my opinion the NorAF can draw some lessons from the discussion on women's participation in close combat positions, especially regarding allegations of team cohesion and gender in a combat area. From my own research (Steder et al., 2009; Kristiansen et al., 2010), the author recognized the resistance towards women in combat units. By confronting the masculine culture, especially in the combat units, one can hopefully reduce some of the daily "suspicion" about the alleged inadequacy and incompetence the military women face.

Bullying and Condescending Behavior

The second example that illustrates the need for a targeted awareness of diversity in the NorAF is presented through a set of typical scenarios/situations for military women from their everyday working life for the NorAF.

In my conscription year, I had a platoon leader who supposedly did not like women in the military. The author had heard rumors and stories about him, but would like to make up my own mind. At the end of the conscript year I received recognition from the other cadets, but there was little support during the year. He patted me on the butt in front of the entire battalion, talked condescendingly to me, and I always had to perform extra. (Kristiansen et al., 2010)

"Today I got up at half past four to clean my closet, ironing my clothes and tuck my hair in close to the head. Always just nice to feel and look like a man" (Jørstad, 2010).

The author stand out, as I'm a woman. The whole camp knows who I am, and I don't know who anyone else is. I get the looks, the whistles and stuff. It's not accepted to whistle at women, and I get annoyed by it. I feel like I'm being demeaned as an officer, they don't see me as an officer, they only see me as a woman. (Håvimb, 2010)

All the platoons are divided into different teams competing against each other. Younger officers are in charge of the different activities in a given trail/route where we had to navigate between various posts. At his particular post the task was to make as many words as possible from what one was wearing. "You get more points for more dirty words", says the officer. He looks at me, startled, "I did not notice you at first" and laughs a little. Several of the soldiers got undressed and used the different uniform articles, watches and dog-tags for spelling words. Words like fuck, cunt, cock, and various combinations of words with a sexual nature/content are spelled out on the ground (Harsvik, 2010).

At the officer's cadet school, the results in physical tests are obvious to everyone. In the hallway to the cadets the individual score is put up on a common board/list and the girls are marked in red. The girls performance stands out compared to the boys performance—partly because it is marked in red, but mainly because the girl's names are at the bottom of the common result list (Håvimb, 2010).

Had she been strong enough, of course she would have been given the chance, but it is not given that she was fit for it. It's all about the social interaction and the physical capacity. If women are to serve here (in this unit) they cannot be a girly-girl, they must be more of a man, a tomboy, with male humour, otherwise I feel sorry for them. I think one has to look a long time to find women who "have it" to be stationed here. (Totland, 2009)

The selected quotations represent at times an extremely masculine culture. Many military women feel that they step into a masculine arena and adapt to the masculine norms and behavior. This is clearly expressed through language and repression of feminine properties. The call to introduce a zero-tolerance for unwanted behavior is as much a call for awareness of acceptable behavior, and it is not necessarily true that extremely masculine culture is accepted by all men as well. In my opinion, it occurs to such an extent that it can be a

barrier to recruiting and retaining women for the NorAF.

Improved Longitudinal Studies

Based on GNSGC one can draw a stratified random sample and follow the respondents for a long period of time, even if they are not in the NorAF at all times. Through improved longitudinal studies one can uncover cultural influence, individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and how they change in different stages and settings. One can also create one or more follow-up studies regarding the attitude towards women in the military to investigate whether views on women in the military change throughout one’s career. In my opinion and experience an improved longitudinal study can with greater certainty identify the cultural characteristics that influence attitudes toward women in the military.

Gender-neutral Conscript System




Over the past 30-40 years, many countries have abandoned general conscription in favor of an all-volunteer force. Last in this development were Sweden and Germany, who introduced it as late as 2010.

The underlying value that women and men are to be treated equally is a fundamental value in Norwegian society. However, the proposal in the latest long-term plan to implement a gender-neutral conscript system from 2015 is not only seen as an opportunity to increase the proportion of women in the military, but also to improve the production for increased operational capability, and better availability, of all military resources.

Table 1

An Overview of a Simple Risk Analysis of the Suggested Measures for Increased Share of Military Women in the NorAF

Suggested measures to increase the share of military women in the Norwegian Armed forces		HR-value chain				
		Rec	S	Ret	Cost	Culture
1	Improved strategic arguments for more military women	Improvements	Little or no change	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
2	Take better care of the advantages from the GNSGC Part 1	Improvements	Little or no change	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
3	Evaluate the effect of the gender based measures	Improvements	Little or no change	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
4	Make better use of the public school as an effective arena of recruitment	Improvements	Little or no change	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
5	Implement a life cycle oriented personnel policy	Little or no change	Improvements	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
6	Implement a life cycle oriented personnel policy	Little or no change	Improvements	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
7	Practice a targeted awareness of diversity in the education	Little or no change	Improvements	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
8	Improved longitudinal studies	Improvements	Little or no change	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements
9	Evaluate the general conscript system	Improvements	Little or no change	Improvements	Worsening	Improvements

	Improvements
	Little or no change
	Worsening (i. e. increased costs)

Rec	Recruitment
S	Selection process
Ret	Retention
Costs	Fixed and variable costs
Culture	NorAF organizational culture

The current practice of conscription for men and voluntary service for women is controversial. When including women in the general conscript system the NorAF affects the entire capability production process, not only reconsidering the fairness and duty between men and women. The suggested gender-neutral conscription system (GNCS) represents a change in recruitment for both men and women, not a change in duty

and obligations for women.

At the end of the day the supply of future soldiers (about 60,000) exceeds far beyond the demand for soldiers (about 8,000). In other words, the main outcome from the GNCS is that the NorAF can select the best soldiers, independent of sex. My data suggest that the share of unwilling soldiers through the conscript system is low, in other words, most soldiers are willing and able to complete their mandatory military service on a voluntary basis. However, it is possible that an increase of women in the NorAF can reduce the overall level of motivation for service, for both men and women.

Conclusion: Is it Possible to Increase the Share of Military Women in the NorAF?

According to the Parliament White Paper # 36 (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2007), there “are no formal obstacles that suggest that the NorAF should not be able to reach a target of equal representation of women and men in the organization. Hence, a realistic goal in the NorAF is at least 20% military women by 2020”.

Since the White Paper was presented in 2007, the share of military women has been more or less unchanged (around 9%). In fact, the share of military women has never really been consistent with the overall objectives since women were allowed to serve in the NorAF more than 30 years ago.

The development in recent years also suggests that the NorAF will yet again fail to reach the overarching objective. Given the historical development and the current situation, is it at all realistic that the military achieves 20% military female representation by 2020?

First, new measures must be implemented and monitored effectively—immediately. However, there is a great risk that it is already too late. The author is convinced that it is difficult to increase the share of military women without consequences—positive and/or negative.

In summary, most of the measures will result in increased costs for the NorAF. The author also believes that most of the measures have a positive effect on the recruitment and the ability to retain, and that the current culture changes for the better. However the measures have little or no direct effect on the current selection process—but there is an indirect effect through cultural changes (see Table 1).

The nine measures I have proposed here are to be regarded as complementary measures. That is, they have different effects or sets of impact on different areas or sub-processes within the Human Resource value chain, the NorAF economy and the military culture.

If the nine measures, or if a set of corresponding measures, are selected, they will most likely increase the share of military women. If one chooses to implement some of the measures, and wait with others, it will most likely have less effect than a comprehensive approach (all nine). In order to be successful with a diversity strategy, it is recommended that one must be comprehensive, continuous and authentic at all times (Llopis, 2011).

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