

# Gih's electronic datahandling directive



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The computer systems of the EDBLF project were intended to make the Defence services within the areas of personnel, material, supply, maintenance, economy, construction, operative activity and education more efficient and increase employees job satisfaction (GIH's Electronic Datahandling Directive of 13th January 1984, p. 12). The overall knowledge of information technology within the Army was apparently rather limited at the time of the initiation of the EDBLF project. 'This project was going to bring the Army from stone-age to IT-age in one step.

'(Interview with project employee and leader of the technology requirement part of the EDBLF-project, September 1995). What we want to achieve with this project is to use IT (Information Technology) to gain productivity growth by reorganisation, simplification of rules, economising and delegation (Minutes from steering group meeting 13th June 1989). The advice to adopt IT also came from an external consultancy firm, Teledata AS. These were engaged to give advice to the project, and said that: an information system would reduce time to mobilise, would fulfil the wish for more efficiency, better planning and rationalisation.

Another benefit would be to make the jobs in the Army more attractive and interesting. The latter would make the Army more favourable when competing with private enterprises about the same scarce competent personnel group. A recommendation not to develop and adopt a common IT system in the Army, would instead result in an introduction of computers in an unstructured and less controllable way and the amount of investment would not be less if things were done this way. The system was introduced through an organisational development process.

The conception was that the success of the introduction of the new technology was dependant upon the success of the organisational development process. My aim was to analyse the chosen method used to introduce this new technology and to look for conflicts between the method adopted and the organisational culture. This gives rise to the core research question examined in this paper: How did the organisational culture of the Army affect the introduction of the new information technology and the organisational development process in this project?

The Army consists of three categories of employees; approximately 8000 individuals. We have soldiers doing compulsory service, officers and civilian employees. A characteristic of the two latter categories is their permanent employment in the Army. Geographically the Army is spread all over Norway. The organisation has three main levels; the central level with the Defence Command and the Army Material Command, the regional level with the five Land Commands or Regional Commands, and the local level with its approximately 130 local units (appendix A illustrate the Defence hierarchy graphically).

The Norwegian Army is closely connected with words such as obedience, order and discipline. These are some of the salient characteristics of an organisation having as its main task to defend the Norwegian Mainland against attack. The perception is that when facing a wartime situation what is required from the organisation is ability to act consistently and according to orders. In order to achieve this the Army has become a strict hierarchical organisation with strong emphasis on structure and formal position.

'The military term for management is command, a rather straightforward notion that means the superior gives the order and the subordinate executes them' (Noble, 1987, p. 19). Compliance with this system is enforced in a number of ways, including through officers' military record. For officers the military record is a part of their Curriculum Vitae, and together with formal education, qualifies them for jobs in the Army. Their behaviour will directly be reflected in their military record.

Superior officers have given an explanation of obedience to orders which is not to be able to pursue a successful career. Reluctance to obey orders could jeopardise a military career. Reliable and consistent action during wartime requires practice of operations in peacetime. This results in an organisation which during peacetime has to practice wartime activities. One of these wartime practices is refreshers training. Characterised by periodic rehearsal of military procedures, refreshers training, necessitates temporary adjustment to work routines and procedures in the units.

Refreshers training thus impact upon the day-to-day activities and business operations in the units, leaving them without vital personnel resources for long and short periods, in which they make no use of replacements. A second characteristic of the Army is the transfer and application system. This scheme ensures a high job rotation rate. Under the transfer system, officers are unable to apply for new posts until they reach the age 32 to 41 (depending upon their level of education). Officers under the transfer system have to accept the posts they are appointed to.

Once they reach the rank of Captain, officers are released from this type of arrangement and can apply for a post in the organisation. Under the application system they are free to apply for any post within the Army in competition with other officers and according to their competence. The transfer and application system and the use of refreshers training creates insecurity both for the employee and the commander of the local unit. Employees experience short assignments, lasting a year or two, then they are reassigned to a new post.

For the commander at the local unit, this causes discontinuity and instability in the work-force. In the Norwegian Army, as in other private or public institutions in Norway, members have the right to join trade unions. Critique against the formal arrangements within the Norwegian Army, could have been presented via the employees Trade Unions. Interestingly none of the Trade unions I interview saw as a solution to the high job rotation rate to dismiss of it. To speculate about it one could say that this arrangement was such an integrated part of the Army culture that it was not considered a realistic alternative.