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INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY PERSONNEL STUDY

OVERVIEW OF STAFFING ISSUES

Recruitment and Retention of Critical Skills

The Intelligence Community (IC) Agencies report that they have been able to satisfy most of their critical skill requirements (engineers, computer scientists, mathematicians and linguists) despite a highly competitive market. CIA and NSA have been especially successful and both have sophisticated and effective recruiting mechanisms. DIA, FBI and the Military Services hire fewer engineers, computer scientists and linguists, but report greater recruitment difficulties. Also, DIA and many service recruitment efforts are aimed at experienced, full-performance professionals, whereas CIA and NSA concentrate their efforts on recent college graduates at the entry level. CIA and NSA attribute their recruiting success to three major reasons:

> (1) their premium pay scales which make them competitive with the private sector;
>
> (2) a challenging and interesting work environment; and,
>
> (3) good advancement and career opportunities.

Difficulties in filling engineering, S&T, computer science and mathematics jobs experienced by some agencies (notably the military services) result primarily from higher salaries and better career opportunities elsewhere, including elsewhere in the IC. CIA and NSA report having difficulty in hiring the highest quality critical skill college graduates and top individuals with advance degrees. The salary and benefits packages they are able to offer simply cannot compete.

All agencies have problems recruiting linguists, due primarily to the small pool of potential applicants. Requirements for native or near-native language capability, especially in the esoteric, Slavic, Far East, Near East and Mid East languages are very hard to satisfy. FBI has difficulties recruiting agents with bi-lingual capability, especially Spanish. Security requirements, which make many foreign-born or native speaking linguists ineligible for employment, compound the problem. One solution, as advocated and practiced by NSA, is to hire individuals with an aptitude for and interest in languages and train them in the languages needed. Although it has proven successful, this is a time-consuming and costly process.

The military services report that they are not able to effectively compete with the private sector for ex-military personnel with requisite knowledge and experience. Higher salary offers and the dual compensation limitations on military retirees

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are the major problems. The services are becoming increasingly concerned about the diminishing direct military experience among their civilian workforce.

Most IC organizations experience continuing problems recruiting and retaining secretaries/clerical and other such support people, especially in the large metropolitan high-cost areas. Higher salaries attract away many candidates, and many of the best on-board employees leave for the same reason. High turnover of support people in large urban areas is a fact of life, however, and, special rates of pay notwithstanding, will likely continue in the future. The problem is not as severe in areas of smaller populations. NSA, for example, located near but not directly in a major metropolitan area enjoys relative stability among its clerical workforce.

NAPA Staff Views

Although the problem of hiring qualified and experienced ex-military personnel is of growing concern to the military services, the staff does not believe that there is sufficient justification to seek exception from the dual compensation limitations for the military intelligence organizations. Such action would undoubtedly spur similar requests for exception throughout the government. The services would be better served by concentrating their efforts on the recruitment of ex-military who are not retirees and to work to retain them by providing good career opportunities and a good job environment.

Quality of Hires

CIA and NSA have been able to attract and hire at a quality level which equals or exceeds any past hiring experience. DIA is also satisfied with its overall quality, especially with its intelligence specialists, but does have some difficulty with respect to the engineering and S&T skills. The FBI is selective in its hiring of agents, but also experiences problems in attracting sufficient number of quality technical applicants.

The Military Services, have a great deal of difficulty attracting engineers, computer scientists and mathematicians. With the exception of AF jobs at Electronic Security Command (ESC) and Foreign Technology Division (FTD), hiring is focused on experienced, full performance candidates. Low salaries and limited career potential find the services at a distinct disadvantage when competing with the private sector and other government agencies, including other IC agencies. ESC and FTD fare somewhat better as they recruit at the entry level and their postions are located in lower-cost of living areas.

NAPA Staff Views

The staff believes that notwithstanding the overall high quality of IC personnel, IC agencies are rarely able to compete for the truly outstanding technical skills personnel. Whether it be the top 10 percent of the graduates of the best engineering schools in the country, a top PhD mathematician or other highly skilled technical professional, salary and benefits that the IC agencies are able to offer simply do not measure up. It is a rare case when a top quality applicant decides that dedication to the national security mission outweighs a fat pay check and generous benefits.

Looking ahead, flexibility is the key. Assuming availability of adequate applicant pools and the effective use of proven employment screening processes, input of high quality hires should be possible so long as the IC agencies continue to be given the management flexibility to compete in the future job market.

Attrition

Attrition rates within the IC agencies are all well below the national average for the private sector and the US government average. CIA is 4.7 percent, NSA 5 percent, FBI 8.2 percent and DIA 8.7 percent. Turnover of support personnel generally runs considerably higher in all agencies, but this is typical of other organizations, especially in the larger urban areas.

The military services intelligence agencies experience somewhat higher attrition, but they have no specific data due to their decentralized record keeping and reporting systems. Only the military agencies emphasized that the staff they were losing were among their quality staff. They believed they were losing some of their best staff, many to other agencies in the IC.

While losses were not a large proportion of the total workforce, any loss is costly, given initial recruitment and processing expenses. The CIA estimates these figures to be in excess of [   ] per hire. Also, mission is affected when billets go unfilled for any length of time.

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NAPA Staff Views

No organization likes to lose the staff they believe to be among their best and brightest. Within the IC, there is the added factor of the time it takes to recruit and the cost of security clearances, so agencies want to retain their high quality people.

Considering the low attrition rates and the fact that only the military services said they are losing their top staff, it appears that this is not a major issue. Given the reported high quality of the staff recruited, it may be that the agency-wide top

quality eases some of the problems associated with losing particularly effective staff.

Future Staffing Needs

All IC agencies see advancing technology as having significant effect on their future workforces. More sophisticated systems and greater complexity of skills will require finding and hiring people who possess the requisite skills. Computer literacy will be vital for many jobs.

NSA forecasts a need for people to possess a blend of skills, rather than the single skill of most specialists of today. CIA predicts that advancing technology will produce a need for more engineers and engineer support personnel, as well as growth in counterintelligence and arms control requirements. FBI foresees a requirement for more foreign language qualified people, especially special agents, due to the growing international aspects of counterintelligence, international terrorism, and criminal and legal attache programs. Technical advances in fingerprinting and information processing will also require people with better skills.

The demographics of the future US workforce is also of concern. The decline in the birthrate at the end of the "baby boom" will result in fewer college graduates in the 1990's, hence increased competition for the available talent. An increase in the number of foreign born college graduates, especially in the scientific and technical area, will likely further reduce the shrinking pool of eligible candidates. More effective recruiting mechanisms and incentives will have to be developed to meet this future challenge.

Cooperation With the IC on Staffing

The view of the NAPA staff is that there is very little cooperation or coordination exists on staffing matters within the IC. The only formal mechanism in being is the Defense Intelligence Special Career Automated System (DISCAS), which is used primarily by DIA and to a lesser extent by the military services. Each agency concentrates on meeting its own hiring requirements, which vary from one agency to another. No attempt is made to share employment information or to refer potential candidates when a hiring requirement does not materialize. In times of large hiring programs, there are likely few good candidates to refer who are not given job offers, but in times of litle or no growth, such referrals might prove very beneficial. Also, the sharing of information on hiring techniques and strategies, as well as the possible sharing of recruitment resources might prove beneficial.

Impact of Changing Authorization Levels

Most agencies of the IC have experienced wide fluctuations in authorized strengths over the past 20 years, and these

fluctuations have affected mission accomplishment and workforce structure. Only the military service intelligence organizations have escaped these rather radical changes in authorized strength.

CIA, NSA and DIA experienced large personnel reductions in the 1970s following the end of the war in Southeast Asia. This resulted in serious loss of intelligence capability in many areas. Cuts in DIA, for example, reduced them to one-deep in analysts and completely eliminated any capability to generate product on many areas of the world, notably the Third World countries and Latin America.

The rapid and sizeable buildup in the IC agencies beginning in 1981 and continuing through 1987 has had a great impact. Agencies did not achieve the productivity authorized because of the many vacancies which existed until the recruitment process could catch up. Also, experienced staff had to be diverted from operational missions to train the large numbers of new, inexperienced employees being hired.

The workforce structure at NSA, in terms of age and length of service, was greatly affected by these severe changes in authorized strength. Today, because of the large hiring programs in the 1980's, 40 percent of that agency's total strength have under five years of service, and 50 percent are under age 35. At the same time, 29 percent of NSA employees have over 20 years of service and most of these will be eligible to retire within the next 10 years. NSA will likely be faced with difficult management problems as older workers leave the workforce and there is a dirth of experienced middle and senior level managers and technicians ready to take their place.

The staff notes that strength fluctuations are inevitably the result of budget and political considerations and are often passed along to IC agencies as "fair share" reductions, seemingly without regard to their impact on national security priorities. If cuts must be made for overriding political considerations, then the Intelligence Committees of the Congress and the President must realign priorities consistent with those adjustments.

NAPA Staff Conclusions and Recommendations

There is no doubt that the success in hiring critical skill personnel enjoyed by CIA and NSA in recent years was made possible by their management ability to remain competitive through effective use of their authorities to set special salaries where needed. Since DIA obtained similar special authorities in 1984, their recruitment problems have eased. The military services have also recently been granted like authorities, and the NAPA staff recommend that Congress grant the same authorities to the FBI, thus putting all the major members of the IC on equal terms as regard their basic personnel authorities.

The NAPA staff also recommend that all IC agencies be allowed to freely use their special authorities to solve their respective problems in meeting staffing goals. This will be especially important if they are to be competitive in the expected difficult future job market. A clear delineation should be made as to the scope and extent of such authorities, and thereafter oversight should concentrate on equitable application of pay and staffing policy and practices with the Community.

The NAPA staff recommend that an IC Inter-Agency Working Group be established to examine the feasibility of developing a mechanism to share staffing and staffing related information and resources. An applicant referral system, exchange of recruitment strategies and ideas, and a possible sharing of staffing resources could result. For example, focusing attention of the problems of hiring linguists could well prove beneficial to all concerned.

Finally, the NAPA staff recommend that Congress be especially sensitive to the impact on the IC Agencies of severe fluctuations in authorized strengths. The inverted bell-shaped curve of NSA's staff in terms of years of service and age places inordinate pressure on that organization in developing the next generation of managers and senior experts. If reductions in staff do occur as a result of government-wide policies or if tasks continue to increase while staffing remains level, then it is incumbent on the Intelligence Committees to assist in reordering priorities.

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