

# THE PORTUGUESE ARMED FORCES MERIT APPRAISAL SYSTEM: CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE UPCOMING REVIEW <sup>1</sup>

## REGULAMENTO DA AVALIAÇÃO DO MÉRITO DOS MILITARES DAS FORÇAS ARMADAS: SUBSÍDIOS PARA A SUA REVISÃO

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### ABSTRACT

The new regulation of the Armed Forces merit appraisal system (RAMMFA), which entered into force on 1 January 2018, introduced some important changes to the previous system which make the military's merit appraisal process more objective and quantitative and have a direct impact on career progression, especially on promotions by seniority. This regulation is scheduled for review by January 2021. Therefore, it is necessary to ascertain the effects of the regulation's implementation and identify any required adjustments. The study uses an inductive methodology supported by a mixed methods research strategy and a cross-sectional research design, a literature review and content analysis of: 13 semi-structured interviews to officers (heads of services and elected members of the speciality councils); a questionnaire survey delivered to 1180 Portuguese Air Force PoAF service members (24% of N=4917). The findings revealed that the new regulation promotes professional development, as service members are more willing to participate in missions, attend training / courses and promotion courses in their category. Although the RAMMFA sets a foundation that enables skills alignment and provides knowledge on human potential, the organization must improve this process. Furthermore, the study found that satisfaction with the performance appraisal system leads to higher levels of commitment and engagement and decreases turnover intentions. This means that, rather than simply assessing merit, the Armed Forces should use the system to actively encourage and manage it, in a holistic process of continuous improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Article adapted from the individual research work carried out in the 2019/20 Field Grade Officers Course. The defence took place in February 2020 at the Military University Institute.

**Keywords:** Appraisal System, Commitment, Skills, Engagement, Individual Potential, Performance Appraisal, Turnover Intentions.

## RESUMO

*A entrada em vigor do Regulamento de Avaliação do Mérito dos Militares das Forças Armadas, a 01 de janeiro de 2018, introduziu importantes alterações face ao anterior: torna mais objetiva e quantitativa a avaliação do mérito, com impacto direto na progressão da carreira em detrimento de uma progressão por antiguidade. A sua revisão prevista para janeiro de 2021 torna imperioso este estudo que procura entender os efeitos da sua implementação, identificando ajustes necessários, mediante um raciocínio indutivo, alicerçado numa estratégia de investigação mista e num desenho de pesquisa transversal, assim como nas análises: documental, de conteúdo às entrevistas semiestruturadas a 13 oficiais (chefias e membros eleitos comuns dos Conselhos de Especialidade), e das respostas, a um questionário, de 1180 militares da FAP (24% de N=4917). Dos resultados obtidos verifica-se que o regulamento promove o desenvolvimento profissional, com os militares a procurarem participar em mais missões, frequentarem mais formações/cursos e dedicarem-se mais aos cursos de promoção na categoria. Embora o RAMMFA crie as bases que possibilitam a compatibilização de competência e o conhecimento do potencial humano, este processo terá de ser potenciado pela organização. Verifica-se ainda que a satisfação com a avaliação de desempenho faz aumentar o comprometimento e o empenhamento e reduz as intenções de saída. Como corolário do estudo, mais do que avaliar o mérito, as Forças Armadas deverão estimulá-lo e geri-lo, numa articulação holística que procure a melhoria contínua.*

**Palavras-chave:** Sistema de Avaliação, Avaliação de Desempenho, Comprometimento, Competências, Empenhamento, Intenção de saída, Potencial individual.

## 1. Introduction

*“There is nothing permanent except change.”  
Heraclitus*

Today, human resources are considered a “key factor for the success of organizations” (Rego et al., 2015, p.56). This has led organizations to develop mechanisms to “attract, develop and retain the human capital they need to achieve” their strategic goals (Rego et al., 2015, p.90). As an institution that operates in a dynamic and competitive environment of “competition between institutions and organizations, which is compounded by an increasing shortage of talent”, this is also a concern to the military (Portuguese Air Force [PoAF], 2019, p.11).

The future of the Portuguese Air Force (PoAF) depends on its people, and this is reflected in the PoAF’s strategic plan for 2019-2022, which focuses on learning and growth; that is, on enhancing people’s skills and managing them efficiently, particularly with regards to career management and merit appraisal (PoAF, 2019).

Military careers are based on a culture of merit. This is true for all service members of the Armed Forces, regardless of their branch. This culture is reinforced by the Status

of the Armed Forces Military Personnel (EMFAR), which was approved by Decree-Law No. 90/2015 of 29 May and amended by Law No. 10/2018 of 2 March. To assess that merit, Order No. 301/2016 of 30 November 2006 approved the Regulation of the Armed Forces Merit Appraisal System (RAMMFA), which sets the basis for the Armed Forces Merit Appraisal System (SMMFA). The system places special emphasis on individual assessment (IA), that is, it provides “an assessment of service members’ performance in their assigned roles and positions” (Article 6(2) of the RAMMFA).

The implementation of a performance management system can be met with resistance, often due to the perception that the system is designed to control and punish, that it will increase employees’ workload and expose their shortcomings (Camara, 2015, p.111). In the “markedly feminine” Portuguese culture (Hofstede, 1991 cited in Camara, 2015, p.15), there is particularly strong resistance to “assessing and being assessed”. This leads to “an organizational climate that fosters conflict avoidance and strives to maintain the appearance of harmony” (Camara, 2015, p.15).

The RAMMFA’s implementation has been met with controversy in the Armed Forces; on 27 April 2018, the National Association of Sergeants (ANS) delivered a petition<sup>2</sup> signed by 2258 service members to the Portuguese parliament, requesting that the Regulation be suspended.

However, the PoAF already had a merit-based performance appraisal system, which was regulated by Order No. 292/94 of 17 May. The main difference in this new RAMMFA, besides being common to all three branches of the military, is that it makes the appraisal process more objective and quantitative. This will have a direct impact on career progression, which now focuses less on seniority. The merit score is calculated according to the Merit Appraisal Form (MAF), where the IA component has a greater weight than rank seniority (RS). In a highly hierarchical institution such as the military, if this results in a change in seniority, in some extreme cases the superior/subordinate relationship may be reversed. Such reversals will increase resistance to the new system.

Nevertheless, while it may be controversial, performance appraisal is a “widespread practice in companies all over the world, and it is essential for managing human capital” (Kuvaas, 2007 cited in Rego et al., 2015, p.536).

This study aims to provide useful information for the upcoming review of the RAMMFA, but also to improve the system that assesses the merit of military personnel. To that end, it will first attempt to determine if the system is achieving its intended purposes. As this study cannot address all the objectives described in the Regulation, it will focus on Article 5(2) of the RAMMFA, which the authors believe contain the regulations’ main goals: (1) To align the skills of the appraisee to the interests and needs of the Armed Forces in the face of increasingly complex scientific, technical, operational and organizational demands; (2) To facilitate the accomplishment of missions and tasks, as well as the technical advancement of the Armed Forces; and (3) To update and improve the Armed Forces’ knowledge about its human potential.

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<sup>2</sup> Petition No. 506/XIII/3.<sup>a</sup>

Furthermore, the relationships between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system (SPA) and affective organisational commitment (AOC), employee engagement (EE) and turnover intentions (TI) were also analysed, as these indicators have been shown to be good predictors of success in the implementation of an appraisal system (Rego et al., 2015). This study will thus contribute to validate the extant literature with regards to the correlations between them.

The study also aims to make recommendations for the upcoming RAMMFA review, which is set to take place no later than three years after the regulation's implementation, as well as to improve the Armed Forces' performance appraisal system. While the regulation is common to all branches of the Armed Forces, only the aspects that affect the PoAF will be analysed. Therefore, this study will add to the ongoing work carried out by the General Staff Resources Division (DIVREC) and the Air Force Directorate of Personnel (DP).

Is a study at this early stage relevant, given that the system has not been implemented for long? The impact of a significant change to a system with this level of complexity can only be assessed in the medium / long term and can be rather different than the first impressions. However, even if some effects are only visible in the long term and can only be assessed and corrected in the future, others can be identified at an earlier stage and adjustments can be made to the system to help smooth the transition.

This study examines the impact of the RAMMFA on PoAF personnel. The study is delimited (Santos & Lima, 2019, p. 42) in terms of:

- Time, from 1 January 2018, the date the RAMMFA entered into force, to the present day (February 2019);
- Space, to active duty Air Force personnel;
- Content, to the goals of the SAMMFA and the links between SPA and AOC/EE/TI.

The study's general objective (GO) is *To propose measures to enhance the effects of the RAMMFA*, and its specific objectives (SO) are:

SO1: To ascertain if the SAMMFA is achieving its intended purposes;

SO2: To analyse the relationship between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and affective organisational commitment, employee engagement and turnover intentions in the PoAF vis-à-vis the entry into force of the RAMMFA.

The following research question (RQ) helped guide the investigation: How can the effects of the RAMMFA be enhanced?

## **2. Theoretical and conceptual framework**

This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework on which this individual research work is based.

### **2.1. State-of-the-art and key concepts**

The study was guided by the concepts presented in this section.

### **2.1.1. The Regulation of the Armed Forces Merit Appraisal System**

The RAMMFA standardises the merit appraisal system of the Armed Forces, defines the SAMMFA and sets down guidelines for its implementation. This new regulation quantifies the merit appraisal process and makes it more objective, which has repercussions for service members' career progression. The RAMMFA is an annex to Order No. 301/2016 (2016), which came into force on 1 January 2018 and is due for review by 1 January 2021.

### **2.1.2. The Armed Forces Merit Appraisal System**

The SAMMFA is the practical application of the RAMMFA. The system aims to assess the merit of military personnel to ensure that the military's human resources are managed efficiently and to facilitate skills alignment, promote professional development and provide knowledge on individual potential (Article 5(2) of the RAMMFA).

The SAMMFA appraises the following components (Article 6 of the RAMMFA): (1) Individual Assessment (IA); (2) Training Assessment (TA); (3) Disciplinary Assessment (DA); (4) Rank Seniority (RS); and (5) Complementary Assessment (CA).

These components are quantified and (with the exception of the CA) factor into the MAF according to their respective weights. Military personnel are then ranked according to their MAF score and assessed by the Specialty Councils. These Councils issue the CA, after which Merit Lists are elaborated to rank service members according to their "merit". Once these lists are validated by the CEMFA, a Promotion List is issued. In this final list, service members are ranked from highest to lowest score; however, a junior officer will only be promoted over a senior officer if their merit score is at least 0.3 higher than the score(s) of the officers(s) who outrank him or her (CEMFA Decision No. 51/2018, 2018).

### **2.1.3. Satisfaction with the performance appraisal system**

The SAMMFA component that most affects the MAF is IA, which accounts for 35% or 40% of the score (depending on the service members' position / role). Of all components, it is the one with the most impact on the MAF score. IA refers to the quality of the service members' performance in their positions and roles. This information is collected in the Assessment Form (AF) (Order No. 301/2016).

The success of a performance appraisal system depends more on how workers respond to it than on the system itself because, however perfect and robust a system may be, it is doomed from the start if workers do not accept it (Cardy & Dobbins, 1994 cited in Cawley, Levy & Keeping, 1998). The most relevant of these responses is employees' satisfaction with the performance appraisal system, especially given its relationship to commitment, motivation and productivity, which several studies<sup>3</sup> have established (Giles and Mossholder cited in Cawley, Levy & Keeping, 1998, p.616).

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<sup>3</sup> See: Ilgen, Fisher and Taylor in 1979; Larson in 1984; Pearce and Porter in 1986; Wexley and Klimoski in 1984

### 2.1.4. Organizational Commitment

Of the several definitions of Organizational Commitment, the one most consistently cited in the literature was proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991, p.67), who define commitment as “a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee’s relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization”. Meyer and Allen (1991) identified three components of commitment: (1) Affective commitment, which refers to employees’ emotional ties to the organization and is what makes them want to stay in it; (2) Normative commitment, which refers to employees’ moral duty to the organization, and is what makes them stay out of a sense of obligation; (3) Continuance commitment, which refers to employees’ calculation of the cost of leaving the organization, and is what makes them stay out of necessity.

After analysing several studies, Cunha, Rego, Cunha, Cabral-Cardoso and Neves (2014) summarised the trend correlations between these three dimensions and a set of variables. Table 1 summarises the most relevant correlations for this study, that is, the indicators that refer to performance management and turnover intentions.

**Table 1 – Trend correlations between the three dimensions of commitment and the performance management and turnover intentions indicators**

	Affective Commitment	Normative Commitment	Continuance Commitment
Job satisfaction	++	+	-
Learning opportunities and personal development	+	+	0
Receiving feedback on work's performance	++	+	0
Turnover intentions	-	-	-
Overall individual performance	++	+	-

Legend:  
 0 No correlation  
 - Negative correlation  
 + Positive correlation  
 ++ Strong positive correlation

Source: Adapted from Cunha et al (2014).

As Table 1 shows, the affective commitment dimension has the strongest and most consistent correlations with the analysed indicators. Therefore, this study will focus on this dimension.

### 2.1.5. Engagement

Employee engagement refers to the degree to which an employee focuses on and absorbs the roles he or she plays in the organization (Saks, 2006).

Workers have two dominant roles: the first as members of their organization (organizational engagement) and the other as workers performing a job (job engagement) (Saks, 2006). While both are important, this study will focus on job engagement, as the concept of organisational commitment has already been addressed in other studies. It is worth mentioning, however, that the two concepts are distinct (Saks, 2006). Nevertheless, as this study would not benefit from an in-depth analysis of all the constructs in the relationship between workers and organizations, it will focus on organizational commitment because, as mentioned above, it seems to have the most relevant correlation to Performance Appraisal.

### 2.1.6. Turnover intentions

According to Tett and Meyer (1993, p.262), turnover intentions refer to a worker’s conscious and deliberate decision to leave the organization and are a strong predictor for turnover, as shown by several studies (Lee & Mowday, 1987; Michaels & Spector, 1982; O’Reilly & Caldwell, 1981) cited by Tett and Meyer (1993, pp.259-260). Voluntary turnover can have several causes and origins, the most important being the perception of unfairness in the promotions and performance appraisal system and lack of communication and feedback from supervisors (Rego et al., 2015). On the other hand, employees with strong commitment to their organization tend to have a positive relationship with their work, which in turn makes people to want to stay in their organization (Bem, 1967; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978, cited in Tett & Meyer, 1993).

The seniority-based promotions system is believed to be one of the causes for the difficulty in retaining military personnel which several NATO countries have reported (Research and Technology Organisation North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2007, p. 2-1). If, on the one hand, a merit-based promotions system can increase military retention, on the other hand, as Rego et al. (2015) note, performance assessments that are perceived as unfair can generate dissatisfaction and have a negative impact on workers’ commitment and performance, and have been cited as one possible reason for turnover intentions.

## 2.2. Analysis model

This study was developed according to the analysis model presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 – Analysis model**

General Objective	To propose measures that surveyed PoAF personnel believe would enhance the effects of the RAMMFA				
Specific Objectives	Research Question	How can the effects of the RAMMFA be enhanced?			
	Subsidiary Questions	Concepts	Dimensions	Indicators	Instruments
<b>SO1</b> To asses if the SAMMFA is achieving its intended purpose.	<b>SQ1</b> Is the SAMMFA achieving its intended purpose?	RAMMFA  SAMMFA	Skills alignment	Q 13 - 21	Research questionnaire and semi-structured interviews
			Professional development	Q 6 - 12; Q 21 - 30 Q 34	
			Individual potential	Q 13 - 19	
<b>SO2</b> To analyse the relationship between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and commitment, engagement and turnover intentions inthe PoAF, vis-à-vis the entry into force of the RAMMFA.	<b>SQ2</b> What is the relationship between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and commitment, engagement and turnover intentions in the PoAF, vis-à-vis the entry into force of the RAMMFA?	Satisfaction with the performance appraisal system	-	Q 33 - 38	
		Organizational commitment	Affective commitment	Q 39 - 44	
		Commitment	-	Q 45 - 53	
		Turnover intentions	-	Q 31 Q 54 - 58	

## 3. Methodology and method

This chapter describes the methodology and methods that ensure the scientific rigour of this research.

### 3.1. Methodology

This study uses an inductive reasoning methodology supported by a mixed-methods research strategy to analyse qualitative and quantitative data in the same study, as advised by Creswell (2009). A cross-sectional research design was used to collect information on a specific moment in time (Bryman, 2012).

### 3.2. Method

This subchapter describes the study sample, procedures, data collection tools and data processing techniques.

#### 3.2.1. Participants and procedure

**Participants.** Questionnaire 1 was filled out by 1180 PoAF service members, 24% of the PoAF's CS and CP/VP active duty personnel, which corresponds to a level of confidence of 95% and a margin of error of less than 3%.

As the participants were drawn from an accidental non-probabilistic sample (Maroco, 2010), this section will examine their representativeness for the universe under analysis. Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis of the sample obtained for the analysed universe. The sample shows a relatively even distribution in the sergeants (39.6% vs. 33.3%) and officers (56.3% vs. 47.1%) categories and a lower participation from the airmen category (4.2% vs. 19.6%). With regards to the link to the PoAF, most participants are career personnel (CS) (92.6% vs. 72.0%), whereas contract / volunteer personnel (CP/VP) are not as well represented (7.4% vs. 28.0%). This low participation may reflect the fact that the new appraisal system does not have the same impact for these service members. Thus, the data obtained in this study can be extrapolated, with some limitations, but only to a universe consisting of CS sergeants and officers.

**Table 3 – Descriptive analysis of the global sample compared with the population sample of October 2019**

		Frequency (n=1180)	% of the sample	% of the universe (N=4903)	% sample/ population
Q1 - Effective Military Service Time	Less than 5 years	84	7.1%		
	5 to 10 years	105	8.9%		
	11 to 20 years	399	33.8%		
	More than 20 years	592	50.2%		
Q2 - Area	Operational	549	46.5%		
	Support	631	53.5%		
Q3 - Education	9th grade	8	0.7%		
	11th grade	42	3.6%		
	High School	492	41.7%		
	Technical/ professional course	98	8.3%		
	Bachelor	91	7.7%		
	First degree	281	23.8%		
Q4 - Category	Masters degree	161	13.6%		
	PhD	7	0.6%		
	Officers	467	39.6%	33.3%	28.6%
	Sergeants	664	56.3%	47.1%	28.8%
	Airman	49	4.2%	19.6%	5%
Q5 - Service Link	CS	1093	92.6%	72.0%	31%
	CP/VP	87	7.4%	28.0%	6%

Interviews were conducted with the experts listed in Table 4.

**Table 4 – List of interviewees**

Interviewee Code (Ref. in the text)	Study participants	Instrument	Date
dDP	Director of the Directorate of Personnel	Face-to-face interview	3jan20
cDIVREC	Head of the General Staff Resources Division	Email interview	22jan20
cREPPES	Head of the Personnel Department of the General Staff Resources Division	Face-to-face interview	20dez19
cRC	Head of the Staffing and Promotions Department of the Directorate of Personnel	Email interview	8jan20
cRCP	Head of the Careers and Promotions Department of the Directorate	Email interview	2jan20
cSecAM	Head of the Merit Appraisal Section of the Career and Promotions Department of the Directorate of Personnel	Face-to-face interview	23dez19
CoordCarr	Coordinator for careers in the Personnel Department of the General Staff Resources Division	Email interview	3jan20
cSecCCM	Head of the Positions, Courses and Missions Section of the Staffing Department of the Directorate of Personnel (current and former)	Email interview	3jan20
CESP1	Joint elected member of the CESP (officer)	Face-to-face interview	23dez19
CESP2	Joint elected member of the CESP (officer)	Email interview	9jan20
CESP3	Joint elected member of the CESP (sergeant)	Face-to-face interview	10jan20
CESP4	Joint elected member of the CESP (sergeant)	Email interview	8jan20
CESP5	Joint elected member of the CESP (sergeant)	Email interview	9jan20

Procedure. After obtaining the proper authorisation, the questionnaire, titled “Regulation of the Armed Forces Merit Appraisal System”, was sent to all PoAF active duty personnel through GroupWise and remained available on the PoAF intranet portal from 30 October to 8 December 2019. The participants were informed of the purposes of the study, as well as of the anonymity of their answers and that they would only be used for the present study. The participants were asked to answer truthfully as there were no “correct” answers.

The structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or by email on the dates listed in Table 4.

### 3.2.2. Data collection instruments

A questionnaire titled “Regulation of the Armed Forces Merit Appraisal System” was prepared, which consisted of three parts: the first part collected sociodemographic and professional data, the second focused on whether the SAMMFA is achieving its intended purposes, and the third focused on satisfaction with the performance appraisal system, commitment, engagement, and turnover intentions (Table 5). The survey questions were ordered according to a conditional logic, that is, each question depended on the answers to the previous one. This aimed to make the questionnaire easier to fill out and reduce the number of contradictory responses. To assess the instruments’ reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha)

and the validity of the constructs (empirical approach), the questionnaire was first tested on a sample of 31 service members. Initially, a five-point Likert scale was chosen to make the results easier to interpret; however, as the pre-test showed that this would result in biased answers, a seven-point Likert Scale was used in the final questionnaire to increase the sensitivity of the results.

**Table 5 – Questionnaire structure**

Parts	Questions	Question modes	Goal	Source
I	Q1 to Q5	Multiple choice and dichotomous	Collecting sociodemographic and professional data	Developed for this purpose
II	Q6 to Q32	Multiple choice, dichotomous and open-minded	Assessing the degree to which the SAMMFA is achieving its intended purposes	Developed for this purpose
III	Q33 to Q38	7-point Likert scale	Measuring satisfaction with the performance appraisal system	Adapted for use in the military from the Performance Appraisal Satisfaction scale, validated for the Portuguese context by Lima (2010)
	Q39 to Q44	7-point Likert scale	Affective organizational commitment	Adapted to the military context by Fachada (2015) from the Portuguese version of Meyer & Allen's Organizational Commitment Scale (1991), validated by Nascimento et al. (2008)
	Q45 to Q53	7-point Likert scale	Engagement	Adapted to the military context by Dâmaso (2019) from the short version of the <i>Utrecht Work Engagement Scale</i> (UWES) by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)
	Q54 to Q58	7-point Likert scale	Turnover Intentions	Adapted to the military context by Braga (2018) from the <i>Turnover Cognition</i> scale by Bozeman and Perrewé (2001)

The structured interviews were conducted according to scripts tailored to each interviewee, and complementary data were obtained from the Placements Department and Data Department of the DP.

### 3.2.3. Data processing techniques

The quantitative data obtained in the questionnaire were processed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 23. The software was used to analyse the validity of the construct (factor analysis) (Pestana & Gageiro, 2014), to conduct a reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), and to determine Pearson's correlation indices (Franzblau, 1958) as well as the frequency, central tendency, dispersion and association measures (trend, mean, standard deviation).

The thematic content analysis of the semi-structured interviews was carried out according to the recommendations provided by Santos and Lima (2019).

#### 4. Data presentation and discussion of results

This chapter analyses and discusses the data obtained from the questionnaires and structured interviews to answer the subsidiary questions and, consequently, the RQ.

##### 4.1. Intended purposes of the SAMMFA

This section will assess if the SAMMFA is achieving the goals set down in Article 5(2) of the RAMMFA, in order to answer Subsidiary Question 1 (SQ1).

##### 4.1.1. Skills alignment and individual potential assessment

Through the Assessment Form (AF), the SAMMFA aims to assess the skills and potential of all military personnel, in order to “align the appraisee’s skills with the needs of the military”, as well as to “update and improve the military’s knowledge about its human potential” (Article 5(2) of the RAMMFA). Sousa, Duarte, Sanches & Gomes (2006, p.152) define individual potential as “the ability to perform a more complex role at some point in the future”.

Although the RAMMFA is relatively specific in how the information gathered through the five SAMMFA components is used to calculate the merit score and how this score is to be used for promotion purposes, there is little mention of how the information should be used to promote skills alignment. In fact, the most relevant information refers to the impact of a negative IA on personnel assignment procedures (Article 22 of the RAMMFA).

Nevertheless, by defining how service members’ skills and individual potential will be assessed, the RAMMFA provides the military with the tools to match its human resources to their ideal positions / roles. To that end, in addition to the RAMMFA, three aspects to be analysed have been identified: (1) if the positions / roles, as well as the most relevant skills for each position / role are well defined; (2) if the appraisers fill out the AF accurately and know the purposes of each field; and (3) if the information collected in the AF is used by the personnel services to achieve those purposes.

The next section will assess if the above requirements are met by analysing the data obtained from the questionnaire and the complementary qualitative data obtained from the interviews.

1 – Are positions / roles well defined, as well as the most relevant skills for each position / role? Aligning the skills assessed by the SAMMFA will only be possible if the skills required for each position are known. In the words of Rego et al. (2015), “the organization should know which aspects of performance are most relevant”. Câmara, Guerra and Rodrigues (2010) define two types of skills: general skills, which are common to all roles, and specialised skills, which are only required for a specific set of roles.

While Article 20(5) of the RAMMFA defines which skills are to be assessed according to military roles, those roles (Article 34 of the EMFAR) are remarkably broad. Furthermore, no specialised skills are identified, so it can be assumed that the regulation only assesses general skills.

On the other hand, while the organization manuals and operating procedures of the PoAF’s Units/Establishments/Corps (U/E/C) describe each position, these descriptions list the required qualifications and roles, but not the most valued skills for each position (not even general skills).

2 – Do the appraisers know how to accurately fill out the AF, and do they know the purpose of each field? This question will be answered by analysing the results obtained in questions Q14 to Q21, which assess how appraisers fill out the AF.

Of the 395 respondents who have already been appraised by the new system, 60.3% find the instructions for filling out the AF to be clear, but only 50.4% consider them sufficient (Figure 1).

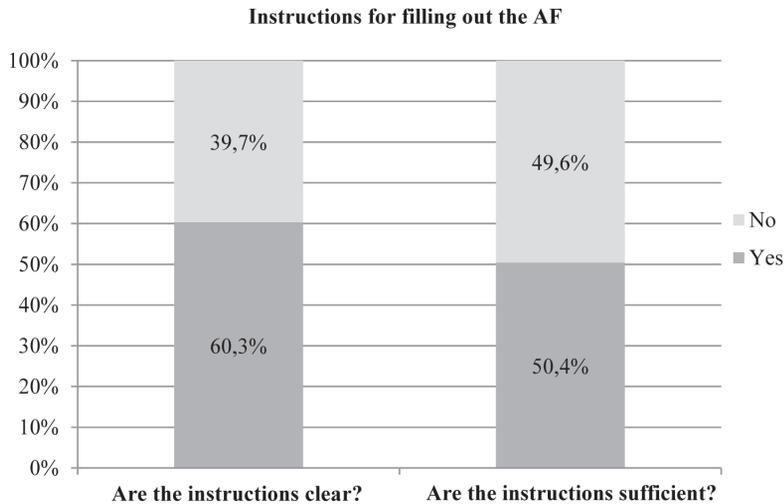


Figure 1 – Results obtained in Q14 and Q15

Considering the percentage of surveyed service members who find the instructions unclear and / or insufficient, it would be relevant to provide training for appraisers and / or conduct awareness raising actions because, as Camara argues (2015, p.116), this is essential when implementing such systems. The process should be developed according to the phases described in Figure 2.

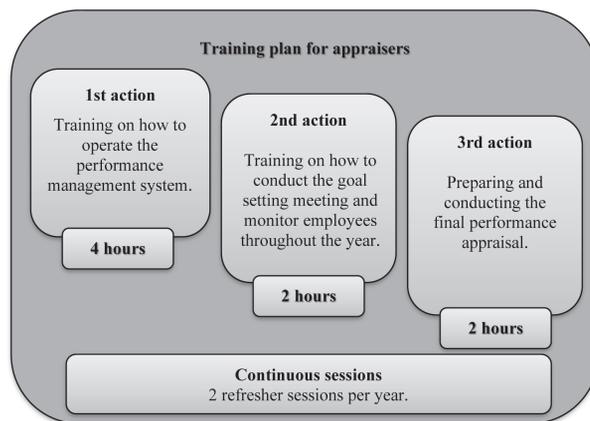


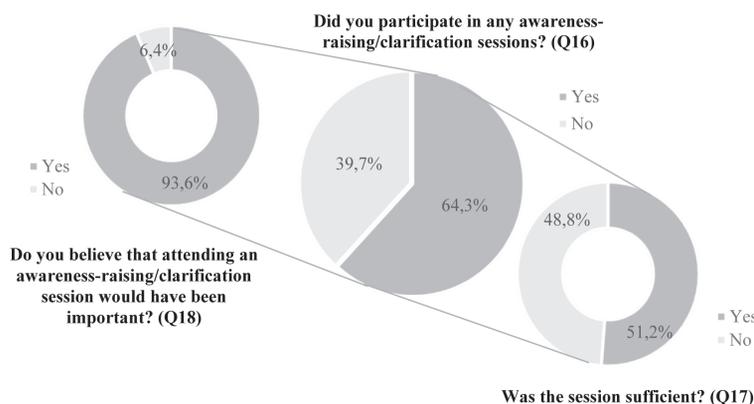
Figure 2 – Training for appraisers

Source: Adapted from Camara (2015).

Although there was a system in place prior to the implementation of the SAMMFA, this lack of preparation was also one of the problems with the previous system (CESP2).

The data presented in Figure 3 reveal that 64.3% of surveyed service members have attended some form of training / awareness raising, which shows that the PoAF is already making efforts to prepare its appraisers.

However, as only a little more than half (51.2%) of respondents consider this training to be sufficient, there is room for improvement. Furthermore, 93.6% of service members who did not receive training would have found it useful. Most of the interviewed joint elected members of the CESP expressed concern over both these percentages and the reports of the speciality councils stating that appraisers are ill-trained / ill-prepared.



**Figure 3 – Results obtained in Q16-Q18**

The Head of the Merit Appraisal Section of the Career and Promotions Department of the Directorate of Personnel explained that the DP tries to decentralise the training given to appraisers through the personnel management services. Those services receive the training, which is then passed on to the units. One of the main difficulties reported by these services is that, due to the shortage of human resources, appraisers have a large number of requests to meet and find it difficult to attend the training sessions. Furthermore, the high turnover rates in personnel services often means that the service members staffing these services are not properly trained and are unable to provide the required support.

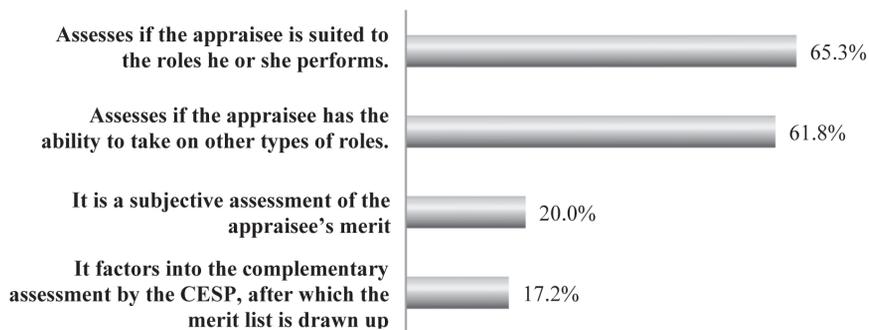
Given the importance of the AF for career progression, this training should be compulsory and refresher sessions should be held. CESP1 suggested that once a year, before the start of the assessment period, appraisers attend short training sessions that focus on explaining how each field is to be filled out but also how to justify the assessment, stressing the importance of practices such as taking notes on subordinates' performance over time.

This lack of training was reflected in the lack of agreement regarding the AF fields "Potential assessment" (field 6), "Appraisee's time in unit" (field 7.1) and "Appraisee's training

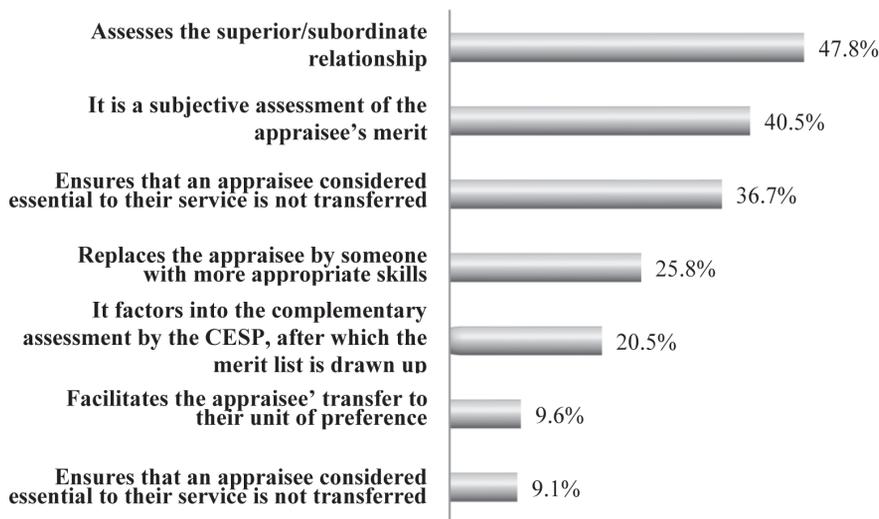
needs” (field 7.2) in the answers to Q19-Q21 of the questionnaire, as Figure 4 shows. This lack of a common interpretation undermines the intended purpose of these fields, not to mention the standardised assessment that the AF should provide. Moreover, the interviews revealed that even the DP, the DIVREC and the joint elected members of the CESP disagree on the purpose of these fields.

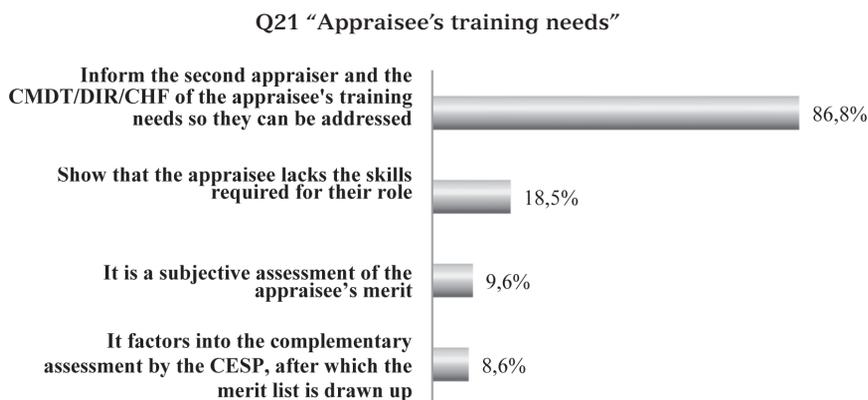
Moreover, the fields that refer to the “Potential assessment” component are not fully exploited by the CESP when calculating the CA score, although the RAMMFA provides for this. These fields focus overmuch on relative performance comparisons and it is unclear how they should be filled out. For example, the field “Appraiser’s preferred military roles” (field 6.3) does not mention the skills required for those roles.

**Q19 “Appraiser’s preferred military roles”**



**Q20 “Appraiser’s time in unit”**





**Figure 4 – Respondents’ opinions about the purpose of AF fields 6.3 (Q19), 7.1 (Q20) and 7.2 (Q21)**

3 – Is the information collected in the AF used by the personnel services to align the skills and potential of the appraisee with the institution’s needs? When the assessment process is complete, the AF are sent to the Placements Department (RepC) of the DP. This information is currently not used for the purposes of placements / appointments (cRC). However, the Placements Regulation is currently under review, and, if approved, should provide a solution to harmonise the information in an appropriate and effective manner. The implementation of a new Merit Appraisal System common to all branches of the Armed Forces (the SIAMMFA) will facilitate this process.

The above analysis revealed that neither of these three goals are currently being met. However, the Head of the Careers and Promotions Department of the Directorate of Personnel confirmed that one of the DP’s projects for 2020 is the development of a Skills-Based Management (GpC) model that will “seamlessly match people to positions and align the required proficiency levels for the existing skills”.

#### **4.1.2. Professional Development**

Pursuant to Article 5(2)(a) of the RAMMFA, the SAMMFA aims to “facilitate the accomplishment of missions and tasks by improving the military’s technical capabilities”. This definition is in line with the concept of development, which Hampton (1983, pp.425-426) defines as “helping subordinates improve their performance and acquire new skills”. Chiavenato (1981, p.155) describes professional development in a similar manner, as the result of training that leads to the acquisition of new knowledge, allowing the worker to perform more complex tasks.

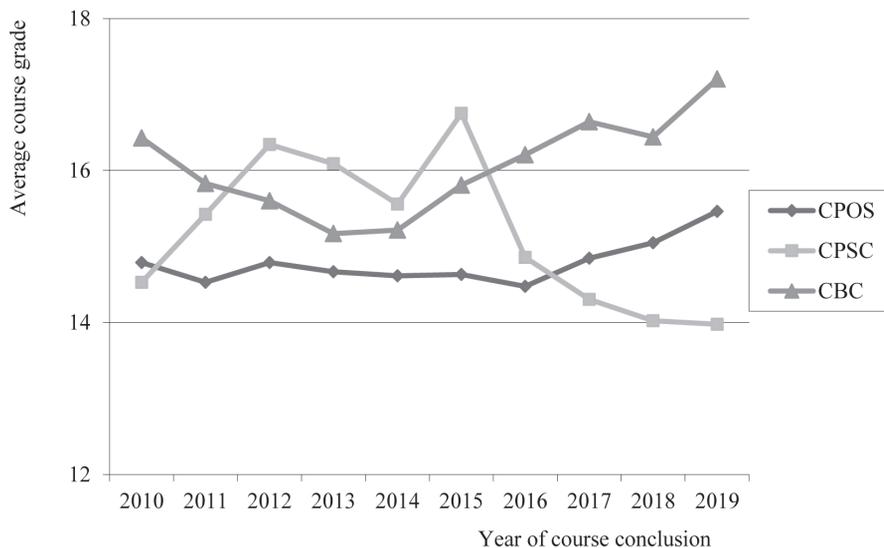
This study identified six ways in which the RAMMFA can facilitate this process (Table 6).

**Table 6 – Ways in which the RAMMFA can foster professional development**

1	Impact on promotion course grades	MAF score
2	Impact on performance (Individual Assessment and Disciplinary Assessment)	
3	Impact on attendance of other courses and training	Complementary Assessment score
4	Impact on participation in operational activities	
5	Identifying the appraiser's training needs	AF (Field 7.2)
6	Holding initial / follow-up meetings to promote communication and professional development	To be held by the appraiser

The next section examines if these aspects are effectively contributing to service members' professional development.

**1:** 91% of questionnaire respondents are aware of the fact that their grades in these courses can influence their career progression (Q7 and Q11). Although 71% of respondents state that they would spend more effort in their promotion courses due to their impact on the MAF (Q12), only 38% of those who attended the courses managed to do so (Q9), perhaps because other constraints prevented them from making that extra effort. Furthermore, 65% of the service members who attended a promotion course, but were not aware that the grade would factor into their MAF score, stated that they would have dedicated themselves more if they had known this (Q10). An analysis of the average grades for each course (Figure 5) confirms that service members in the Field Grade Officers Course (CPOS) and in the Basic Command Course (CBC) outperformed those from the Senior Sergeant Promotion Course (CPSC). Other factors, such as changes in course curricula, may have influenced the grades.

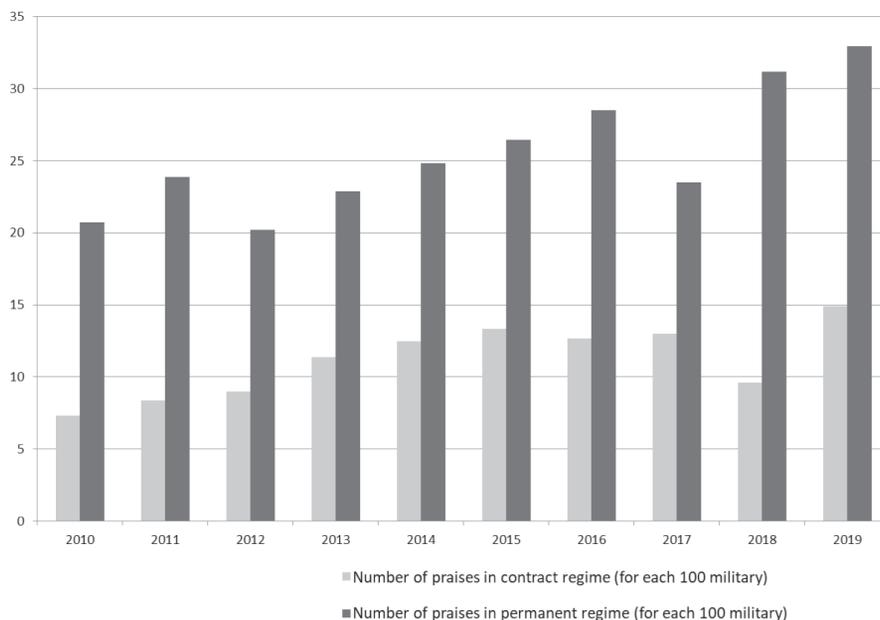


**Figure 5 – Evolution of the average grades of promotion courses**

The improvement in service members' performance in these courses and their willingness to put more effort into these training sessions show that the RAMMFA's implementation can encourage the officers attending promotion courses to perform better, thus contributing to their professional development.

**2:** The RAMMFA states that the purpose of the IA is to encourage service members to improve their performance. This component has the greatest impact on the MAF score, and as such it is one of the most important. However, only 18% of respondents report having tried to improve their performance (Q27), and only 7% of appraisers reported any improvement at all (Q22).

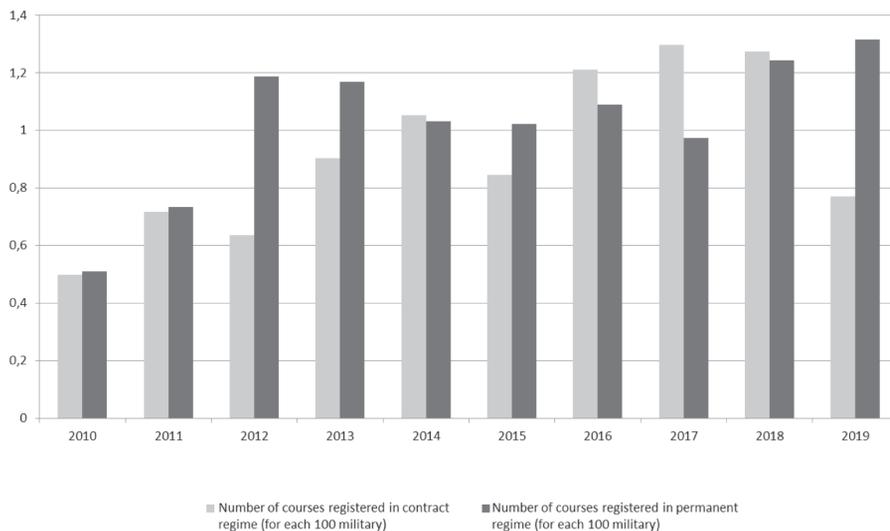
Therefore, an attempt was made to analyse the differences in performance indirectly through the number of praises awarded to service members. The following chart shows the number of praises awarded between 2010 and 2019 per 100 service members (Figure 6). More praises were awarded in 2019 than in the previous 10 years, and there was a 34% average increase in the praises awarded to Career Staff (CS) from 2018-2019 (with the RAMMFA already in force) when compared to 2010-2017. However, the increase was only 12.1% for Contract Personnel (CP). The survey also revealed that 25% of appraisers report having proposed more subordinates for praises (Q23). However, 84% of appraisers acknowledge that the main reason for this was the impact of praises on the MAF score, rather than an actual improvement in performance (Q24). This may explain both the significant increase in praises awarded to CS and the more modest increase for CP, whose careers are not as influenced by them.



**Figure 6 – Praises awarded from 2010 to 2019**

According to the Head of the Personnel Department of the General Staff Resources Division, the reason for this apparent low motivation to improve performance is the fact that the system has only been implemented for a relatively short time. If people do not turn against the system and actively work to improve it, their motivation should gradually increase.

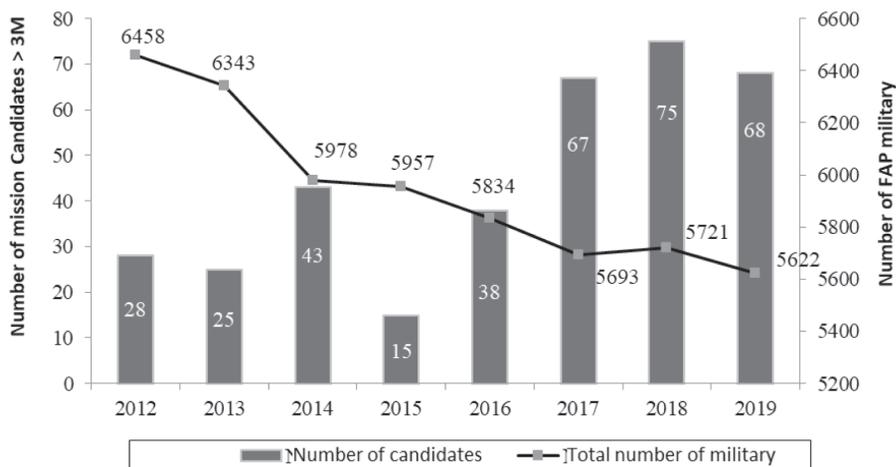
**3:** This section assesses if service members are willing to attend more training because of the impact on their CA score, to which 42% of respondents answered positively (Q28). An analysis of the course registry data<sup>4</sup> since 2010 (Figure 7) revealed that the average number of CS officers who attended the 2018-2019 course was 32.6% higher than the average of the previous 8 years, and that the increase for CP was 14.3%. Interestingly, the CA score does not have an influence on the career progression of CP. This suggests that the SAMMFA has encouraged CS personnel to attend more training and thus fostered their professional development.



**Figure 7 – Number of registered courses since 2010**

**4:** To ascertain if there were differences in service members' willingness to participate in operational activities, given the importance of these missions for the CA, the RepC was asked to provide data on the number of mission candidates since 2012 (Figure 8).

<sup>4</sup> Registry containing data on all military courses, training actions and qualifications, regardless of branch.



**Figure 8 – Candidates for missions longer than three months**

Until 2016, the average number of candidates was about 30 per year; from 2017 to 2019 this average increased to 70 candidates per year, despite the reduction in staff numbers. There could be several reasons for this, such as the calls for tenders having been published earlier, which resulted in a higher number of applicants (previous cSecCCM).

However, given the importance of these missions for the individual assessment process, the significant increase in candidates from 2017 onwards may have also been influenced by the RAMMFA's implementation. The current Head of the Positions, Courses and Missions Section confirmed that "many service members need to have an international assignment on their service record, as this will count towards their military merit score."

**5:** Field 7.2 of the AF identifies the appraisee's training needs. The Head of the Merit Appraisal Section of the Career and Promotions Department of the Directorate of Personnel stated that, in order to progress in their career, the appraisee must improve and enhance his or her technical and / or behavioural skills. The interviewee added that the SIAMMFA platform is currently experiencing some problems which prevent these reports from being extracted automatically. Among other things, this would allow the Armed Forces to quickly identify training needs and streamline the process.

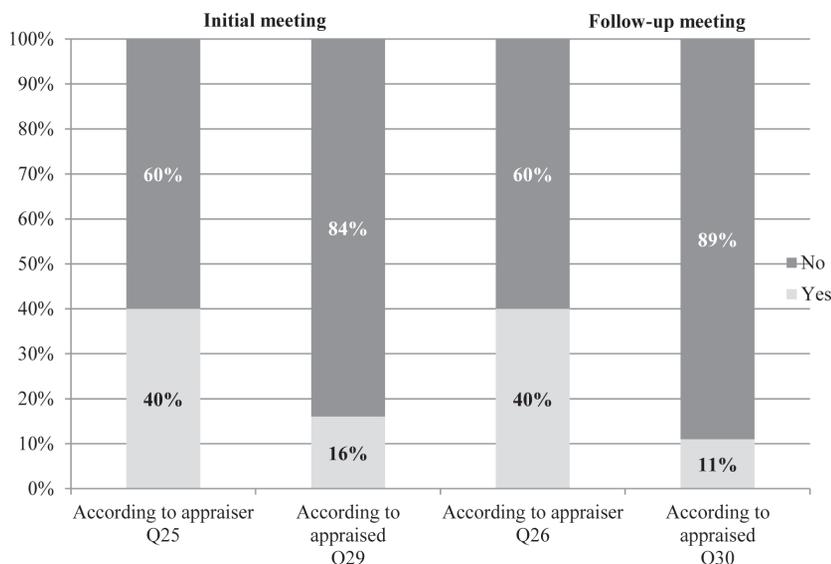
It is worth noting that 18.5% of appraisers agree that the purpose of this field is to show that the appraisee lacks the skills required for their role. This may make appraisers hesitant to fill out this field for fear that it will jeopardise the appraisee's chances of promotion. On the other hand, this field could also be used by the CESP to highlight the appraisee's lack of training precisely with that intent.

The purpose of this field should be clarified, as well as how the information is / will be used. Ideally, it should not factor into the merit score so appraisers are not hesitant about identifying any training needs that could be met to improve the appraisee's performance.

**6:** The feedback given to employees is what drives their personal and professional development (Rego et al., 2015, p.497). Furthermore, Camara (2015) states that an initial

goal setting meeting should be held so employees know what is expected of them and how they can assess their own performance. The quality of these objectives will affect the quality of the employee's performance. There should be year-round monitoring to correct any shortcomings that may emerge.

Although Article 17(3) of RAMMFA provides for initial and follow-up meetings, as Figure 9 shows, these meetings are seldom held by appraisers.



**Figure 9 – Responses to Q25/Q26/Q29/Q30**

These results highlight the fact that appraisers and appraisees disagree on whether these meetings were actually held, which suggests poor communication.

#### 4.1.3. Brief overview and answer to SQ1

There is a common perception that performance appraisal systems are designed to increase workers' workload and effort, and that they are essentially controlling and punitive. Performance management systems should be viewed as a positive transformational tool that can improve individual and organizational performance (Camara, 2015). The RAMMFA aims to do more than simply appraise subordinates' actions to either reward or punish them; it aims to facilitate skills alignment, provide knowledge on existing human potential, and foster professional development.

The PoAF is currently working on implementing a GpC model that will match service members to positions according to their skills and individual potential. The SAMMFA contributes to this process by defining and measuring the most relevant skills for a position against objective descriptors and by providing specific fields to assess individual potential.

The implementation of a GpC model and the review of the Placements Regulation will make it possible to meet two requirements analysed in this study which are currently not being met: the U/E/C manuals do not include the required skills for each position / role and,

perhaps as a result, the RepC does not use the information collected in the AF for placement purposes. Another important measure is to ensure that all fields of the AF are accurately filled out, which will require improving the training given to appraisers.

The study found that the RAMMFA fosters professional development as it encourages service members to:

- Sign up for more missions;
- Attend more training / courses;
- Put in more effort into career promotion courses.

However, the RAMMFA seems to have little impact in improving performance. There may be several reasons for this, which may not directly relate to the RAMMFA, such as the current shortage of human resources leading to an increased workload, which in turn hinders service members' ability to enhance their skills. The following are some of the reasons that may directly relate to the RAMMFA:

- Lack of an individual development plan to meet the training needs identified in field 7.2 of the AF.
- Resistance to the current system, compounded by the fact that the transition was not gradual, as noted by the Director of Personnel;
- Appraisers' low adherence to initial / follow-up meetings to guide subordinates and encourage them to improve their performance;
- Lack of a rewards system (other than promotion) to encourage service members to improve their performance;
- Ill-prepared appraisers; as Camara (2015, p.70) notes, a poorly conducted assessment "destroys the credibility of the system, affects the appraisees' motivation and self-esteem, and fosters conflict and resistance".

Currently, it appears that performance is assessed but not managed, and the potential of these systems to improve individual performance is not explored in full since, as the Director of Personnel states, the RAMMFA only focuses on promotion.

#### **4.2. Impact of the RAMMFA in the PoAF**

This chapter assesses the impact of the RAMMFA on PoAF personnel and answers Subsidiary Question 2 (SQ2): What is the relationship between SPA and AOC/EE/TI in the PoAF, vis-à-vis the entry into force of the new RAMMFA?

##### **4.2.1. Relationship between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and commitment, engagement and turnover intentions in the PoAF**

The correlation structure of the scales was assessed through an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the correlation matrix with factor extraction using the principal component method. One latent factor (1F) was obtained with an *eigenvalue* greater than 1, which explained the total variance and matched the factor structure (1F) of the original scales. The validity of the EFA was tested by obtaining the KMOs, which were classified as good according to Maroco (2010, p.368).

The results (Figure 10) obtained by items Q33 to Q38, which cover SPA, show that service members are dissatisfied with: how the current model assesses performance (Q33); the

feedback and guidance they receive from their supervisors (Q34); their assessments when compared to the assessments of their peers (Q36); the fact that the AF does not reflect improvements or declines in performance (Q37).



Figure 10 – Satisfaction with the performance appraisal system: results

Item Q33, which refers to satisfaction with the current performance assessment model, is particularly relevant. It is one of the most important parameters since it refers to the model's acceptability. According to Rego et al. (2015, p. 499), this "is the most important requirement, without which the system is bound to fail". This item revealed that 75.7% of respondents were dissatisfied with the current model, with the trend (43.6%) located at the extremity of the scale ("Totally disagree"). The Head of the Careers and Promotions Department of the Directorate of Personnel acknowledged that improving the system's acceptability is crucial, as the results of the merit lists have left service members concerned.

In order to explain these values and find solutions, the correlations between the items were assessed (Table 7).

Table 7 – Satisfaction with the performance appraisal system: matrix of correlations between items (Pearson)

	Q33	Q34	Q35	Q36	Q37	Q38
Q33	1					
Q34	<i>.356**</i>	1				
Q35	<i>.311**</i>	<u>.554**</u>	1			
Q36	<i>.352**</i>	<i>.451**</i>	<u>.648**</u>	1		
Q37	<i>.346**</i>	<u>.541**</u>	<b>.761**</b>	<i>.678**</i>	1	
Q38	<i>.315**</i>	<u>.544**</u>	<b>.846**</b>	<i>.660**</i>	<b>.827**</b>	1

\*\* The correlation is significant at level 0.014 (bilateral).

Note: Correlations > 0.700 are in bold; correlations in the range [0.500; 0.700[ are underlined; and the correlations in the range [0.300; 0.500[ are in italics.

Low positive correlations ( $0.3 < r < 0.5$ ) were found (Table 8) between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system (Q33) and: satisfaction with the feedback from supervisors (Q34); with the results and the quantity and quality of the work performed (Q35 and Q37); with the individual assessments, when compared to their peers' (Q36).

That is, even if the system is improved by focusing on these three factors, this positive influence alone may not be enough to ensure service members are satisfied with the new assessment model (Q33). Their satisfaction with the performance appraisal system may be due to some initial resistance to the change in the career progression paradigm rather than to the fairness of the results.

Questions Q35 to Q38 assess trust in the appraisal system. Rego et al. (2015, p.501) confirm that trust “from all stakeholders is crucial for the effectiveness of a performance management process” and that it “requires management and leadership practices that are consistent over time, transparent, fair and respectful of people’s dignity”. While the positive results in questions 35 and 38 reveal some satisfaction with the assessment of the work performed, the results obtained by Q36 reveal concern with the inconsistent criteria used by appraisers. This inconsistency can be mitigated by providing training and standardising assessments, which most interviewees agreed is crucial. The DIVREC is currently analysing how this can be implemented.

The responses to Q37 reveal dissatisfaction (trend at “Totally Disagree”) in how the AF reflects changes in performance. These results confirm the responses to Q22 and Q27, which show that individual performance improvements (17.8%) are not perceived as such by appraisers (6.8%). The gap between these values may be bridged by increasing monitoring and feedback from appraisers, as shown by the moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.541$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) between the two questions (Q34 and Q37).

The relationships between the SPA, AOC, EE and TI variables, which SQ2 aims to examine, were analysed using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient and are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8 – Correlations between SPA/OAC/EE/TI (Pearson)**

	M	SD	SPA	AOC	EE	TI
SPA	3.58	1.5331	1			
AOC	4.91	1.5243	<i>0.317</i>	1		
EE	4.75	1.5047	<i>0.362</i>	<u>0.686</u>	1	
TI	3.62	1.8117	<i>-0.34</i>	<u>-0.593</u>	<u>-0.543</u>	1

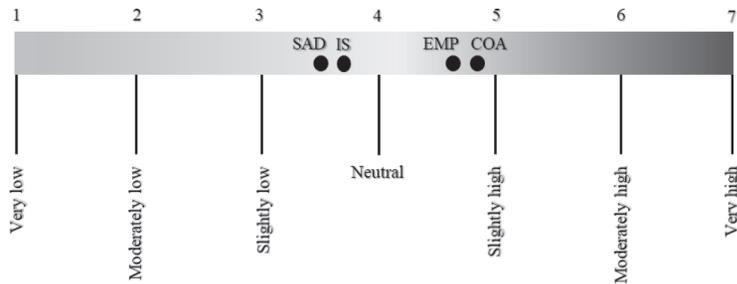
\*\* The correlation is significant at level 0.01 (bilateral).

Note: Correlations  $> 0.700$  are in bold; correlations in the range  $[0.500; 0.700[$  are underlined; and correlations in the range  $[0.300; 0.500[$  are in italics.

Although a correlation was found between SPA and the other variables, it was a weak correlation. That is, SPA increases AOC and EE and decreases TI, but not significantly. Curiously, these results differ slightly from what several studies predict (see sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.5).

In fact, it appears that although service members are dissatisfied with SPA ( $M=3.58$ ), and especially with the current performance assessment model (Q33,  $M=2.414$ ), they nevertheless

show reasonable levels of AOC (M=4.91) and EE (M=4.75) (Figure 11). Interestingly, a moderate positive correlation was found between commitment, engagement and turnover intentions, that is, service members who have an affective link to the Organization are also more committed to their job and have lower turnover intentions.



**Figure 11 – Average SPA, AOC, EE and TI, scored on a 7-point Likert scale**

These values for commitment can be explained by the influence of several factors which may not directly relate to performance assessment (Cunha et al., 2014, p.220), as the Director of Personnel confirmed. The seemingly low impact of the new assessment system on commitment may be due to the fact that it has not been implemented for long and its full effects have not been felt yet. Furthermore, the emotional bond between service members and the military institution is built on particularly solid foundations through an ongoing process of acculturation that increases resilience and leads to stable levels of commitment.

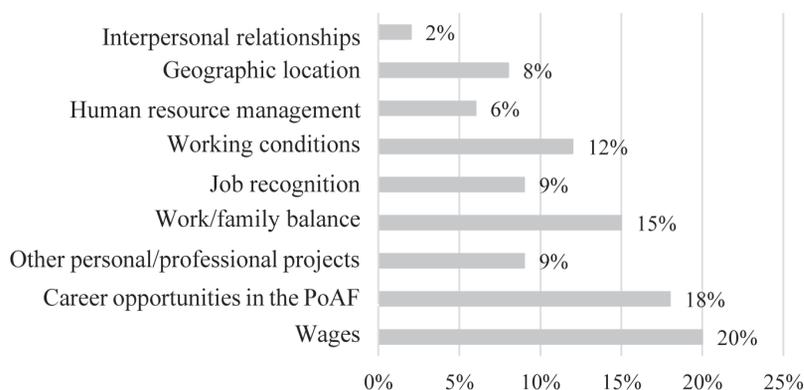
While many studies consider the performance assessment system to be the best predictor of engagement (Ameen, 2019), this study found a weak correlation between SPA and engagement. This can be explained by the fact that, as Ameen (2019) argues, the aspects that increase commitment may relate more to the purposes of the assessment system (feedback, training, promotions, recognition and financial rewards) than to the system itself. Table 9 shows the relationship between these purposes and the results obtained in the PoAF.

**Table 9 – Aspects that promote engagement**

Aspects that promote engagement	Results obtained in the PoAF
Feedback	Seldom used by appraisers, low satisfaction reported by appraisees (section 4.2.1).
Training	Included in field 7.2 of the AF, but appraisers are unsure of its purpose and the information is not used (section 4.12).
Promotion	This goal is achieved, but there is resistance to the use of performance assessment for the purposes of promotion (section 4.2.1).
Recognition	This goal is achieved, as the system changes the progression by seniority paradigm to a merit progression system.
Financial Rewards	Not applicable in the Armed Forces, but could be useful in other types of organizations.

If all these goals are met, the correlation between SPA and EE could change. Future studies can attempt to replicate this one to determine if the measures taken to enhance the effects of RAMMFA were successful.

This study found a weak negative correlation between turnover intentions and SPA. A significant percentage of surveyed service members (47%) are currently planning to search for another job in the near future (Q54), 31.5% plan to do so next year (Q57), and 22% are currently doing so (Q55). The Director of Personnel pointed to recent studies by the DP, which suggest that the main reason for turnover intentions are wages rather than how human resources are managed (Figure 12).



**Figure 12 – Reasons for CS turnover**

Source: DP (2019).

However, 68.9% of surveyed service members (Q31) will consider separating from the military if they are passed over for promotion, depending on the reasons:

- 22% will do so if they are passed over by someone with a worse performance;
- 29.5% will do so if they are passed over by reasons unrelated to their performance;
- 15.9% will do so regardless of the situation;
- 1.5% if will do so passed over by more than one person.

As these figures are cause for concern, the joint elected members of the officers and sergeants CESP were asked if such situations have occurred and how they can be minimised. These shortcomings essentially reflect the inconsistent criteria used by appraisers and the fact that praises have different weights depending on the appraisee's position.

#### 4.2.2. Brief overview and answer to SQ2

The section above analysed the relationship between SPA, AOC, EE and TI, and found a positive correlation between SPA and AOC and EE, and a negative correlation between SPA and TI. However, the correlations are weak, that is, SPA has a weak influence on the AOC, EE and TI of surveyed service members, which may be explained by other factors that also influence these variables. Even so, according to the literature, the relationship between

these concepts should be stronger. This may be explained by the fact that the system is still relatively new, that its effects have barely been felt, and that its “toolkit” has not yet been fully explored (feedback, training, promotion, recognition and rewards). Thus, future studies seeking to replicate this one may obtain different results.

#### 4.3. Measures that can be taken to enhance the effects of the RAMMFA (answer to the RQ).

The answers to the subsidiary questions discussed in the previous subchapters will provide an answer to the RQ “How can the effects of the RAMMFA be enhanced?”

The answer to SQ1 revealed that the RAMMFA facilitates skills alignment, promotes professional development, and provides knowledge on human potential, and the answer to SQ2 established the relationship between SPA and AOC, EE and TI. The study identified several opportunities for improvement that will enable the RAMMFA to achieve its purposes more effectively, increasing its positive influence on AOC and EE and decreasing TI.

Table 10 presents the identified gaps organized according to goals and categories of analysis, as well as suggestions to mitigate them. The latter were drawn from the content analysis performed on the semi-structured interviews and the ensuing critical reflection. These measures aim to enhance the RAMMFA and should be taken into consideration: (1) during the RAMMFA review; (2) during the review of the CEMFA decision; and (3) by the Organization, to enhance the purposes of the RAMMFA.

**Table 10 – Recommendations to mitigate the identified gaps**

Identified gaps		Recommendations
Objective	1 - To ascertain if the SAMMFA is achieving its purposes	
Category	1 – Skills development, 2 – Professional development, 3 – Individual potential	
Appraisers are ill-prepared	Most surveyed service members find the instructions for filling out the AF to be unclear and / or insufficient.	1) The RAMMFA review should clarify the instructions for filling out the AF, including information on how the information collected will be used, especially with regards to fields 6 and 7. 2) Training plan for appraisers, covering: – Operation of the assessment system; – Goal-setting and follow-up meetings; – Assessment and final meeting; – Short training sessions should be held regularly, and attendance should be mandatory. 3) Training effectiveness evaluation form (training assessment). 4) Clarifying the purpose of the fields: – 6: Potential assessment; – 7.1: Appraisee’s time in Unit; – 7.2: Appraisee’s training needs. 5) AF field for the appraiser to record if initial and follow-up meetings were held.
	Nearly half of appraisers did not attend any training / awareness raising sessions.	
	Most appraisers do not hold initial and follow-up meetings with appraisees.	
	There is a lack of knowledge and consensus on how the information collected in some AF fields will be used.	
Category	1 – Skills development	
Skills-alignment needs	There is a lack of information about the most valued skills for each defined position / role.	6) The organization’s manuals and the U/E/C operating standards should include the most valued skills for each position / role. 7) The personnel services should take the information collected in the AF into consideration when assigning placements and appointments.
	The information collected in the AF (on skills and potential) is not used.	

(Cont.)

Identified gaps		Recommendations
<b>Category</b>	<b>2 – Professional development</b>	
The AF field “Appraiser’s training needs” is seldom used	Appraisers are unsure about the purpose of field 7.2, and may not fill it out for fear of jeopardising the appraisee’s chances of promotion.	8) Mandatory training for appraisers.
	Difficulty using the information collected in field 7.2 due to problems with the SIAMMFA	9) Defining how the information collected in field 7.2 of the AF will be used in a document to common to all PoAF services to facilitate a more effective integrated response. 10) Solving the problems with the SIAMMFA to automate the processing of training needs.
	Lack of PoAF-level directives on how the information will be used to address the identified needs	11) Implementing individual development plans to address the identified training needs.
The RAMMFA can facilitate the development of other areas	Despite already facilitating professional development in several areas, the RAMMFA can be used to explore other aspects that influence military performance	12) In addition to promotion courses, additional courses and training, there are other areas which are already assessed and which should be included in the appraisal, such as the physical condition component (e.g. physical tests, military medals).
The RAMMFA has a low impact on improving daily performance	The RAMMFA has little influence on improving military performance	13) Defining other effects of the assessment in the RAMMFA that have a more direct impact than promotions, both for negative assessments (meeting training needs, performing different roles in the same service) and for positive assessments (attribution of merit days, praises or medals).
<b>Category</b>	<b>3 – Individual potential</b>	
The AF field “Potential Assessment” is not sufficiently objective	Fields 6.1 and 6.2 focus overmuch on relative performance comparisons	14) AF field 6 should be reviewed to: - Collect more detailed information on the type of positions / roles that the appraisee can take on; - Collect more detailed information about the aspects that the appraisee should improve; - Reduce the emphasis on ranking service members (current and previous system).
	Not enough information is collected regarding the appraisee’s ability to take on more complex roles	
<b>Objective</b>	<b>2 – To analyse the relationships between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and commitment, engagement and turnover intentions in the PoAF, vis-à-vis the entry into force of the RAMMFA.</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>3 – Relationship between SPA and TI</b>	
Perceived unfairness of the system	Inconsistency in the criteria used by appraisers	15) Defining a methodology to standardise the Individual Assessment component (as provided for in Article 33(1) (d) of the RAMMFA). One possible measure would be to retrieve the appraiser’s (average) profile from the previous system.
	The impact of praises on the score depends on the appraisee’s post	
	The “Rank Seniority” component poses some constraints, particularly when service members who attended different courses are promoted on the same date due to lack of vacancies.	16) Reviewing the value assigned to praises, making it less dependent on the appraisee’s post (CMPost DT/DIR/CH; this measure may be included in the Operational Component of the SF).
	Opportunities and careers are different: some lead to more recognition (assessments, praises, medals) than others, and service members have little control over this or choice on the matter	17) Reviewing the component “Rank Seniority” to include not only the time in rank but also, for example, the time elapsed from the moment the appraisee meets the requirements for promotion to the current rank, but is not promoted due to lack of vacancies or other reasons for which the appraisee is not responsible (the daily value should be lower than the one defined in Article 36(2) of the RAMMFA). That is, there should be a way to distinguish courses where all attendees were promoted on the same date from courses with only a few promotions due to lack of vacancies.
Lack of knowledge about the relationship between CS turnover and the assessment system	When a CS officer separates from the military, the organization should obtain more detailed information on their reasons for leaving	18) Reviewing the turnover reasons survey, adding sublevels (HR Management, Job Recognition, etc.), to collect more detailed information on why the service member has chosen to leave. One of these sublevels could be satisfaction with the appraisal system.

(Cont.)

Identified gaps		Recommendations
Category	1 – Relationship between SPA and AOC, 2 – Relationship between SPA and EE, 3 – Relationship between SPA and TI	
The 0.3 buffer required for being promoted ahead of another service member in the Merit List poses problems	Some service members with substantially higher merit scores cannot be promoted ahead of others due to this “buffer” (the difference between scores must be higher than 0.3v). In the following example, the merit list ranking would not be changed, although the last score is 0.85v higher than the first: 14.0v - 14.28v - 14.57v - 14.85v.	19) Determining the frequency of situations that prevent service members from being promoted according to their merit and, should they occur, reviewing CEMFA Decision No. 51/2018 to find solutions to minimise them.
The experience and information available to CESP are seldom explored	The problems identified and experienced by the Specialty Councils (as CPESFA support bodies) are not fully addressed	5. The entities responsible for reviewing the RAMMFA and for elaborating the Assessment System documentation should consult with the CESP stakeholders, particularly the joint elected members;  20) Assessing the relevance of defining a (non-binding) guideline for use by the CESP when calculating the Complementary Assessment scores, based on the best examples from previous CESP. Alternatively, sessions may be held to present the models that have been shown to best fit this type of data analysis and Complementary Assessment calculation (also non-binding).
<b>Other measures</b>		
-	-	21) Reviewing the wording of certain fields of the AF (e.g. 7.1 - “Appraisee’s time in unit” should be replaced by “Appraisee’s time in the current service”, as this information is collected by the 1st appraiser and improve the quality of the answers.

## 5. Conclusions

The entry into force of the RAMMFA on 1 January 2018 introduced significant changes to the PoAF’s performance appraisal system which aimed to increase the system’s impact on human resource management. Unlike the previous system, the RAMMFA is common to the three branches of the Armed Forces. It also makes the merit appraisal process more objective, with direct consequences for service members’ career progression. Although these are the most noticeable differences, the RAMMFA aims to have a broader and more ambitious impact on human resource management, especially in terms of skills alignment, professional development and individual potential. This work has examined whether the RAMMFA is achieving these goals and analysed the relationship between satisfaction with the performance appraisal system, commitment, engagement, and turnover intentions.

As the system has only recently been implemented, future studies that attempt to replicate this one may obtain different results. However, this study will serve to monitor and understand the effects of the implementation at a relatively early stage, as well as to identify

adjustments that may contribute to a smoother transition and to the regulation's upcoming review, which is set to take place by January 2021.

This study's specific objectives are to ascertain if the SAMMFA is achieving its intended purposes (SO1) and to analyse the relationship between service members' satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and commitment, engagement and turnover intentions vis-à-vis the entry into force of the RAMMFA (SO2), in order to propose measures which the surveyed PoAF personnel believe will enhance the effects of the RAMMFA (GO). In view of the findings, all these objectives have been achieved.

The study is delimited in terms of time to the period from the date the RAMMFA entered into force to the present day, in terms of space to active duty PoAF personnel, and in terms of content to the purposes of the SAMMFA and the relationship between SPA and AOC/EE/TI.

The study used an inductive reasoning methodology supported by a mixed methods research strategy and a cross-sectional research design.

The main findings were drawn from a questionnaire survey delivered to 1180 PoAF service members. These findings were reinforced qualitatively by structured interviews with several PoAF experts and by the information obtained from the DP.

The answer to SQ1 "Is the SAMMFA achieving its intended purposes?" is that, although the SAMMFA aims to facilitate skills alignment, professional development, and knowledge about human potential, the system's documentation does not focus on these goals and does not specify how they should be achieved. On the contrary, its main goal seems to be to rank service members for promotion purposes. The SAMMFA sets the foundations for achieving the above goals; however, they must be fully explored and enhanced by the organization. More than assessed, merit should be managed and encouraged by providing appraisees tools for self-improvement and by using the information obtained from the system to advance the organization. If this is not done, the appraisal system may be perceived as simply a tool for control, generating resistance and wasting its full potential.

With regards to *skills alignment*, the study found that this purpose can be achieved once a GpC model is implemented. An implementation study is currently being developed by the DP. At this time, the system facilitates the process by defining and measuring the most relevant skills using objective descriptors but there is no follow-up, as the RepC does not use the information in the AF for placement purposes and the U/E/C manuals do not include the most relevant skills for each position / role. The study also found that some fields of the AF should be clarified, and that the appraisers lack the training required to accurately fill-out the AF and ensure that the collected information is useful and reliable.

The study found that the RAMMFA fosters *professional development* by encouraging service members to: (1) Sign up for more missions; (2) Attend more training / courses; and (3) Put more effort into promotion courses.

As for the RAMMFA's ability to identify training needs that can be addressed, thus improving the appraisee's performance, even though field 7.2 of the AF serves to collect this information, appraisers are unsure of how the information will be used and there is no consistent plan to meet the identified training needs.

The impact of the RAMMFA on improving daily performance was found to be low.

Although the reasons for this are not obvious, they may relate to:

- Resistance to the current system, in addition to the fact that the transition was not gradual;
- Appraisers' low adhesion to initial / follow-up meetings to guide and encourage subordinates' performance;
- Appraisers' lack of preparation, which can lead to poorly conducted assessments and affect the motivation and performance of appraisees who perceive the system as unfair.

Moreover, the AF fields that assess individual potential focus overmuch on relative performance comparisons and the collected information appears to be insufficient to ascertain if the appraisee can take on more complex roles, or what those roles are.

The answer to SQ2 *“What is the relationship between SPA and AOC/EE/TI?”* is that increasing satisfaction with the performance appraisal system leads to higher levels of commitment and engagement and reduced turnover intentions. However, this impact is low, which can be explained by the fact that there are several factors that influence these variables. The system's recent implementation may be one of those factors, as its effects are still unclear and it is mainly used for promotion purposes.

If the RAMMFA is continuously improved and its results monitored, and if the feedback between subordinates / supervisors / the organization is enhanced to provide service members the tools they need to improve their skills in a way that meets the needs of all stakeholders, people will feel more involved and enthusiastic. Only then will the full effects be noticeable and the link to commitment, engagement and turnover intentions become stronger.

This part of the study included an analysis of the findings, which revealed a link between high turnover intentions and the possibility of being unfairly passed over for promotion. Given the shortage of human resources in the military, these situations should be monitored by making efforts to correct any shortcomings in the system. The joint elected members of the CESP have a privileged perspective on how the merit lists are drafted and are a valuable source of information for identifying such situations.

The analysis carried out to answer the SQs also served to elaborate a list of aspects that can be reviewed and improved upon in the RAMMFA, in the decision of the CEMFA, and in the organization. By addressing these aspects, the positive impact of the assessment system will be improved and its effects enhanced. The interviews and ensuing critical reflection answered the RQ *“How can the effects of the RAMMFA be enhanced?”* and a list of recommendations was elaborated (Table 10):

- Ensuring appraisers are better prepared;
- Facilitating skills alignment;
- Using the AF field of “Appraisee's training needs” more effectively;
- Promoting the development of other areas through the RAMMFA;
- Enhancing day-to-day performance;
- Making the AF field “Potential Assessment” more objective;
- Making the system fairer;
- Monitoring the relationship between the new assessment system and turnover;

- Flagging potential problems with the 0.3 difference required to be promoted ahead of another service member in the merit list;
- Taking full advantage of the experience and knowledge of the CESP to identify any shortcomings that can be corrected.

This study's main *contribution to knowledge* is that it is the first to analyse the effects of the new appraisal system on service members and on the Armed Forces, an organization with a strong vertical hierarchy in which seniority is traditionally the main requirement for career progression. The reason for this study – to ascertain the system's impact – is based on evidence that a performance appraisal system with low impact (as was the case with the previous one) will not effectively improve the organization's human resources. Although this article does not address them in depth, the study found statistically significant differences in the effects felt by CS officers and CP, as well as between officers and sergeants. This study corroborates the extant literature inasmuch as an assessment system should be only one part of a broader transformational approach, where communication and training are used to enhance skills to the desired levels of proficiency. While this is suggested by the modest gains in performance and by the weak influence of SPA on AOC, EE and TI, it can only be confirmed by a longitudinal study that attempts to replicate this one after the suggested improvements have been made. The study also highlighted the complexity of human behaviour and the difficulty in isolating the factors that influence it, especially with regards to commitment, engagement and turnover intentions. These factors were found to have a weak correlation to performance assessment and moderate correlations among them. As the data were drawn from a significant sample (24% of officers and sergeants on active duty), the results reflect the current reality of the PoAF. However, these variables are dynamic, and the relationships they establish are context-dependent and may change over time. The study also identified adjustments that can be made to bridge the gap between the implemented system and the theoretical mode and enable it to achieve its intended purposes. Finally, although the study only surveyed PoAF personnel, this research methodology can easily be used by other branches or adapted to other organizations with complex assessment system such as the one used by the Armed Forces.

The main *limitation* of this study is its qualitative component, which makes it difficult to identify and measure all the factors that could explain a variable, and consequently to reach objective conclusions.

*Future studies* are needed to analyse the differences in results between age groups, types of service contract, and between the sergeants and officers categories, as this study found some statistically significant differences between them. It would be especially interesting to understand the causes of these differences. As the RAMMFA is common to all branches of the Armed Forces, this study may be replicated in the other branches to identify specific problems and solutions, how the information collected is processed and used, and if the assessment system is achieving its proposed goals.

In addition to the *recommendations list* in Table 10, the assessment system should be monitored and audited to identify the medium and long term effects, as well as to assess the impact of the changes introduced in the meantime and identify any new effects that may arise from them. The contributions of the joint elected members of the CESP will be crucial for this

analysis, as they will help identify any unfair situations, which could have significant impact on the SAMMFA's acceptability and thus directly influence the levels of satisfaction with the system. A joint analysis is also needed to identify problems specific to other branches and to prepare a common response. Finally, as the success of the system will depend essentially on how it is used, the AAFF should prepare a strategy to boost its organizational effectiveness. This will entail improving communication (feedback), facilitating professional development and promoting skills alignment rather than focusing overmuch on ranking service members according to merit.

"What gets measured gets done, what gets measured and fed back gets done well, what gets rewarded gets repeated."

John E. Jones

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