

‘Man shall not live by bread alone’ – Occupational Needs of Military Personnel and their Significance for the Attractiveness of the German Armed Forces as an Employer

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Due to the changes German society is undergoing as a whole, like the declines in the birth rate and number of high school or college graduates,¹ as well as a drop in the number of unemployed young people,² a tendency that began in the middle of the 21st century’s first decade,³ the pool of potential applicants for apprenticeships and jobs in Germany is continually decreasing. At the same time, an increasing number of vacancies in the German job market remain unfilled for longer and longer periods.⁴ The Bundeswehr is therefore under more pressure than ever, especially since the suspension of compulsory military service, to recruit and retain qualified personnel, and is required to compete with civilian employers in the “war for talent”.

All in all, the findings of several empirical studies conducted by the former Bundeswehr Institute of Social Sciences (SOWI) and the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences (ZMSBw) indicate that the Bundeswehr as an employer will have to make some improvements in order to increase its attractiveness among both potential applicants and its existing civilian and military personnel. A survey among young people in 2011 (Hentschel, 2014) shows that many young men and women tend to consider the armed forces unattractive as an employer. Although a clear majority sees it in a positive light, fewer than half of the interviewees describe their personal attitude towards the armed forces as (rather) positive. In a direct comparison with other employers, the military ranks in the bottom third among young people.

In order to defeat other employers in the so-called “war for talent”, the Bundeswehr must improve external perceptions of its attractiveness as an employer. One decisive factor in this, beyond professional and effective employer branding, resides in the attitudes of its own personnel, who function as brand ambassadors and multipliers and hence shape the image of the armed forces among civilians. Moreover, with regard to the retention of qualified military personnel who, for structural reasons, have to decide whether or not to re-enlist as regulars at some point in their careers, it is of fundamental importance for the German military to be perceived by service members as an attractive employer.

¹ Federal Statistical Office, 2013 ; Secretariat of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States in the Federal Republic of Germany, 2013.

² Germany even has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the Euro area and the European Union : see Federal Employment Agency, 2015b.

³ Cf. statistics provided by the Federal Employment Agency, 2015a.

⁴ Federal Employment Agency, 2015c.

Against this background, the objective pursued in this article is to analyze and determine empirically, based on data collected in a representative survey, how the Bundeswehr is perceived as an employer by its own personnel, what motives or needs substantially influence its perceived attractiveness and what implications these results have for future military recruitment and retention strategies. First, the conceptual background and the methodological design of the study are presented. This is followed by a univariate analysis of the military personnel's perception of the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as an employer and of concomitant components – motivation, commitment, identification and job satisfaction. The next step is an examination of how the motives and needs of military personnel are met by the Bundeswehr and to what extent this affects its perception as an employer. The paper ends by summarizing and discussing the empirical findings presented.

Assumptions and Method

In occupational and organizational psychology, motivational theory tries to explain how a person feels as well as the direction, intensity and persistence of human behaviour (Nerdinger, 2007 ; Vollmeyer, 2005). In addition to motives and incentives, personal characteristics (drives and skills) as well as situational factors (opportunities) are included to explain goal-directed behaviour.⁵ Therefore, three groups of work motivation theories are usually identified : theories bearing on goal selection and goal achievement (both process theories) and content theories. The latter consider motives and needs as temporally stable personality traits that determine specific goals, and thus human behaviour. They assume that the satisfaction of these motives has a positive impact on job satisfaction and employee performance (*ibid.*). Proceeding from Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, Alderfer (1972) identifies three categories of needs in his "ERG" theory: existence needs (e.g., job security, good pay), relatedness needs (e.g., work-life balance) and growth needs (e.g., possibility of assuming responsibility). Recent works on employer attractiveness and employee motivation also emphasize the relevance of motives and occupational needs either directly⁶ or indirectly.⁷

Following this view, this article analyzes occupational needs as determinants of the Bundeswehr's perceived attractiveness as an employer. In line with to contemporary research, employer attractiveness is defined as the appeal of an employer for potential applicants (willingness to apply) and existing employees (willingness to work).⁸ Knowing that, in comparison to other companies on the job market, the Bundeswehr is seen as rather unattractive among younger people, the article examines the perception of the Bundeswehr by military personnel. Thereby, attractiveness and related aspects like employee motivation, commitment and identification are investigated. Moreover, the perceived fulfilment of existential, social and growth needs is assessed. It is assumed that the perception of the

⁵ Brandstätter & Schnelle, 2007

⁶ Cf., for instance, Klaffke & Parment, 2011 ; Ruthus, 2013 ; Lake, 2015 ; Otto & Remdisch, 2015. These are primarily management-related works.

⁷ Cf. Schwaab, 2008 ; Fietz & Worschech, 2009 ; Tomczak, von Walter & Henkel, 2011 ; Apt, 2011.

⁸ Cf., for instance, Grobe, 2003 ; Huf, 2007 ; Hedlund, Andersson & Rosén, 2009.

Bundeswehr as an employer should differ among military personnel as a function of the diversity of task areas and occupational burdens, as well as of agendas and value orientations across different status groups and ranks. Overall, the satisfaction of needs is expected to have a positive effect on employer attractiveness and the related aspects employee commitment, employee motivation, identification with the employer and job satisfaction.

The data used is based on a survey (hereinafter referred to as the Attractiveness Study) conducted in 2013 by the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences (ZMSBw). As part of the data collection process, 7,744 service members were interviewed in an intranet survey between January 30 and March 3. The target population is defined as the Bundeswehr’s military personnel as of 7 February 2013 (n = 190,517). A random sample (n = 41,567) was drawn from the target population, so the coverage rate is approximately 19 percent. In this context, it must be pointed out that not all military personnel have a Bundeswehr e-mail address and therefore some had no chance of being included in the random sample. For the purpose of harmonizing its structure with that of the target population, the data were weighted by the variables gender, major organizational entity, service status and rank category (see Table 1).

In the questionnaire, the latent variables attractiveness, commitment, motivation and identification were measured in blocks with six randomized items each (see Tables 2-5, pp.4-6). The perceived satisfaction with occupational needs contained 10 randomized items for each of the three need types (see Figure 1, p.9).

Table 1 : Comparison of Target Population and Realized Sample

	Target population	Realized sample (unweighted)	Realized sample (weighted)	Difference unweighted	Difference weighted
<i>Gender</i>					
Male	89.9	91.6	89.9	1.7	0.0
Female	10.1	8.4	10.1	-1.7	0.0
<i>Major organizational entity</i>					
Federal Ministry of Defence	0.5	1.4	0.9	0.9	0.4
Joint Support Service	23.8	26.7	25.6	2.9	1.8
Joint Medical Service	10.6	9.7	11.0	-0.9	0.3
Personnel	4.0	2.9	2.6	-1.0	-1.3
Army	34.5	29.2	33	-5.2	-1.4
Air Force	17.5	20.6	18.8	3.1	1.3
Navy	8.5	7.2	7.0	-1.3	-1.5
Equipment, IT and Service Support	0.6	1.9	0.8	1.3	0.2
Infrastructure, Environmental Protection & Services	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.2
<i>Service status</i>					
Career service member	28.8	60.2	32.1	31.4	3.4
Temporary-career volunteer	66.5	38.8	64.9	-27.7	-1.6
Military service volunteer	4.7	1.0	2.9	-3.7	-1.8

<i>Rank category</i>					
Generals / admirals	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Senior officers	6.5	15.6	7.4	9.1	0.9
Junior officers	12.8	22.1	12.9	9.3	0.1
Senior NCOs	36.1	47.2	39.6	11.2	3.5
Junior NCOs	19.5	8.2	19.8	-11.3	0.4
Rank and file	25.1	6.8	20.3	-18.3	-4.8

Sample database : 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, military personnel (n = 7,744).

Empirical Results

Attractiveness, Commitment, Motivation and Identification

Table 2: Attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as Employer

“To what extent do the following statements apply to you ?” (in %, rounded ⁹)					
	Does not apply at all	Hardly applies	Neutral	Somewhat applies	Applies completely
<i>Positively phrased items</i>					
I consider the Bundeswehr an attractive employer.	7	16	40	24	13
If I had the choice again, I would enlist in the Bundeswehr again.	20	16	22	20	22
I would recommend friends and acquaintances to enlist in the Bundeswehr.	26	21	33	13	7
<i>Negatively phrased items</i>					
The Bundeswehr is an unattractive employer.	23	22	34	14	7
If I had the choice again, I would prefer to be taken on by another employer.	19	21	24	17	19
I would advise friends or acquaintances not to enlist in the Bundeswehr.	16	16	29	20	20

Database: 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, military personnel (n = 7744).

As the empirical results of the Attractiveness Study indicate, not everybody within the Bundeswehr sees the organization as being attractive. All in all, only about four out of ten military personnel interviewed confirm that they consider the armed forces an attractive employer (*cf.* Table 2). Only a slightly higher number of interviewees would enlist in the Bundeswehr again and only one in five would recommend friends or acquaintances to do so. Inversely, two out of ten interviewees consider that the Bundeswehr is unattractive as an employer and about one third has mixed feelings. In retrospect, about one third of the military personnel would prefer to work for another employer if they had the choice again. Four out of ten interviewees would advise friends or acquaintances not to choose the military as an employer.

⁹ In some instances, the sum of percentages differs from 100 percent due to rounding.

Despite the military personnel’s extremely varying and in some cases negative perception of the attractiveness of their employer, about half of the interviewees stated that they felt closely connected to the Bundeswehr and about the same number would like to remain employed by it for the next few years (*cf.* Table 3). Only 21, i.e. 28 percent, disagree in that matter. Nevertheless, only one third of the interviewees confirm that they could hardly imagine themselves changing employers. The same number of people state that they are considering the idea of leaving the military, a statement that applies to two out of ten service members at least to some extent. If it was possible, more than four out of ten interviewees would leave the Bundeswehr over the next one to three years and even three out of ten would leave within the next year.

Table 3: Commitment to the Bundeswehr as an employer

“To what extent do the following statements apply to you?” (in %, rounded ¹⁰)					
	Does not apply at all	Hardly applies	Neutral	Somewhat applies	Applies completely
<i>Positively phrased items</i>					
I feel closely connected to the Bundeswehr.	6	15	30	34	16
I would like to remain employed with the Bundeswehr over the next few years.	17	11	17	21	34
I can hardly imagine myself changing employers.	29	17	22	15	18
<i>Negatively phrased items</i>					
I am considering the idea of leaving my employer.	30	17	18	13	23
If I could, I would leave the Bundeswehr over the next one to three years.	31	14	13	12	30
If I could, I would leave the Bundeswehr within the next year.	45	14	10	7	24

Database: 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, military personnel (n = 7744).

The motivation of military personnel seems much more pronounced than their commitment. All in all, they are highly motivated. Six out of ten interviewees often think about how they could be more successful in their work, while only two out of ten state that they do not (*cf.* Table 4, next page).

It is important to almost all the interviewees to put up a good performance at work and 42 percent enjoy their work, while only few say they do not. Furthermore, only a negligible number of the interviewees state that they only do what is necessary at work (5 percent). Likewise, it is important to most of the interviewees to be successful in their work and only 6 percent state that they do not care about that. Despite the fact that most of the statements made by the respondents are positive, two out of ten state that they are frustrated with their work.

As shown in Table 5 (next page), the level of identification of the military personnel with the Bundeswehr is rather high. Although only 38 percent think it is good to

¹⁰ In some instances, the sum of percentages differs from 100 percent due to rounding.

be recognized as a member of the Bundeswehr in public (a quarter is unsure about it), six out of ten interviewees are proud of being service members and it makes about three quarters of them proud to hear someone speak well of the military in public. In contrast, only few interviewees do not care if someone speaks ill of it (10 percent). Nevertheless, almost three of ten interviewees avoid being recognized as a service member in public and some are even ashamed of being a member of the Bundeswehr (16 percent).

Table 4 : Motivation

“To what extent do the following statements apply to you ?” (in %, rounded¹¹)					
	Does not apply at all	Hardly applies	Neutral	Somewhat applies	Applies completely
<i>Positively phrased items</i>					
I often think about how I could be even more successful in my work.	6	12	23	37	22
It is important to me to put up a good performance at work.	1	1	6	29	63
I enjoy my work.	7	14	38	28	14
<i>Negatively phrased items</i>					
I only do what is necessary at work.	64	22	8	3	2
I do not care whether or not I am successful in my work.	63	21	10	4	2
I am frustrated with my work.	19	25	32	15	9

Database : 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, military personnel (n = 7,744).

Table 5: Identification with the Bundeswehr

“To what extent do the following statements apply to you ?” (in %, rounded¹²)					
	Does not apply at all	Hardly applies	Neutral	Somewhat applies	Applies completely
<i>Positively phrased items</i>					
I think it is good to be recognized as a member of the Bundeswehr in public.	12	17	34	22	16
I am proud of being a member of the Bundeswehr:	5	9	26	29	30
It makes me proud to hear someone speak well of the Bundeswehr in public.	4	5	19	36	36
<i>Negatively phrased items</i>					
I avoid being recognized as a member of the Bundeswehr in public.	31	20	23	16	11
I am sometimes ashamed of being a member of the Bundeswehr:	39	24	22	10	6
I do not care if someone speaks poorly of the Bundeswehr in public.	39	34	17	6	4

Database : 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, military personnel (n = 7,744).

When summarizing the described univariate results into indices¹³ (cf. Table 6, next page), it becomes even clearer that the Bundeswehr has deficiencies, particularly

¹¹ In some instances, the sum of percentages differs from 100 percent due to rounding.

¹² In some instances, the sum of percentages differs from 100 percent due to rounding.

¹³ Indices (mean) are calculated and consist of 6 items each. Internal consistency : Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$ (attractiveness), 0.90 (commitment), 0.80 (motivation), 0.84 (identification).

concerning its attractiveness as an employer and the commitment of its personnel. The average value of all the military personnel interviewed on an attractiveness scale from 0 to 1 is a mere 0.51. With an average of 0.55, the commitment of the military personnel is only marginally higher. Slightly better values are achieved for the identification of the military personnel with their employer (0.67) and motivation at work (0.73). All in all, the index values for all four constructs are in the positive range (above the midpoint of 0.5), but they are far from the maximum value of 1.

Table 6: Indices according to Service Status/ Military Rank

	Attractiveness	Commitment	Motivation	Identification
Total	0.51 (0.28)	0.55 (0.31)	0.73 (0.18)	0.67 (0.22)
Career service members				
Officers	0.45 (0.26)	0.64 (0.26)	0.74 (0.17)	0.71 (0.20)
Senior NCOs	0.45 (0.26)	0.69 (0.25)	0.74 (0.17)	0.70 (0.21)
Temporary-career volunteers				
Officers	0.44 (0.26)	0.37 (0.28)	0.71 (0.19)	0.64 (0.21)
Senior NCOs	0.48 (0.27)	0.50 (0.31)	0.71 (0.19)	0.64 (0.22)
Junior NCOs	0.52 (0.27)	0.49 (0.31)	0.72 (0.18)	0.63 (0.23)
Rank and file	0.61 (0.27)	0.56 (0.31)	0.74 (0.18)	0.68 (0.21)

Database : 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, military personnel (n = 7,744). Indices : Range [0 ; 1]. The table shows the means (with standard deviation in brackets) of the indices for the whole sample as well as for subgroups sorted by service status combined with military rank. Differences between the groups were tested with the one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) and are highly significant for all four indices.

Overall, there are substantial differences among the military personnel regarding the evaluation of their employer (*cf.* Table 6, above). In general, temporary-career volunteers, with the exception of officers, rate the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr significantly higher than their other fellow service members.

Similar to the perceived attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as an employer, the level of commitment to it differs among the troops depending on their service status and rank category. As expected, career service members show a significantly higher commitment to their employer than military personnel who serve for a limited period of time. Among the latter, there is a negative correlation with military rank (especially when they are approaching the end of their period of service) within the group of temporary-career volunteers – rank and file show the highest levels of commitment, officers the lowest. The differences are rather minor among career service members, but NCOs still show a slightly stronger commitment to the Bundeswehr.

Overall, military personnel show the same level of motivation across the rank categories. There are minor, though significant, differences between officers and NCOs who enlist for a limited period of time on the one hand and career service members and rank and file on the other. The latter are slightly more motivated.

As with the commitment and motivation of military personnel, identification with the Bundeswehr is most pronounced among career service members and rank and file.

Occupational Needs and Employer Attractiveness

As shown in the 2012 ZMSBw survey about work-life balance,¹⁴ the Bundeswehr has special demands on military personnel and requires much more of them than other employers in the civilian labour market. At the same time, as we have seen above, the German military as an employer is rather unattractive for many potential applicants and even for some of its existing members. Particularly with regard to its declared goal to become one of the most attractive employers in Germany, it is all the more important to understand what needs have a key influence on the perception of the Bundeswehr as an employer. As described in this article’s section on method, the perceived satisfaction of occupational needs is analyzed in relation to the military’s perceived attractiveness as an employer as well as to commitment, motivation and identification.

Based on Alderfer’s concept, the survey covered three types of occupational needs, each with 10 items: existential needs, social needs and growth needs. For illustration purposes, they are shown in Table 7 ordered by categories.

Table 7 : Measurement of the perceived satisfaction of occupational needs¹⁵

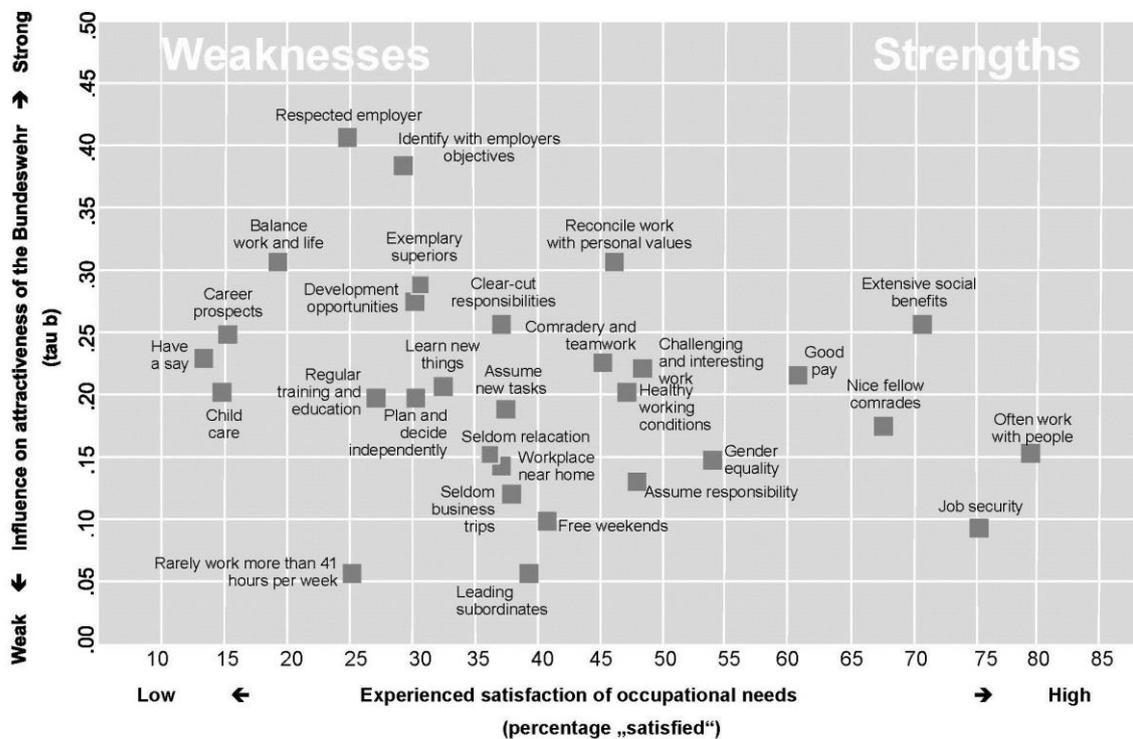
Occupational needs		
Existential needs	Social needs	Growth needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ good pay ▪ extensive social benefits provided by the employer (e.g. free medical care) ▪ job security ▪ healthy working conditions (protection from dust, noise etc.) ▪ employer provides child care ▪ live close to work ▪ seldom need to move for occupational reasons ▪ seldom need to work more than 41 hours per week ▪ always have weekends off ▪ seldom need to do temporary duty travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have exemplary superiors ▪ have nice colleagues ▪ have a lot to do with people ▪ Bundeswehr members can have a say in important questions ▪ comradeship and teamwork ▪ clear-cut responsibilities in a clear hierarchy ▪ ability to lead subordinates ▪ men and women have equal rights ▪ prestigious and respected employer ▪ able to balance work and family life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ able to do challenging and interesting work ▪ able to develop ▪ able to tackle new tasks again and again ▪ able to always learn new things ▪ able to regularly undergo advanced training basis ▪ able to assume a lot of responsibility ▪ able to be promoted and get ahead ▪ able to plan and decide things on my own ▪ able to identify with the objectives of my employer ▪ able to reconcile my work with my personal values

¹⁴ Cf. Bulmahn *et al.*, 2014.

¹⁵ Wording of the 30 items : “When you think about your work in the Bundeswehr, how do you assess the following items ? To what extent is it true that ...”.

Figure 1 shows the frequency distributions of the 30 items combined with their relevance for the perceived attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as an employer. The strength-weakness analysis (Figure 2) shows the extent to which the Bundeswehr as an employer meets the various occupational needs of the military personnel (horizontal, satisfaction in percentage) and the influence these needs have on the feeling that the Bundeswehr is attractive as an employer (vertical). The latter was measured by the rank coefficient Tau *b*.¹⁶ It serves as a bivariate measure of association for the feeling that needs are satisfied and the perceived attractiveness of the employer (index of the 6 items on the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr from Table 1). The stronger the (positive) association, the greater the relevance respectively the influence of the specified need is for the perceived attractiveness.

Figure 1 : Occupational Needs and Employer Attractiveness



Database : 2013 ZMSBw survey, military personnel (n = 7,744).

All in all, it is evident that the levels of satisfaction for the 30 occupational needs are evaluated very heterogeneously by the interviewees. On the whole, there are great shortages primarily within the groups of growth and social needs. More than 50 percent of military personnel feel that only six of the 30 evaluated needs are (somewhat) satisfied. A little less than three quarters of the interviewees report that their job entails contact with many people and that they enjoy full security of employment. Seventy-one percent have the opinion that the Bundeswehr offers extensive social benefits, two thirds have nice comrades-in-arms and slightly fewer confirm that they get good pay. In addition, more than half of them believe that men and women have equal rights in the Bundeswehr.

¹⁶ Range of Tau *b* [-1;1].

Considering the Bundeswehr’s strengths as an employer, only the social benefits factor has a greater impact on its perceived attractiveness and is therefore the only significant positive feature with regard to employer attractiveness.

In contrast, military personnel have a number of occupational needs that are only insufficiently satisfied by the Bundeswehr. For many, it is not a prestigious employer, only a few can identify with its objectives and less than half believe that they are able to reconcile their work with their personal values. Furthermore, there are clear deficiencies regarding the work-life balance, exemplary superiors, possibilities for personal development and clear-cut responsibilities. These weaknesses have a comparatively strong influence on attractiveness. Since it can be assumed that, depending on their service status and military rank, military personnel attach different values to their various needs, the personal feeling that individual needs are satisfied was combined with their corresponding relevance by way of calculation¹⁷ (cf. Table 8).

Table 8: Needs indices according to service status / military rank

	Growth needs	Social needs	Existential needs	Overall index
Total	-1.0	2.0	11.6	3.3
Career service members				
Officers	17.7	5.3	13.0	12.3
Senior NCOs	5.6	-1.7	9.1	4.0
Temporary-career volunteers				
Officers	7.9	-5.7	-1.9	1.1
Senior NCOs	-3.3	-4.0	8.4	-1.2
Junior NCOs	-11.0	1.2	18.8	-1.0
Rank and file	-7.8	6.7	21.2	2.5

Database : 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, military personnel sample (n = 7,744). Range of indices: [-100;100].

The extent to which each need is satisfied was weighted in accordance with its influence on the perceived attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as an employer (Tau *b*, as seen in Figure 1) and combined in an index (range: – 100 to +100). It becomes clear that with an index value of 11.6, the existential needs of relevance for military personnel are satisfied much better than relevant social needs (2.0) and growth needs (-1.0). Nevertheless, the Bundeswehr as an employer does not satisfy the different needs of the military personnel of all groups in equal measure. Deficiencies in growth needs particularly exist for NCOs and rank and file within the temporary-career volunteer group. In contrast, officers in the temporary-career volunteer group consider that the satisfaction of relevant social and existential needs is poor.

As previous calculations have shown, the Bundeswehr as an employer satisfies occupational needs of their personnel rather inadequately. This was confirmed both when

¹⁷ The arithmetic mean of the feeling that individual needs are satisfied (degree of satisfaction based on weighted balance values) is multiplied by their relevance. This relevance was calculated with the Kendall Tau *b*, which indicates the rank correlation or association between the feeling that a specific need is satisfied and the subjective perception of the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as an employer. For more details on the conceptual foundations and methodology, see: Bulmahn, 2012 (unpublished draft paper).

individual needs were considered and when indicators were combined to form weighted indices. Therefore, the next step analyzes the extent to which deficiencies (with regard to the satisfaction of needs) can explain the perceived degree of attractiveness, employee commitment, motivation and identification.

Table 9 : Occupational Needs as Explanatory Variables for the Concepts ‘Attractiveness’, ‘Commitment’, ‘Motivation’ and ‘Identification’¹⁸

	Attractiveness		Commitment		Motivation		Identification	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Growth needs	0.34***	0.47***	0.55***	0.50***	0.40***	0.42***	0.29***	0.28***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Social needs	0.51***	0.43***	0.32***	0.35***	0.25***	0.24***	0.41***	0.40***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Existential needs	0.41***	0.29***	0.18***	0.18***	0.02	-0.00	0.05***	0.06**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Sex (female)		0.03**		0.04**		0.03***		-0.02
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Education (high)		-0.03***		-0.04***		0.00		-0.02***
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.00)		(0.01)
Career Senior NCOs		0.02		0.08***		0.04***		0.02
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Temp Officers		0.02		-0.26***		-0.01		-0.04**
		(0.01)		(0.02)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Temp Senior NCOs		0.07***		-0.10***		0.03***		-0.02
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Temp Junior NCOs		0.12***		-0.10***		0.05***		-0.04***
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Temp rank and file		0.18***		-0.06***		0.06***		0.00
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Navy		-0.03**		-0.03*		-0.01		-0.02**
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Air Force		-0.01		-0.00		-0.00		-0.01
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.00)		(0.01)
Working hours/ week		0.05		0.15**		0.17***		0.11**
		(0.04)		(0.05)		(0.03)		(0.04)
Length of service in current position		-.25***		-0.50***		-0.08*		-0.22***
		(0.05)		(0.06)		(0.03)		(0.04)
Constant	-0.16***	-0.19***	0.02	0.05	0.39***	0.28***	0.28***	0.27***
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Corrected R ²	0.35	0.40	0.25	0.33	0.35	0.38	0.25	0.26
n	7708	6097	7694	6086	7720	6101	7712	6098

Database : 2013 ZMSBw Bundeswehr survey, sample of military personnel (n = 7,744). Multiple linear regressions, unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors parenthesized. Collinearity tests do not suggest any significant collinearity of the explanatory variables. Variables or indices are distributed almost normally. Significance levels: *** p ≤ .001, ** p ≤ .01 * p ≤ .05.

¹⁸ Indices (means) are calculated for the analysis. The indices for the three needs categories consist of 10 items each, the constructs ‘attractiveness’, ‘commitment’, ‘motivation’ and ‘identification’ of 6 items each. To get a valid index value, the respondent must have answered at least half of the items (otherwise missing value). Internal consistency: Cronbach’s α = 0.87 (growth needs), 0.74 (social needs), 0.69 (existence needs), 0.93 (attractiveness), 0.90 (commitment), 0.80 (motivation), 0.84 (identification).

The multivariate analysis in Table 9 (Model 1) shows that – in line with the initial assumption – the satisfaction of occupational needs with an explained variance of about 35 percent is extremely important for employer attractiveness. The regression analysis also suggests that the feeling that existential needs are satisfied in general has the same effect on the perception of employer attractiveness as the satisfaction of growth needs. Social needs seem to have an even stronger influence. However, when controlled¹⁹ for the variables ‘sex’, ‘education’, ‘service status’ and ‘military rank’, ‘military department’, ‘service hours’ and ‘length of service in the current position’ (Model 2), growth needs have the greatest impact on the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as an employer. In comparison, social needs have a slightly lower and existential needs a considerably lower influence.

In addition, the satisfaction of occupational needs has – as expected – a significant impact on the commitment of military personnel, their motivation and identification with their employer – all aspects that are connected with employer attractiveness and, of course, are extremely important factors for ensuring that the Bundeswehr, as a modern army, sustains its capacity to act and operate effectively. All in all, the commitment of service members to their employer, with an explained variance of almost 25 percent (Model 3), is significantly influenced by the feeling that occupational needs are satisfied. In both models (with and without control variables), commitment is primarily determined by the satisfaction of growth needs. Existential needs seem to have less influence on the commitment to the Bundeswehr as an employer.

With an R^2 of 0.35 (Model 5), the satisfaction of occupational needs is very important with regard to motivation and is on one level with employer attractiveness. As seen for the commitment, growth needs also have a considerable impact on motivation, while the satisfaction of existence needs has no influence on the motivation of the military personnel (Model 5 and 6).

Model 7 confirms that occupational needs – with an explained variance of around a quarter – also determine military personnel’s identification with their employer. While growth and social needs are rather equally relevant²⁰ (Model 8), the satisfaction of existential needs – as seen for motivation – only plays a marginal role for identification.

Considering all the empirical findings presented, it is hardly surprising that only about half of the interviewees are overall satisfied with serving in the Bundeswehr (no figure).²¹ Two out of ten interviewees have mixed feelings about this. Consequently, about one third of the military personnel are (rather) dissatisfied. Again, the greatest dissatisfaction is reported by temporary-career volunteers, with the exception of the rank

¹⁹ The multivariate analyses for the models with control variables were also conducted with the variables ‘overall length of service’ and ‘remaining length of service’. Due to high correlations with the dummy variables of service status/ military rank (hence the problem of multicollinearity), they were removed from the models.

²⁰ Standardized regression coefficients : beta = 0.27*** (social needs), 0.26*** (growth needs).

²¹ Wording of the item: “How satisfied are you currently, altogether, with serving in the Bundeswehr ?” (seven-point response scale).

and file, who are the most satisfied group. Multivariate analyses indicate that the satisfaction not only of existential needs, but also of social and growth needs has a key impact on satisfaction with service in the Bundeswehr, with growth needs having the greatest impact of the three. In line with previous findings, almost three quarters of the interviewees confirm that they would, apart from their current military employer, like to work for another employer (no figure).²² Significantly higher rates of agreement with this can be found among NCOs and officers within the temporary-career volunteer group, even though, at approximately 70 percent, the rates are also relatively high among career service members and the rank and file.

Summary and Implications

Against the background of the ongoing changes in society and the resulting “war for talent”, the objective of this article was to determine how the Bundeswehr is perceived as an employer by its own personnel and what motives and needs determine this perception.

Empirical results of other studies indicate that the Bundeswehr is, to a great extent, unattractive for many potential applicants. With less than fifty percent considering the Bundeswehr an attractive employer, a somewhat similar picture emerged among existing military personnel. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to improve their commitment and job satisfaction. There are comparatively greater weaknesses among temporary-career volunteers in the higher rank categories with regard to commitment, motivation and identification. Since the people in this group typically are at the point of their career where they have to decide whether or not to apply for permanent career status, it is necessary to take appropriate measures to improve their commitment, motivation and identification. As expected, multivariate analyses confirm that, in connection with employer attractiveness – and the associated aspects of commitment, motivation, identification and satisfaction – occupational needs are decisive factors and therefore constitute a field in which the Bundeswehr as an employer must make improvements.

In order to permanently improve its attractiveness as an employer and the other aspects mentioned, it is necessary for the Bundeswehr to take action to increase the satisfaction of occupational needs. This must be done according to the specific and individual demands and prevailing requirements of the various groups of military personnel. Above all, significant deficits are apparent within the group of growth and social needs, whereas existential needs are comparatively better satisfied by the Bundeswehr. As shown, the latter have only a minor influence on the commitment, motivation and identification of the Bundeswehr’s military personnel. Accordingly, initiatives must not be confined to pay increases and service-related benefits, but should be geared to the social and growth needs of personnel.

²² Wording of the item: “Apart from the Bundeswehr, is there an employer you would like to work for ?” (two-point response scale).

In general, all the presented empirical findings of the surveys conducted by ZMSBw within as well as outside of the military indicate that considerable improvements must be made and thus emphasize the relevance of the Bundeswehr's attractiveness offensive. This political agenda addresses some of the problems highlighted here, the aim being to reduce service-related stress for military personnel and enable more purposeful action to satisfy occupational needs. Future empirical studies on the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr will show whether the current intervention is suitable to sustainably improve the perception of the military as an employer, both within and without. To make changes apparent, future studies on the evaluation of the armed forces as an employer should be based on the instruments used here. Thus, due to the complex context of motives or needs and employer perception, it is recommended to add further variables to the questionnaire and analyses, in order to expose potential interaction effects and enable underlying back-door paths in the regression analyses. Moreover, an oversampling of military personnel from fields in which a shortage of skilled labour exists (or is expected to arise) could help to identify weaknesses of the Bundeswehr as an employer "amongst" specific target groups.

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