Career Development of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officers in the Philippine Air Force

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Abstract- ***Career development is a very important facet of any professional's life, especially in hierarchical organizations like the military. This study aims to assess the current career development program of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) officers in the Philippine Air Force. The study focuses on evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of the program, identifying gaps and issues, and recommending solutions for a more responsive and beneficial career development program. The statistical analysis of the data reveals that the current program is ineffective in supporting the goals of EOD officers and lacks training opportunities. Identified gaps and issues include the program's irrelevance to EOD officers, insufficient offerings and resources, lack of clear positions/assignments, and inadequate training for upgrading skill levels. The Kruskal Wallis H test shows that EOD officers across different units have similar perceptions about the program's current status, while there are no significant differences in their assessments of the program. The study recommends revising the current program to make it more relevant, providing continuous training and education for EOD officers, establishing a clear policy on career development, creating and enforcing milestone-based badges, including EOD officer's career path in basic training, offering more training aside from on-the-job training, and developing a career ladder and training program for EOD officers and other specialized personnel. These recommendations aim to improve the effectiveness and relevance of the career development program for EOD officers in the Philippine Air Force.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Career development refers to the process of acquiring new skills, knowledge, and experiences that enable individuals to progress in their chosen careers. It involves a deliberate and continuous effort to enhance one's professional growth and achieve career goals. Career development can take many forms, including formal education, training programs, on-the-job learning, and mentorship. It is an ongoing process that requires individuals to be proactive, self-directed, and adaptable to changing circumstances. The benefits of career development include increased job satisfaction, higher earnings potential, and greater opportunities for advancement. It also enables individuals to stay competitive in their field and keep up with new technologies, trends, and best practices. Employers play an important role in supporting the career development of their employees. They can provide opportunities for training and development, offer career guidance and mentorship, and create a culture that values learning and professional growth. Career development is a critical aspect of professional success and requires a commitment to continuous learning and growth. It is an ongoing process that requires individuals to be proactive and take ownership of their career trajectory, while also seeking out opportunities for support and guidance from their employers and mentors.

McKay (2020) defines career development as “the process of self-knowledge, exploration, and decision-making that shapes your career.” As a process, career development “requires successfully navigating your occupational options to choose and train for jobs that suit your personality, skills, and interests.” Gartner (2023) also offers another definition through an organizational lens, citing that career development is “the support an organization provides to employee professional growth, especially to employees' movement to a new position or project within the organization.” This support is defined into various activities that “includes coaching, mentoring, skills development, networking, and career pathing” and is often facilitated by the organization’s Human Resource Office and its functions in professional learning and development, talent management, or

recruiting. The military, like many organizations, also makes use of career development over its members. Any branch of the military is built on a strict and well-defined organizational structure and hierarchy. Any member of the military can progress and build their career as soon as they are admitted into the profession. Career development in the military varies depending on the country and the branch of the military a soldier chose to work with and for. One common ground of military career development with its corporate counterpart is the framework for career development, which includes a dedicated office for these concerns. On the other hand, one distinct difference is the approach in each environment. Jobhunt.org (2023) says that progression in a military environment usually starts akin to a military ladder, where one "rises to the top, based on a career ladder (from enlisted one to enlisted seven through nine within a 20-year career; or junior officer to senior officer) within the same service." The soldier also progresses in the same service, career field, or expertise. This particular flavor of career development in the military tends to have two kinds - the enlisted personnel career development plan and the officer career development plan. Each branch of the military has its respective programs since the hierarchy and rankings in each military branch are unique. Like in any career progression, a soldier's change in career also affects his rank, role, and pay grade. Minnesota State CAREERWise (2023) enumerates the factors considered for a military officer advancement/promotion, which includes "career-long performance of job duties, leadership, and management, the pursuit of, and success in, positions of increasing responsibility, successful completion of required qualifications and professional military education." The two aforementioned types of the career development plan are present in the Philippine Air Force. In this study, the officer career development program is more suited for the study's participants, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Officers.

The main goal of this study is to assess the current career development plan through the lens of the career progression of EOD officers. Apart from an assessment, this study also tried to collect significant information about issues, solutions, and gaps that concern the career progression of PAF's EOD officers. This study hopes that it can continue to contribute to the goal of improving the current career development plan as well as empowering EOD officers to gain more knowledge, skills, and agency to forge their path in the Philippine Air Force.

This study is also loosely tied to the Philippine Air Force's Flight Plan 2028. The said Flight Plan 2028 is an organization-wide campaign of the Philippine Air Force to enable the agency to be a credible air defense posture for the country. Part of the Capability Enablers of the Plan is about Personnel, aiming to "procure, develop, and sustain the best talents who have high absorption capacity, for professional and technical mastery on Air Power" with core values of integrity, service above self, teamwork, excellence, and professionalism. EOD officers are an integral part of the PAF support system and their operations are in high regard in the organization. It is to the advantage of the PAF and the AFP as higher-tier organizations to nurture and push the career development of soldier's professionals in every unit and specialization for the fulfillment of a higher and noble goal of public service and duty.

II. PROCEDURE

- Research Design

The researcher has chosen a descriptive, quantitative research design. According to AccountingNest.com (2023), descriptive quantitative research design is "a non-experimental type of research whereby the variables are measured using numerical terms, although the variables under interrogation are not manipulated by the researcher." The descriptive quantitative technique was used for this study due to its nature and the suitability of the said nature to the fulfillment of the study's goals – the assessment of the current officer career development program of EOD officers.

- Population and Sampling

The study's participants are the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) officers in the Philippine Air Force (PAF). These EOD officers are currently assigned at the 710th Special Operations Wing (710th SPOW) and the 420th Supply Wing (420th SW). The researcher also considered other EOD Officers assigned at the Headquarters Philippine Air Force holding positions not related to the career field they chose to

complement the data gathered. Because of the population and constraints faced by the study, this research endeavor will use a type of probability sampling called the random sampling technique. As such, the sample population for the study will include the said EOD officers as participants.

- Data Gathering Procedure

The study determined the current status and potential improvement of the career development of EOD personnel in the Philippine Air Force. For this study, the researcher created a survey questionnaire that covers the variables of assessment, namely – relevance, effectiveness, perceived benefit and training examined against the current career development plan/pathway for the EOD officers. After the creation of statements that reflect the aforementioned variables, a Likert Scale was created and used as a form of input from the participants and a measuring unit for their responses. The Likert Scale consists of four levels, with numerical interpretation and verbal interpretation ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) based on the given related statements. The participants were also asked open-ended questions where the participants were free to articulate their responses about the topics queried in these questions.

The study was conducted with the following steps and served as the data collection process:

1. The researcher finalized the survey questionnaire and other tools to be given to the participants. Different documentation was created and given to appropriate authorities, such as a signed and approved letter of permission to conduct the study to the EOD officers from the 710th SPOW, 420th SW and HPAF. The final survey questionnaire was transformed into a Google Form, an online survey platform for easy distribution and access.
2. The Google Form link was distributed via Viber and Messenger, with the link and an estimated time of one week to complete the actual data collection and submission of the said Google Forms from the participants.
3. Upon the submission and collection of answered forms, the researcher processed the raw data including data tally, analysis and synthesis. The researcher collected both numerical data/statistics for each item, and the general theme of responses.
4. For validation purposes, Key Informant Interviews were conducted by the researcher to validate the results obtained from the survey questionnaire.

- Statistical Treatment of Data

The researcher used the following statistical tools to process the raw data for this study.

1. Frequency and Percentage. This statistical tool was used to count the instances of participants that answer in a particular way to form a data set and to determine and simplify the groupings or data set that align to a particular response.
2. Weighted Mean. This statistical tool was used to determine the average score or ratings from the frequency of answers to a particular verbal interpretation from the Likert Scale. Moreover, this was also used in generating the grand mean after the median test. The raw data is obtained and interpreted through this Likert Scale.
3. Kruskal-Wallis Test. The Kruskal-Wallis Test is one well-known statistical tests and sometimes known as the ‘one-way ANOVA on ranks. This test is used “to analyze the differences between means of given groups is the ANOVA (analysis of variance) test. The Kruskal-Wallis Test is used for data that doesn’t follow a normal distribution or if the sample size is too small to determine a normal distribution.
4. Ranking. It represents the relationship between the objects in the set. For example, consider the following two items: the first is either "ranked higher," "ranked lower than," or "ranked equal to" the second.
5. Thematic Analysis. This was applied to the research study's three Key Informant Interviews (KII) answers. It encoded interview extracts and determined the emerging themes derived from the analysis.

III. RESULTS

Table 1
SUMMARY MEAN RESULT AND STANDARD DEVIATION DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS’ CURRENT STATUS WITH RESPECT TO DIFFERENT VARIABLE

Variables	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
Relevance	2.01	0.690	3	Disagree
Effectiveness	2.24	0.719	1	Disagree
Perceived benefit	2.22	0.745	2	Disagree
Average Weighted Mean	2.16	0.718		Disagree

Table 1 shows the summary mean result and standard deviation distribution of the participants' current status in terms of different variables. The mean score for "effectiveness" has the highest score with 2.24, followed by "perceived benefit" with a mean score of 2.22, and "relevance" with a mean score of 2.01. This implies that the participants perceive the career development program as being more effective and beneficial than relevant.

The standard deviation for all variables is relatively high, which indicates that there is a considerable degree of variation in the responses of the participants. It suggests that there is a diversity of opinions and perceptions among the participants regarding the current PAF career development program.

Overall, the average weighted mean score for all variables is 2.16, which indicates a general disagreement among participants with the current PAF career development program. The implications suggest that there is a need to review and improve the program to meet the needs and expectations of the EOD officers. It may include conducting a needs assessment, updating the program design and implementation, providing more effective career counseling and coaching, and creating a more relevant and beneficial training and educational opportunities.

Table 2
KRUSKAL WALLIS H TEST RESULT IN THE PARTICIPANTS CURRENT STATUS UPED ACCORDING TO UNIT

Variables	*Kruskal Wallis H-Tab*	*Degrees of Freedom*	*p-value*	H_0	*Conclusion*
Relevance	0.668	2	0.716	Accept	Not Significant
Effectiveness	0.970	2	0.616	Accept	Not Significant
Perceived benefit	0.569	2	0.752	Accept	Not Significant

Table 2 presents the results of the Kruskal Wallis H test that was conducted to analyze the differences in the participants' current status when grouped according to their unit. The three variables analyzed were relevance, effectiveness, and perceived benefit of the career development program.

For relevance, the H-Tab value was 0.668, with 2 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.716. This result suggests that there is no significant difference in the perception of the relevance of the career development program among the different units. This implies that regardless of the unit that EOD officers belong to, they share a similar perception of the relevance of the program. This could indicate that the program is designed to cater to the unique needs of EOD officers across different units, which is a positive indication of the program's effectiveness.

For effectiveness, the H-Tab value was 0.970, with 2 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.616. This result suggests that there is no significant difference in the perception of the effectiveness of the career development program among the different units. This implies that regardless of the unit that EOD officers belong to they share a similar perception of the program's effectiveness. However, it is important to note that the mean scores for effectiveness varied slightly among the different units, with the 710th SPOW unit having the lowest mean score. This could indicate a need for targeted improvement initiatives for this unit.

For perceived benefit, the H-Tab value was 0.569, with 2 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.752. This result suggests that there is no significant difference in the perception of the perceived benefit of the career development program among the different units. This implies that regardless of the unit that EOD officers belong to they share a similar perception of the benefits provided by the program. This is a positive indication that the program is providing consistent benefits to EOD officers across different units.

Overall, the results of the Kruskal Wallis H test suggest that the career development program expressed in terms of relevance, effectiveness and perceived benefits, is perceived similarly by EOD officers across different units.

Table 3
SUMMARY MEAN RESULT AND STANDARD DEVIATION DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS' CAREER DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT CONCERNING DIFFERENT VARIABLES

Variables	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
Relevance	2.16	0.790	4	Disagree
Effectiveness	2.19	0.772	3	Disagree
Perceived benefit	2.86	1.041	1	Agree
Training	2.35	0.908	2	Disagree
Average Weighted Mean	2.39	0.878		Disagree

Table 3 presents the summary mean result and standard deviation distribution of the participant's career development assessment concerning different variables.

The mean score for relevance is 2.16, indicating that the participants disagreed that the career development program is relevant to their roles as EOD officers. The standard deviation is 0.790, which suggests that there is a moderate variation in the responses.

The mean score for effectiveness is 2.19, which also indicates disagreement among the participants regarding the effectiveness of the program. The standard deviation is 0.772, indicating a moderate variation in the responses.

On the other hand, the mean score for perceived benefit is 2.86, indicating agreement among the participants regarding the program's perceived benefit. The standard deviation is relatively high at 1.041, which suggests that there is considerable variation in the responses.

The mean score for training is 2.35, which indicates disagreement among the participants regarding the appropriateness of the training provided in the program. The standard deviation is 0.908, indicating moderate variation in the responses.

Overall, the average weighted mean is 2.39, indicating that the participants disagreed that the career development program met their needs as EOD officers. The standard deviation is 0.878, suggesting that there is a moderate variation in the responses.

The implications of these results suggest that there is a need to review and assess the career development program's relevance and effectiveness in meeting the participants' needs. The program may need to be revised and updated to ensure that it aligns with the participants' expectations and aspirations. Additionally, efforts may need to be made to improve the training opportunities and support provided to the participants to enhance their career advancement opportunities.

Table 4
KRUSKAL WALLIS H TEST RESULT IN THE PARTICIPANTS CAREER DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT WHEN GROUPED ACCORDING TO UNIT

Variables	*H-Tab* χ^2	*Degrees of Freedom*	*p-value*	H_0	*Conclusion*
1. Relevance	1.605	2	0.448	Accept	Not Significant

Variables	*H-Tab* χ^2	*Degrees of Freedom*	*p-value*	H_0	*Conclusion*
2. Effectiveness	0.874	2	0.646	Accept	Not Significant
3.Perceived benefit	0.120	2	0.942	Accept	Not Significant
4. Training	0.236	2	0.889	Accept	Not Significant

Table 4 shows the results of the Kruskal Wallis H test conducted to determine if there are significant differences in the participants' career development assessment when grouped according to unit. The p-values for all variables are greater than the alpha level of 0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference in the participants' assessment of the relevance (H-Tab value was 1.605, and a p-value of 0.448), effectiveness (H-Tab value was 0.874 and a p-value of 0.646), perceived benefit (H-Tab value was 0.120 and a p-value of 0.942), and training (H-Tab value was 0.236 and a p-value of 0.889) of the career development program based on their unit.

The results imply that the participants' assessments of the career development program are consistent across different units. It suggests that the program's strengths and weaknesses are perceived similarly across different units, and that the program may need improvement overall rather than just in specific units. The findings also suggest that the program needs to be tailored to meet the needs of EOD officers across all units to ensure a more consistent level of support and development opportunities.

Therefore, it is recommended that the PAF should review and improve the overall career development program to address the concerns raised by the participants across all units. Additionally, regular evaluations and assessments should be conducted to ensure that the program remains relevant and effective in meeting the needs of EOD officers throughout their career development.

Table 5
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS' ADVANTAGES OF THE CURRENT PAF OFFICER CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

ADVANTAGES	*Frequency f*	*Percentage %*	*Rank*
The career development plan creates more realistic career development goals for me as an EOD officer.	11	36.70	4
The career development plan helps me focus on skill development and improves my learning opportunities.	12	40.00	3
The current career development plan provides me with opportunities for promotion and/or lateral moves to contribute to the employee's career satisfaction.	7	23.30	6
The current career development program gives me effective and helpful assistance and guidance with our career decisions.	9	30.00	5
In the current career development program, the career path of an EOD Officer is not clearly stated and there is no defined career path that an EOD Officer can follow.	19	63.30	1
In the current career development program, there is no career progression nor advancement of skills in the PAF designed for EOD Officers.	17	56.70	2

The participants identified six advantages of the program and ranked them based on their perception of each advantage. Ranking all the advantages, participants say that the most advantageous feature of

the program is the program's vagueness about an EOD officer's career path and EOD officer's role.

The second-ranked advantage based on the table is about the lack of career progression or advancement of skills in the PAF designed for EOD Officers. This statement garnered a 57% response rate while the statement about the career development plan helping EOD officers to focus on skill development and improving their learning opportunities ranked 3rd place. In fourth place, participants placed the sentiment that the career development program creates more realistic career development goals for EOD officers with 37%. The career development program/plan gives EOD officers effective and helpful assistance and guidance with their career decisions and was ranked and judged in fifth place. The lowest placed advantage in this dataset belongs to the statement that says the program provides EOD officers with opportunities for promotion and/or lateral moves to contribute to the employee's career satisfaction.

Table 6
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS' GAPS OR ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS IN THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PAF CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Gaps or Issues and Solutions	*Frequency f*	*Percentage %*	*Rank*
I feel that the current career development program is not relevant enough to support my role as an EOD officer.	15	50.00	4
I feel that the current program needs to be more effective in its offerings and outputs.	23	76.70	2
I feel that positions/assignments should be identified as I go up the rank.	18	60.00	3
The current program should provide training for upgrading skill levels.	25	83.30	1

Table 6 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the participants' gaps or issues and solutions in the current state of the PAF career development plan. The table indicates that the majority of the participants (83.3%) believe that the current program should provide training for upgrading skill levels, which is the top-ranked gap/issue.

The second-ranked gap/issue is the need for the current program to be more effective in its offerings and outputs (76.7%). The third-ranked gap/issue is the identification of positions/assignments as the participants go up the rank (60%), and the fourth-ranked gap/issue is the perception that the current career development program is not relevant enough to support their role as EOD officers (50%).

Table 7
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATION/S TO ENHANCE THE CURRENT CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Recommendation/s	*Frequency f*	*Percentage %*	*Rank*
A relevant and responsive career development path for EOD officers.	26	86.70	1
Establish a clear policy on the career development program of EOD Officers.	24	80.00	3.5
Continuous training and education for my role as an EOD officer.	25	83.30	2
Create and enforce performance and impact milestone/based badges.	18	60.00	5
Assignment of EOD officers in the technical units related to ordnance/logistics units and at the command level.	24	80.00	3.5

Table 7 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the participants' recommendations to enhance the current career development plan for EOD officers. The top recommendation, with a frequency of 26 (86.70%), is to establish a relevant and

responsive career development path for EOD officers. The second and third recommendations are continuous training and education for EOD officers (83.30%) and the establishment of a clear policy on the career development program of EOD officers (80.00%).

The fourth recommendation is to create and enforce performance and impact milestone/based badges (60.00%), while the fifth recommendation is to assign EOD officers to technical units related to ordnance/logistics units and at the command level (80.00%).

The results indicate that the participants want a more relevant and responsive career development path for EOD officers, as well as continuous training and education. They also feel that there is a need for a clear policy on the career development program for EOD officers. The recommendation to create and enforce performance and impact milestone/based badges may help to motivate EOD officers and give them a sense of accomplishment. Finally, the recommendation to assign EOD officers to technical units related to ordnance/logistics units and at the command level may help to improve their skills and provide them with better opportunities for career development. The implications of these recommendations are that the PAF should consider revising its current career development plan for EOD officers to address the gaps and issues identified by the participants and incorporate their recommendations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected, analyzed, and interpreted from the Survey Questionnaire and KII Interviews, the following are the major findings of the study:

1. The participants' responses indicate that they do not find the current career development plan to be relevant, effective, or beneficial. This suggests that there may be a gap between the needs of the EOD officers and what the current career development plan offers.
2. The participants' assessment of the PAF career development plan indicates that it is not meeting their expectations. While they agree that there are perceived benefits, they disagree with the relevance, effectiveness, and training components. This implies that the current program does not align with their career goals and is not preparing them adequately for their roles.
3. The results suggest that while the current career development plan has some advantages for the participants, there are significant limitations, particularly for EOD officers. The lack of a clear career path and skill advancement opportunities may result in job dissatisfaction, which can affect retention rates and morale.
4. There are several gaps or issues in the current state of the PAF career development plan that need to be addressed to enhance its effectiveness. The participants' identified issues suggest that the current program needs to be more responsive to the needs of EOD officers and provide opportunities for skill development and career advancement.
5. The participants have provided valuable recommendations to enhance the current career development plan for EOD officers. The most common recommendation is to establish a relevant and responsive career development path for EOD officers, which indicates the need for a career development plan that is tailored to the specific needs and requirements of EOD officers. This can help in improving their career satisfaction, motivation, and retention.

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