

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE COMMITMENT OF MILITARY STUDENTS TO PROFESSION

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Abstract. The process of professionalizing the Romanian army reflected, at institutional level, on all aspects in the human resource field: recruitment, career management, conversion and retaining. Under the conditions of Romanian population decrease and in strong competitiveness from the labour market, the army sought efficient means to ensure effective loyalty of the persons recruited. However, as public institution, the army may have a major impact on objective factors that influence the loyalty of its employees and that can meet the subjective factors related to each individual. The concern for the retention of recruits begins, of course, ever since the military training base, in academies of the kind in the country. To identify the factors influencing the level of commitment of students to the military profession we have built a questionnaire that lists 40 significant features of the latter. Students were asked to evaluate the importance of these features for their commitment to the military profession. The factor analysis had as result the detaining of six factors with a significant impact.

Keywords: military profession, commitment, retention

Introduction

The professionalization process of the Romanian Army had a remarkable impact on this institution and on the Romanian society as a

whole. As shown by Duțu (2007) at army level the impact was felt at several levels:

- At the institutional level, all aspects related to human resources (recruitment, the career management mode, conversion and retention) have changed;

- At the organizational level, the fundamental characteristics of military units and the organization of the defense unit on the national territory have changed; now the focus is on the modularity of military structures, on their flexibility and inter-arms character;

- At the level of identity, aspects regarding the development of the military profession, the nature of its mission and the place it has in the Romanian state have been redefined; therefore, in addition to traditional, historical missions (defense of sovereignty, independence, unity and national territorial integrity of the country and of the Romanian citizens) currently, the Romanian army is running a series of new missions (what we call stability and support operations: mission maintaining, restoring or peace enforcement, humanitarian missions, missions to combat international terrorism);

- At the operational level, the increase in the operational capacity of the military in order to support the wide range of international missions, simultaneously with task accomplishment on the national territory was pursued.

Therefore, in the last decade, the Romanian army went through an extensive process of restructuring in which it had to maintain operational capability, which made the process itself to be quite difficult and delicate. Military professionalization occurred in the conditions of significant budgetary constraints (especially in the last five years) and a resistance to serious change come from within the system, especially at

the beginning of the process. But it is evident that the whole approach, no matter how difficult, was successful.

After all these changes, the image of the military in Romanian society and relations with it have changed significantly. During the communist period and the first years after the revolution, the military profession had a very clear representation in the population due to the participation of young adults, by conscription, to specific training. Any family who had boys - sons, nephews, cousins - knew what was happening to them in the period they were incorporated, they were aware of the functioning and life events in the army and supported its activities morally supporting their offsprings through difficult times. The military training of boys was a real rite of passage with a high level of popularity among the population. Conscription was abandoned in 2007 and caused a progressive occultation of the profession which, we are sure, is not so clear as it used to be to the country's elderly population.

As shown by Duțu (2007), the link between the military and the Romanian society had to be redefined. This was achieved by formulating a doctrine that clearly stated the national army position in the country and the world, its role in national defense and security and its tasks within NATO.

The transition from the mixed army to the professional army posed the question of ensuring human resources: recruitment, retention and conversion of the military, especially of those employed on contract.

In terms of recruitment, the military currently faces two problems: the decline of Romanian population and competitiveness in the labor market. The decrease in population is closely related to declining birth rates, accentuated aging and the exodus of Romanians abroad. This latter aspect is also related to the competition in the labor market because many

Romanians go elsewhere to work. Also, even in the labor market in Romania, wage offers and wage earning opportunities in other fields make a serious competition for the army. Therefore, in order to counteract the effects of these two problems, the Army has modified some of the selection criteria for recruitment to incorporate staff and the share of people employed on a contract basis increased.

Regarding the retention of recruited people, keeping them for as long as possible after the first contract expired is influenced by a number of objective and subjective factors. The army seeks to provide its staff conditions to become factors of commitment to the profession and military organization: satisfactory remuneration, competitive, clear and motivating career prospects, conversion possibilities adapted to each category of military life and working conditions appropriate to modern society.

The fact that the army has remained one of the institutions that Romanians trust most - as evidenced by numerous sociological surveys conducted in the country in the last 25 years - shows that the process of redefining its relationship with the Romanian society delivered the expected results. The army has a good image even among young people and this is due to family influences that transmit attitudes and values favorable to this profession. The adult population of the country continues to cherish military system specific values - honor, duty, discipline, loyalty etc. - especially in the midst of social, political and economic unrest through which the country passes since communism has been removed. Moreover, in the midst of these troubles, the military remains a successful model: an old school (and unfashionable) who succeeded in a relatively short time to modernize itself in line with the

requirements of allies and trends of national, regional and global security environment evolution.

In all these, the military organization must take into account the practices of market economy: analysis of costs and gains, not only in financial terms but also psychosocial. The effects in the psychosocial plan of military professionalization are significant. The military professional is an expert who will compare himself systematically with trained civilian specialists having a similar activity and the findings of these comparisons are often negative: being trained and having similar experience or even superior, military specialists are paid less and have worse working conditions. The military organization must counteract this negative aspect by strengthening group cohesion, optimization of the psychosocial climate by improving interpersonal communication and within groups, reducing maladaptive events, enhancing the effectiveness of military groups etc.

The military profession

The military profession is a "permanent occupation held in the military environment, exercised by a person who has graduated from a military educational institution or who concluded a contract of employment with the military institution" (Duțu. Moștofleu, Sarcinschi, 2003, p .5). Characteristics and peculiarities of developed activities, of the environment in which these are in practice and their finalities, make this profession a special form of social activity.

The professional military is "a highly qualified person, characterized by *competence, responsibility and esprit de corps*. He is an expert with specialized knowledge and skills in a significant range of human activities. His ability is the result of appropriate theoretical

expertise in different specialized institutions and a long experience in the field. In other words, the professional is a recognized authority in its field". (Duțu, Moștofleu, Sarcinschi, 2003, p.6).

The professional military acquires his *competence* through theoretical and practical training in specialized institutions and complements it with the experience gained from practicing his profession. He proves his *responsibility* by the proper application and at the highest possible level of his capabilities, knowledge and experience in the tasks and missions he receives. In what the *esprit de corps* is concerned, it is specific to the military professional group and requires a specific internalization of values: pride, loyalty, trust, honesty, dignity, honor, discipline, devotion, solidarity, etc., values that are part of the military ethos.

The Romanian Army had no problems in recruiting staff in the years since the revolution, despite the changes that it had to face. According to The Human Resources Management Direction, military schools and foremen schools and NCOs had more than enough candidates in each session of admission. This was reflected positively on the selection criteria and practices which have remained at a high quality level, allowing the recruitment of those young people who cumulatively meet all the criteria required by the profession. Duțu, Moștofleu and Sarcinschi (2003) list the main reasons why the army has such a privileged position in the perception of Romanian society:

- The favorable image that the public has about the military profession, associated with a high social prestige;
- Job security;
- The opportunity to participate in various missions abroad,
- Salary safety, even if it is not at the desired level;

- The prospect of a secure and lasting career;
- The presence of advantages when leaving the system (compensation, retirement, retraining, etc.).

The three authors show that the number of employment requests as military based on contract remains at a high level, exceeding the needs of the army and its financial possibilities. The causes of this situation are: jobs in the army are secure and stable, ensuring a decent and stable income, enables missions abroad, allowing continuous transition among military personnel (provided additional specialty training) and provides the chance of qualification in employment on the labour market.

Regarding the payroll of the army, the three authors mentioned above take the 2003 information data bank of Sociological Investigations Department of the Army that although the organization has a social positive image, the profession itself occupies only the sixth place among the top ten professions appreciated in Romania in terms of financial and social prestige.

Methodology

Ten years after the conduct of the surveys mentioned above, we aimed to identify those factors that influence the strength of commitment of the students in the Land Forces Academy of Sibiu – the military educational institution with the highest number of students in the country – to the chosen profession. We assumed from the outset that these factors are unchanged, given the apparent stability and high social performance of the military social organization. Therefore, we constructed a questionnaire in which we listed 40 aspects of the military profession with a possible impact on the commitment of those who have chosen it.

Students were asked to evaluate the subjective importance of each of the aspects in terms of their level of commitment to the military

profession, by using a Likert scale with values from 1 to 5, where 1 means "not at all important" and 5 means "extremely important". The questionnaire was anonymous and it was applied to a total of 200 students from the Land Forces Academy in Sibiu. Within this sample there were summarized 44 girls (22%) and 156 men (78%), aged 20 to 23 years old, meaning an average age of 21.7.

In the next step we applied KMO and Bartlett's Test. The result is shown in Table 1. The value of these coefficients indicates that our data is suitable for factor analysis.

Table no.1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,911
	Approx. Chi-Square	8052,968
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	528
	Sig.	,000

The protocol adopted here for factor analysis was to use default settings initially (Principal Axis Factor - PAF) and to rotate the matrix of loadings to obtain orthogonal (independent) factors (Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization). The prime goal of factor analysis is to identify simple items loadings (>0.40) on factors that are interpretable, assuming that items are factorable.

In the next step, there were identified variables that explain to satisfaction the factors extracted from the analysis. Items that had communality less than 0.3 were eliminated.

Table no. 2. Factorial Structure - Rotated Factor Matrix

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	Communality
It is closest to my ideal profession	,750						,751
I believe in the military organization goals	,733						,722
It brings me maximum satisfaction	,671						,713
It allows me to serve my country	,497						,522
It brings me social prestige		,662					,652
it brings me a satisfactory social status		,639					,646
It brings me respect in society		,598					,613
It gives me a sense of pride		,430					,518
It allows me to develop my practical sense			,691				,629
It allows me to develop my creativity and originality			,603				,566
It satisfies my need for variety			,470				,458
It allows me to connect with many people			,405				,389
It allows me to assimilate knowledge useful in civilian life				,688			,573
It allows me to develop my intellectual abilities				,604			,635
Career advancement is certain				,540			,447
It gives me financial				,507			,536

security and stability							
It allows me to take parte in decision making				,404			,514
I have all the qualities required of this profession					,703		,647
This profession meets my desire for adventure and risk					,574		,516
I am simply made for this profession					,543		,584
My personal values are very similar to those of the profession					,513		,606
It allows me ti influence people and events						,599	,434
It allows me to help other people						,499	,424
It allows me to work in a team						,485	,504
It allows me to command						,443	,415
Eigenvalue	11,68	2,170	1,69	1,54	1,37	1,24	
Percentage of total variance	35,41	6,576	5,13	4,69	4,17	3,77	

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 17 iterations.

Discussions

Factor analysis revealed the presence of six main factors which have a significant impact on the commitment of our students to the military profession. These factors include 24 characteristics of the profession and explain 60.74% of the total variance.

The first factor is loaded with four items referring to the correlation between personal aspirations and goals of the military profession: the military profession is the closest to professional ideal of subjects, brings maximum satisfaction and enables them to serve the country; also, the subjects cherish the goals of the military organization. We call this factor "correlation person-profession". This factor explains 35.4% of the total variance.

The second factor is loaded with items that relate to the social benefits the military profession brings: social prestige, high social status, respect in society and a personal sense of pride. We call this factor "social benefits". It explains 6.57% of the total variance.

The third factor contains items that refer to those aspects of the profession that facilitate personal development: subjects consider that the profession develops practical spirit, creativity, originality and the ability to relate to many people; it also satisfies the need for variety. We call this factor "personal development". It explains 5.13% of the total variance.

It is interesting that the factor which refers to the development of creativity and originality is present in this item: subjects surveyed feel that they develop these qualities in a job that is socially perceived as one of the most rigid and uncreative.

The fourth factor is loaded with items that relate to the subject's personal gain: the assimilation of knowledge useful in civilian life, developing intellectual skills, safety, career advancement and financial stability, the opportunity to participate in decision making. We call this factor "personal advantage". It is responsible for 4.69% of personal variables.

The items that were grouped in this factor appear to be part of two different categories. On the one hand it is about developing intellectual

skills and assimilating useful knowledge for civilian life; these issues could be included in a category that might be called "intellectual development". On the other hand, it talks about the attributes of the profession: financial stability, safety, career advancement, the ability to make decisions in professional activities, elements that seem to belong in another category that might be called "professional stability". The subjects investigated made the connection between these two subcategories; identifying the reason could be the purpose of another study.

The fifth factor is loaded with items that relate to the correlation between the internal structure of the subjects investigated and requirements specific to the profession: subjects believe they have all the necessary qualities and are simply made for the military profession, they think their values are very similar to those of profession and that they satisfy their own desire for adventure and risk. We call this factor "correlation person-requirements". It explains 6.57% of the total variance.

The sixth factor is loaded with items that relate to the possibilities of relating to others: thus, the military profession allows them to influence people and events, to help others, to work in teams and to command to others. We call this factor "social influence". It explains 3.77% of the total variance.

Conclusions

For students enrolled in our sample, the correlation between personal aspirations and characteristics of the profession seems to be the factor with the greatest impact on their commitment to the military profession. This is the closest to their ideal professional, gives a state of maximum satisfaction and enables them to serve the country. Subjects

believe in the goals of the organization and that trust is the basis for the internalisation of organizational values, the more so since their values are very similar to those of the profession. Social benefits (prestige, satisfactory social status, respect in society and a sense of pride for their chosen profession) and personal benefits (stable career, safety and financial stability) continue to be strong cases for an increased commitment to the profession.

Students appreciate intellectual and personal development opportunities as well, offered by the profession, the variety that this entails, the adventure and risk associated with it, perhaps having the prospect of possible future missions. The opportunity to meet and interact in various ways with many people is also appreciated.

The variety of aspects specific to the military profession chosen by students and how they are grouped into factors brings to mind the thesis institutional versus occupational proposed by C. Moskos. This author believes that military academies represent an extreme case of institutional socialization in the armed forces. He presents the experience of W. Clover and T.M. McCloy, commanders of the US Air Force Academy who have seen the type of institutional versus organizational conflicts in military academies. These conflicts are caused by the opposition of the institutional side of academic life that focuses on character building, sports and spiritual aspects and occupational trends which are reflected in the curriculum and the marketing strategies of these academies, which increasingly resemble more than those of civilian institutions of higher education. According to these two commanders, in the initial period of training, cadets cling to institutional values but they slowly detach as their training in the academy continues, the trend being weaker in female cadets who stay institutionally oriented for a longer time.

The presence of such conflicts in the Romanian military academies has not been substantiated with evidence; the thesis institutional/occupational has been very poorly studied in the Romanian military context. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the military academies have been for years in the situation described by the two commanders. We can say, from our experience, that the institutional-occupational opposition signs have been manifesting in the Romanian military organization, in general and military academies, in particular. Such statement requires demonstration, of course, be it by longitudinal studies that highlight changes in attitudes and cadet behaviors during their training, or through comparative studies showing the differences between cadets according to the year of study in which they are enrolled. Certainly, in time, the presence of such opposition would alter the way the military profession is perceived by those who choose it and the changes in this perception would have a significant impact on their commitment to the profession.

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