THE MILITARY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

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Abstract:
The present paper is aimed to delineate a level of awareness regarding the specificities of the military system which are to be considered by one who is looking into the possibility of joining the organization. It is more or less an inventory of the unique combination of characteristics that apply within the military environment.. A bunch of relevant assumptions and constraints have been iodentified and referred to such as: strictness; discipline; loyalty; hierarchal structure; uniform; good health and physical condition; adaptabilit.
The considerations hereafter do not represent the result of a research investigation regarding the military organizational culture. They are simply a collection of personal thoughts issued on the grounds of the personal experience gathered as a military.

Key words: discipline, hierarchy, health, physical condition, loyalty, courage, patriotism.

1.Introduction

All the mankind achievements along history were either determined by, or at least linked to a specific social arrangement. It was never the individual, but always the human society that determined and sustained evolution. Valuable ideas and revolutionary findings might have been indeed sparked by individuals, but none of the knowledge seeds could turn into a real harvest outside the social environment.

Over centuries, as the human society has become more and more complex, it relied on a more and more vast network of subsystems, or organizations. Regardless reference is made to a specific small organization, or to the society in general, the proper settlement of such gathering, as well as its functionality were determined by some essential factors which needed to be defined:
- the inner structure of the society and wiring between its members;
- the set of applicable rules and procedures;
- the role(s) and placement of the specific organization within the society as to a mechanism compared to the big machinery.

Records are being kept from history of various types of human organizations that were established per different specific criteria, such as: age (e.g. teenagers groups, retired people organizations etc.); gender (e.g. militants for the rights of women); profession (e.g. architects, engineers, doctors, pilots etc.); hobbies (e.g. fishermen, radio-amateurs, hunters

etc.); artistic skills (e.g. painters, singers, poets, film directors etc.); physical skills (e.g. gymnasts, athletes, swimmers etc.).

Among lots of group types which can be found as elements of the present society, a fine observer could spot a limited number of them as being a little bit more special due to the fact they seem to require at the same time a broader range of native abilities, and developed skills. Some examples of such particular organizational categories are doctors, priests, or military. The latter group is the subject of the present paper which will try to capture a personal view of the specific assumptions and constraints that this profession is connected with.

2. Assumptions and constraints of the military organization

2.1. The military organization visibility

Being myself part of the military organization, I am supposed to have quite a qualified point of view on both the military system as a whole, as well as on the individuals that it consists of. It took many years though for crafting and maturing a presumptively thoughtful perspective on the organization. Based on this accumulated experience I will try to define in this chapter the assumptions and the constraints that govern the military organization, while providing it with such a unique profile. Where possible, my attempt will mirror the outsider's expectations with the real limitations that can be found within the system.

As a starting point for this analysis I will refer to the particular situation that all the members of the military organizations have been faced with at the beginning of their career. Specifically, this is the moment when the youngsters are taking the decision to join the military, which basically occurs either before going to high-school, or after they graduate it. Regardless such decision is taken at the age of 14 or at the age of 18 there are still quite few relevant entries to support a decent analysis. Fact is that whatever pros and cons can be identified at that time, they seem insufficient for founding the decision on the future professional life. Needless to say that no longer than two decades ago the situation was much more difficult, as the means of communication were not even close to the level of development reached today, and the relevant information was hardly accessible.

As a first resort one who investigates the possibility of embracing a military career tries to get some insights from family members that are, or have been at some point in time part of the system. Those who have a relative to whom they can turn to and seek assistance from are considered lucky. The information provided by these active or ex military, as obsolete or subjective as it may be, is definitely preferable to any theoretical inputs or to no information at all.

Secondly, a potential applicant can use and interpret to the best of his/her abilities, any personal contact that he/she might have had with the military world, either on unique occasion or on regular basis. In the past not many persons were able to access relevant information due to the fact that the military organization was by definition a discrete organism which unveiled itself to the civil world as little as possible, usually in some specific circumstances such as:
- during certain targeted campaigns carried out for the advertisement of military career, usually conducted in high-schools, at the ending phase of the gymnasium, or
- during military ceremonies, when only the shiny side was visible, thus a very limited perception of the system was offered to the civil society. As surprising

as this may be, image sells very well at all times, and can be more powerful than a thousand words. Therefore such festive exhibitions of the military and their uniforms were actually very efficient in terms of impact to the public, and consciously or not, they were remembered for long periods and revisited by those who considered joining the military.

Fortunately the access to information no longer represents an issue due to the numerous means of communication we have today. Information is collected and processed much easier now but eventually, what really counts for a teenager who struggles for the right decision concerning a possible military career is more or less an inventory of assumptions concerning the military organization, and the constraints that he/she might have to deal with.

2.2. Discipline
Probably the first word that the military career can be associated with is *discipline*. It is beyond any doubt that the military people are deemed to be the most disciplined members of a society. The control of each individual within the military system is indeed as close as assumed. Actually the whole military machinery relies on two verbs which go hand in hand: *to give orders – to execute*. This binomial is almost like a religious belief which is most of the times taken as granted without any explanatory notes. Therefore from a candidate's perspective it is not only essential but vital that all military people accept being obedient to superiors, executing their orders, and avoiding as much as possible conflicts with the military hierarchy. On the other hand this does not mean that the military are no more than dummies trained to willingly execute whatever they are ordered to without pursuing any personal judgment. The question though is how the system manages to enforce discipline and at the same time, avoid any interference between this constraint and the individual ego and self respect of the military, which is crucial for preventing conflicts. The answer may reside in the fact that military people are given a vast and rigorous set of rules and regulations to follow, usually broken down into approved sets of procedures.
Everything has to be done by the book. The personnel are being given explicit assignments. The organization has tried to fill all gaps by delineating clearly the responsibilities and specificities for different positions or types of missions. Even the daily schedule of the military is meticulously detailed. All these elements that the military systems is very keen on maintaining, have composed the picture of a disciplined organization which promotes clear paths, where efforts are not to be duplicated and confusion or misunderstanding are most of the times prevented. Additionally, the regulatory framework facilitates an effective control of the system.

2.3. Hierarchic structure
In close connection with the main characteristic – discipline, next comes the architecture of the military organization which has to be hierarchic. This has always been the only workable model as it facilitates complex processes being run effectively, efficiently, and in many cases within a given timeframe. Moreover, such an arrangement provides the support for materializing the *unique command* principle. This is essential for any organization which is exposed to multiple risk factors. For the military world, consequences of any miscoordination can be dramatic.

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The principle of hierarchic configuration for the military institution has not changed since the establishment of armed forces thus this is less of an assumption and more of a certainty. The only variables that have evolved and continuously influenced the profile of the leaders on different levels were the set of skills required for them to prove and be evaluated against, which have changed in time from brut force to superior mindset.

As good as hierarchy may look from the organizational perspective it still carries a payload of constraints for its members. Most of the times military people can only access one level upward as they are not allowed to report directly to higher commanders. Reports of which recipients are two or more levels upper are processed exclusively via the hierarchic flow in place. However, should a matter request being addressed directly at a higher level, the first commander still needs to be informed prior to pursuing such action.

2.4. Good health and resistance

Expectance is that the military people maintain good health and physical condition. Actually these are mandatory requirements for those who want to join the military system, as their acceptance is conditioned by them passing the medical tests. But this does not stop here. Once they are part of the organizations they are also subject to regular medical checks and they are obliged to keep themselves in a good shape for being able to pass periodical physical tests. Certain specializations such as pilots or divers are even more demanding than others, as they are required to have an exceptional health and pass much more rigorous tests.

When it comes to the mind's health, things are even clearer and more stringent. Under no circumstance may a candidate access or be maintained within the military system if he/she has a medical record of any mental disorder or psychological issues. These are instant show-stoppers for both new applicants and experienced military, as no compromise is accepted in this very stressful and risky profession. Besides a good physical and mental condition, and in strong connection with the latter, the military have to prove resistance to a large scale of stress factors. It is part of their day-to-day business to face frequently, and quite often simultaneously, stressful situations. Therefore it is mandatory for the military to have a good state of mind and self control, provided he/she is by definition required to act adequately in times of crisis.

2.5. Loyalty, honor, courage, patriotism

The sacred set of values that encompasses loyalty, honor, courage, patriotism, and ultimately, spirit of sacrifice is definitely the most vibrant one associated with the military organization and equally recognized by the civil society. This cluster of exceptional attributes is essential for the profile of any potential members of the armed forces therefore by no means should it be missed or accepted by the military organization with limitations. As much as the civil society would like to think that it embraces these values at the same level, it is beyond any doubt that such marks are not widely spread among civil population especially when the society is divided, egocentric and governed by a permanent struggle for personal wellbeing.

Since the early stages of the armed forces, military people were required to be honorable, brave, and loyal to the organization and to their leaders. The tights between the military were and still are unique as they are strengthened in years of training or fighting together. The mutual support shown by military people during the service of duty and the long lasting relationship they preserve long after retirement cannot be observed even among close members of civil society.

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The loyalty for the organization and for the country is even stronger and more profound. Since early ages the rudimental armies stood up to defend human settlements had such admirable characteristics which were derived from the attachment to a certain form of social organization. As the human society developed more and more, notions like *homeland* or *nation* got buried deeper and deeper into the minds and hearts of the military. National symbols such as the flag or the anthem acted like effective catalysts. Patriotism enlightened more and more the spirit of modern military and ultimately they have consciously accepted the idea of a potential total sacrifice, should it be required for the preservation of national sovereignty, integrity, and independence.

Indeed, such state of mind and behavior were cultivated over generations of military people. Then the military organization, always rigorous and determined, had found a way to formalize the pledge of its members to their country and nation by introducing the military oath. An analogy could be made to the Hippocrates oath by which doctors are sworn, only the military oath is much more binding than that, as it speaks of unconditional commitment to obey superiors' orders, to respect the organization, and to defend the homeland even by ultimate sacrifice.

2.6. Tidy looks – the uniform

No reference can be made to the armed forces without instantly visualizing a military uniform. Generally speaking, people like uniforms. They have to be both functional and good looking, and at the same time they carry some symbols which are familiar only to military. Uniforms, on the other hand, are not easy to wear. They require a certain posture and they have to be always clean. Surprisingly, civilians have opposite perceptions about uniforms. Some assume correctly that the uniform is not only a mandatory piece of clothing designed to display the attachment to a certain professional cohort, but it also embeds symbols of courage, honor, and sacrifice. Therefore uniform should be worn proudly. On the contrary, some others think that uniform, besides its recognized functionality, has some undesirable effect on the military. Specifically, they consider uniform being the perfect means for leveling different personalities and for limiting the personnel in expressing themselves visually. As odd and divergent different opinions may be, overall it is unanimously accepted that:
- the present society does not conceive for now, nor does it foresee for the near future giving up of uniforms from the military;
- uniform should not be dishonored or worn inappropriately due to the noble values and symbols it is associated with.

2.7. Social position

Most of the people who join the military system assume that they are going to be granted with a recognized position in society once they become active military. This is not only about a certain financial comfort which, by the way, in many armed forces ceased to be a valid criterion. Most important, the applicants aim onto being pinned on the social billboard at a similar level corresponding to the level of trust and respect that the organization itself is granted with by the civil society. The expectation for a good social position is legitimate as long as the military are part of the system.

Some issues may appear after they leave the organization and face the civil world. Regardless this change occurs at the regular retirement or after the minimum tour of duty the former military should accept this change as a start over and prove their adaptability. Unfortunately human characters cannot be re-booted like computers. Moreover, neither the

military system always provide a real back-up tool for a better integration of the departing personnel, nor is the civil society prepared to accept former military in the already complicated labor market.

2.8. Rigorousness
A constant perception from the civil society is that the military people are extremely well organized. They are known to possess a structured way of thinking as well as ordered mind and life. To a certain extent this is perceived as a discipline of mind. Beside let's say this good part there is also a less favorable opinion according to which such organized minds are less creative. But I dare to say that this is not necessarily true. The military people may be addicted to rules and regulations as also they may not be able to write essays or poems on regular basis. Nevertheless they can sure manage various types of crisis, and that shows some creativity and versatility. Having to face quite often unexpected situations and being confronted with cuts of resources the military prove that their mind is rapidly adaptable. Various challenges that they are undertaking on regular basis made them recognize and react to multiple tones of grey between black and white.

One can argue with the above considerations by saying that the military people have their limitations determined by many years of following regulations. As an example of self limitation one can mention the military-type of greeting of different expressions which continues to be used by the retired military. I would say that this is a voluntary addiction to military habits, rather than a limitation. The retired military are willingly keeping the service-like kind of greeting so they maintain some informal strings attached and stay in touch with the system they have left.

2.9. Adaptability and versatility
The military are required to easily switch assignments and take over new responsibilities during their career. Therefore it is essential for them to be versatile and adaptable to new challenges. Moreover, they are expected to not really settle down in a specific location for their entire activity. Change of tasks, units, and garrisons represent major challenges for one who aims at joining the military organization.

Among all the challenges the change of location of duty is the ultimate test of military's adaptability. This factor touches the personal life of a military and becomes even more complicated when his/her family is involved. Such challenges may be accepted by one who's part of the system but they are most of the times strongly rejected by the members of the family. Again, this is also the result of the society evolution. Time has past when the armed forces were represented almost entirely by men and for those who had a family wives were either jobless or had some less demanding jobs that allowed them to allocate significant amount of time for taking good care of the family members.

Nowadays more women have joined the military organization and improved the gender footprint of the system. Some of them have non-military spouses. On the civil side of the society women are much more active members and fair contributors to its progress, having most of the times full-time stressful jobs. Therefore taking into consideration the afore-mentioned, the possibility of relocation is usually perceived by the military spouse with anger and lots of tension, regardless the gender. Repetitive relocations generate a lot of frustration and may even disband families. Some armed forces with high budgets may afford sustaining the periodical reposting of the military and their families. Other concurrent elements though are not something that can be accommodated into any military procedure nor can they be fully compensated by immediate reparations.

2.10. Technological advancement

Another assumption related to the military organization is about the technological developments that it gets in contact with. Military personnel are being given modern and robust pieces of equipment to operate and maintain. The state of the art technology acquired by the armed forces all around the world is extremely expensive and thus inaccessible to civilians. It is not only about weapon systems which are dedicated by definition to the military. Some of the equipment is not military exclusive, yet those that are aimed for military use posses extra features compared to similar civil applications (e.g. ruggedized laptops, secure means of communication, special means of transportation on land, by air and or sea, dedicated software etc.).

Even this assumption which may look like an advantage does imply some constraints. From the organization's perspective the procurement of such equipment needs a significant budget to be secured for the Ministry of Defense and this may not be possible at all times. When financial resources are limited acquisitions are postponed and this may determine operational gaps, as well as frustration. On the other hand, from perspective of the military personnel, having access to such advanced technology calls for high qualifications and continuous training process in order to ensure that the equipment is properly operated and maintained.

3. Current challenges

3.1. Civil control of the military

The human society is continuously evolving and reshaping the relationships between its various components. Tremendous changes are required as a result of technological progress, appearance of new global challenges, threats or needs. The military organization is permanently connected to those changes and has always adapted itself to the transformation within the civil society.

One of the significant changes that occurred in the modern history of military organizations was the control of the civil society over the armed forces. Many nations empower by Constitution their Parliaments to exercise control over the military. For many states the appointment of a minister of defense who is a civilian was quite a challenge after a long history of having high ranked flag officers filling that position. This shift looked strange to the military but eventually they realized that the political burden was actually taken over their shoulders. The active military understood that their tasks were simply to follow the direction set by their civil minister, and to train for military operations. On top of that, even though the military life is led by politicians, regulations state that any involvement of the military in politics is strictly forbidden regardless the rank and position.

3.2. Sometimes less is more

There was a time when not only the quality of the weapons but also the size of the army was considered vital. The challenges, the needs, but also the tools of the present world are much more complex, hence the quantitative factor is no longer critical. Efforts are being made nowadays by the international diplomacy and international organizations (e.g. United Nations - UN, North Atlantic Treaty Organization - NATO) to prevent or at least to better anticipate armed conflicts. With this shield being effective, and having more accurate early warning of a potential conflict, nations have considered the decrease of the

armed forces. Savings are also taken into account but this diminishing the forces does not necessarily mean lower costs.

Today's military organizations are no longer oriented towards quantity, but towards quality. They are compensating by being more professional, more agile, and much better trained and equipped. The result is a less numerous but more effective military organization.

3.3. Regional or worldwide defense

The lessons learned from the 20th century conflicts, as well as the analysis of the 21st century threats have determined many nations to engage themselves towards adhering to a coalition of forces. During this type of endeavors the political element is playing a crucial role prior to joining to international politico-military organizations such as NATO or the European Union (EU). As soon as this step is complete the military organization jumps in and plays the main part according to the mandate granted by the politicians. This includes various new tasks for the military people, such as filling posts in international Headquarters (HQs), or participating to international operations in different corners of the world. Consequently the military are faced with a new spectrum of demands and constraints for being able to successfully accomplish the tasks. Most important, they are required to be interoperable with the other forces engaged in the theatre. Building interoperability is a huge effort to which contributes both the military organization (increased budget for new acquisitions or modernization of equipments, and for deployment), and the personnel (learn foreign language, adapt to standards, learn common procedures). Besides that, other challenges are directed to the personnel who participate in operations outside the country, which are usually long and developed in diverse types of climates to which they have to adapt.

3.4. Improved communication

It is again the recent history that is appealed to evidence another change that occurred in the military organization. During the 20th century, and especially the cold war, there was a poor exchange of information between the civil and the military side of the society. Due to the specific attributes of their job military have developed certain opacity to the world outside their garrisons. They were not use to share much information to civilians and they were quite reluctant to queries from the civil society.

Things have changed since then due to the boom of the information era and the globalization of conflicts. The organization had to adapt and at present it displays more openness to civil society. The military people have become better communicators. The military organization is nowadays visible and accessible through different means: newspapers, magazines, radio, television (interviews, documentaries), and internet. This proves once more how the power of information can break even the tightest sealed organizations.

4. Conclusion

The military organization remains a unique group within the modern society. Some of its traditional behaviors and constraints continue to be kept unchanged while other have been softened or even abandoned as a result of the progress. Nevertheless the military system continues to be governed by discipline and hierarchy and surprisingly, people continue to be attracted by the military despite the constraints and challenges far more demanding than in other duties.