

MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING AND PRACTICING THE MILITARY PROFESSION

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Abstract: *The growing shortage of staff globally confronts the armed forces with the challenge of recruiting and retaining skilled personnel. The article examines the structure of motivation for choosing and pursuing the military profession. On the basis of the results of the study of military motivation in the international environment and a comparative analysis with the previous research, the main motives for joining and serving in the armed forces are deduced. The results of the study could be used to improve the image of the military profession and retain qualified personnel.*

Keywords: Motivation, Military profession, Personnel

1. Introduction

“Everything depends on the individual and what he or she is going through in their life.” [1]. This is how one of the interviewed servicemen answered the question what would motivate him to join the army today.

Nowadays, both the army and other state institutions face the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. This calls for a study of the causes and motives that make people enrol in the armed forces. This article presents and analyses the results of a study of military motivation in an international environment. Its purpose is to describe the attitudes and motivations of servicemen to enlist and serve in the military so that they are used to recruit and retain motivated and trained personnel.

The analysis made in previous studies [2; 3] shows that motivation has a complex structure and is inherent only in the individual or personality characterized by a high degree of consciousness [4, p. 172]. This provokes authors like Taylor, Mayo,

Ouchi, Maslow, Herzberg, Vroom, McClelland, Skinner, Murray, Porter and Lawler, Adams, Heider and Kelley, Locke, Kohn-Bandura, Thomas, Lancaster, Pink, Lawrence and Nohria, etc. to study it. [5]. All of them develop their own thesis about the importance of one group of factors in motivation or another. Some authors consider the external factors related to working conditions to be more important, while others stress the importance of internal factors related to the nature of the work itself. The external ones correspond to the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy, and their lack directly influences the choice of profession, because they are visible in the environment surrounding the organization. Internal ones are related to the specific workplace and lead to increased job satisfaction. In other words, a person's satisfaction is the result of the work itself, and his dissatisfaction – of the conditions in which he works. Poor working conditions repel him, but good conditions attract him. Routine demotivates him, and interesting

work brings satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to identify the main motives for choosing and practicing the military profession, by indicating their hierarchical structure and establishing the relationship between them.

The working hypothesis of the study states that the dominant factors in the motivation structure in choosing a military profession are external factors, while in its exercise, internal factors related to the nature of the job itself dominate.

2. Methodology for conducting the study

The study of the motivation for choosing the military profession is based on a methodology developed specifically for the needs of this study, and this methodology is based on data collection through a questionnaire survey. The study focuses on two main target groups (categories) of military personnel, from the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria and from the US Armed Forces participating in the Operation Resolute Support in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in the period 2018-2019.

The survey reflects the views of the author and the interviewees, and does not reflect the official position of the Bulgarian or US Armed Forces.

The scope of the survey was polled by category:

- NCOs - 37 people;
- officers - 26 people.

The total number of interviewed people is 63, 52 of them (82.5%) are US servicemen and the Bulgarians are 11 (17.5%), with more than 70% having 2 to 6-7 deployments.

In order to achieve the goals of the empirical study, a questionnaire [1] was developed in English, identical for all the categories interviewed. It includes two main parts: the first part – the passport and the second part – questions structured by groups to reflect the opinion of the interviewees. The passport part includes general information about the respondents.

In the second part, twenty-one closed questions are structured, which the interviewees should answer. The opportunity to respond is in the form of a Likert scale, i.e. it is formulated as an assessment by which the respondent may agree (or disagree) to varying degrees. The scale contains five stages as follows: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – medium; 4 – relatively high; 5 – very high.

The twenty-second question is open and can be freely answered in the form of a text.

3. Analysis of the results of the study

The analysis of the results of the questionnaire conducted was made on separate questions or a group of questions from the questionnaire, considering the opinion of all the categories examined.

Question № 1 of the questionnaire is worded as follows:

“To what extent do you think the choice of the military profession is personally yours?”

The results for question № 1 are shown in Fig. 1, with their analysis showing that the majority (almost 80%) consider to a relatively high and very high degree that the choice of the military profession is theirs.

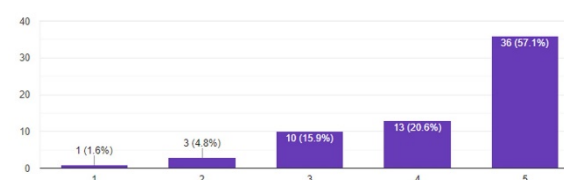


Figure 1: Answer to question 1.

Questions № 2 and 3 of the questionnaire have been phrased as follows:

Question № 2: “To what extent were you familiar with the expectations of military life (character of military activities) before joining the Army?”

Question № 3: “To what extent did your friends or family influence your decision to join the military profession?”

The analysis of the results on questions № 2 and 3 shows that the number of the interviewees that were clear or not clear

about their expectations related to military life before joining the military is almost the same. Over 50 % of the respondents state that their friends and family have not influenced their choice of a military career. Questions № 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the questionnaire relate to the prestige of the military profession and the respondents' opinion on its current status and its change in time.

The results of the survey indicate that the majority of respondents (over 50%) consider the military profession to have a relatively high or high degree of prestige in society, and the merit for this opinion is of the interviewed US servicemen mostly. About 40% of the respondents believe that the prestige of the military profession is rising slightly, and almost all of them consolidate around the view that, compared to before, the prestige of the military profession is much lower now, and not enough is done for its rise.

Question № 8 of the questionnaire is worded as follows:

“To what extent do you think the following factors are important for choosing a military carrier?”

This question is structured into twenty-one sub-sections containing various factors that influence the choice of military profession. Part of the results on question № 8 are shown in Fig. 2; their values show that the interviewed place first the opportunity to participate in missions and operations abroad (80%) and second the opportunity to serve their country (78%), which shows the role of patriotic upbringing. It should be noted that much of the US servicemen joined the military precisely after the September 11, 2001 attacks with the idea of protecting their country (the USA) from aggression and terrorism while keeping security threats out of their territory –in the place where they arise.

Other important reasons highlighted are career opportunities (75%), opportunities to work with weapons and military equipment (71%), free education (67%), teamwork and

work in an international environment (65%). The opinion of the interviewees is unanimous that the main reasons for joining the army are remuneration (56%), security and predictability in the workplace (54%) and early retirement (54%, the right for that is acquired after twenty years of service).

If we compare the answers to this question with the results of an identical survey [2] (Fig. 3), but conducted only with Bulgarian servicemen in 2018, obvious differences can be found. The 2018 survey identified first the factors related to remuneration, early retirement and job security. The explanation for the discrepancy between the significant factors in the two studies is rooted in the national differences of the categories examined. In the 2019 survey, more than 82% of those interviewed are US military personnel. For them, the level of remuneration in the armed forces is around and above the average salary for the country, and the acquisition of a right to a pension is possible with fewer years of service and at a much earlier age than in the Bulgarian Armed forces.

The other factors that motivate the choice of military career generally overlap.



Figure 2: Response to question 8 from 2019.

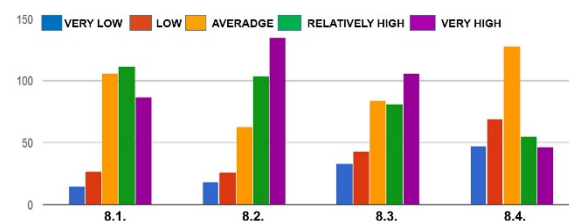


Figure 3: Response to question 8 from 2018.

The analysis of the results on this issue shows that the motivation for choosing the military profession is a complex composite of many and various interrelated factors.

The predominant part of them are external (hygienic) factors, combined with the patriotic motives of the individual. A comparative analysis between the two studies shows that external factors are the basis for the emergence of internal factors. Therefore, without external incentives, dissatisfaction would arise in the individual, leading to an inability for the genuine intrinsic motivation to emerge, which would render recruitment and retention of personnel impossible.

Question № 10 in the questionnaire is worded as follows:

“To what extent do you think that frequent legislative changes regulating the conditions for a military career adversely affect an individual's choice to join the Army?”

The results on question № 10 indicate that 41% of respondents consider that the legal changes in the military have a negative impact. In the previous survey from 2018, with the participation of Bulgarian servicemen only, this percentage was much higher (57%). It showed that to a relatively high and high degree, “frequent legal changes adversely affect both the choice of the military profession and those already practicing it”. [2].

The differences between the two surveys may have been due to the fact that the US military legislation is much more consistent and in the interest of servicemen. In Bulgaria, the reforms in defence over the past 25 years have been continuous and demotivating.

Questions № 11 and 12 of the questionnaire concern the relationship between the choice of military profession and the provision of resources, the state of armaments, equipment and infrastructure.

The results on question № 11 show that almost 40% of the respondents believe that the resources are insufficient, which adversely affects the motivation in the military. Comparing the answers given to this question with those of the 2018 survey, it is not difficult to find the

difference. In 2018, over 80% of the Bulgarian military unanimously expressed dissatisfaction with “sufficient” resource provision [2]. This is the reason why many qualified servicemen were demotivated and left after they were confronted with the daily problems of material scarcity.

Comparing the answers to question № 12 of the 2019 poll with that of 2018, the differences of opinion contrast very strongly. In the 2018 survey (Fig. 4), the Bulgarian military were adamant (over 75%) that the outdated equipment, weapons and infrastructure, as well as the delay in their modernisation, lowered the interest in the military profession. The responses to the 2019 survey (Fig. 5) with predominantly US participation are the opposite – over 51% of those surveyed agree that motivation is not affected by modernisation. The US military is working with state-of-the-art, up-to-date and well-resourced equipment, so their motivation cannot be low-key or negatively impacted.

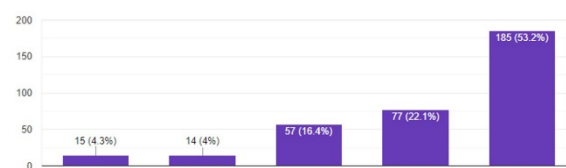


Figure 4: Answer to question 12 from 2018.

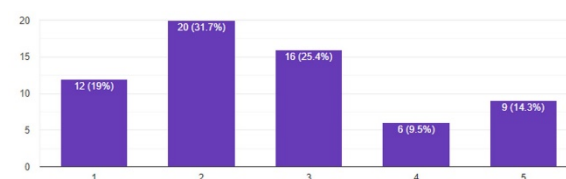


Figure 5: Answer to question 12 from 2019.

Question № 14 in the questionnaire is worded as follows:

“To what extent do you think that if the relationship between society and the Army improves, there will be an increase of the interest for a military career?”

The results on question № 14 clearly show that about 56% of the respondents believe that the interest in the military profession is in direct proportion to the strength of the

“society – army” relationship. The results of the previous poll are a little more eloquent – 75% of those who answered share the same opinion. This shows that there is a need to constantly work towards improving the “society – army” relationship in order to increase interest in the military profession.

Questions № 15, 16, 17 and 18 of the questionnaire are related to the popularity of the military profession in society.

The analysis of the results on the questions shows that the majority of the respondents (over 58%) believe that the public is not aware of the activity of the military at the moment. This almost confirms the results of the previous survey, where more than 70% gave a similar answer.

Question № 16 was not included in previous studies, and its results show that 47% of the respondents believe that military careers are not popular in society not only in Bulgaria but also in the USA. In the last 1 – 2 years, attempts were made to regain interest in the military profession in Bulgaria, promoting it through campaigns such as Be a Soldier, open days in military formations, military rituals and other events. However, efforts over the last few years could hardly make up for decades of negative attitudes and negligence against the military. It is no secret that there is a huge number of vacancies for officers, NCOs and soldiers, although the number of military personnel has decreased many times over the last 30 years. At present, the Bulgarian Armed Forces should number at least 37,000 [6], but the real number is by thousands less. The shortage of military personnel at the beginning of 2019 is as follows: officers 19%, warrant officers 17%, NCOs 9%, soldiers 27% [7].

Most respondents (46% in the current survey, over 67% in 2018) believe that the mass media should be more active in promoting military careers because the public is poorly aware of the opportunities to practise it. Almost 50 % of the respondents believe that civilians are not

aware of these opportunities although in the US, the recruitment arrangements for military personnel are much more diverse and comprehensive, as are the benefits after joining the military.

The analysis of these issues shows that work is not being done in the right direction to strengthen the “society – army” relationship, which is also one of the main problems for the diminished interest in the military profession and the opportunities to practise it.

Questions № 19, 20 and 21 in the questionnaire relate to satisfaction with the choice of military profession.

The analysis of the results on these questions shows that for the majority of the respondents (63%) the military profession is satisfying to a relatively high or high degree. Similarly, 62% of the respondents believe that their expectations of choosing a profession have been met to a relatively high or high degree, which makes their opinions significantly different from the previous study done in 2018. Then only 32% of the Bulgarian servicemen state that their military careers meet their expectations.

Over 68% of the interviewees said they would not hesitate to choose a military career again, which is over 23% more than in the previous survey in 2018 (then about 45% gave that answer). This shows that the predominant number of US military personnel who took part in this survey are much more motivated and, despite the difficulties they face almost daily, would again dedicate their lives to this not-so-easy profession as is the military one.

Question № 22 was an open one and worded as follows: “In your opinion, what would motivate you to join the Army today?”

The answer to this open question was provided by 46 servicemen, of whom Bulgarians were only a few. The analysis of the results on this question shows that respondents (14 people) put first salary and benefits as a motive for joining the army today. Second, 10 people cite “to serve my

country” as a reason for joining the military. Third in the hierarchy is free education or loan assistance for training loans (8 people), followed by health care and family benefits (6 people), participation in operations (5 people), early retirement (4 people), job security (4 people), better conditions for leaving the armed forces (4 people), career development (3 people), etc. The lesser motives include professional ethics, tax breaks, the opportunity to advertise, work with clear rules, a desire to participate in a military conflict, etc.

This is similar to the results of the RAND Arroyo Center study commissioned by the US Army Recruitment Command, *Life as a Private – A Study of the Motivations and Experiences of Junior Enlisted Personnel in the US Army* [8]. In the study, the motives for joining the army are divided into two groups – institutional and occupational. The institutional ones include call for service, family background, honour and respect, dream profession, discipline, etc., while the professional ones contain thirst for adventure and travel, benefits, pay and security, compensation for leaving, vocational training, etc. It is not difficult to see that institutional motives correspond to internal motivating factors and professional motives – to external ones. The results of the study indicate that “The total number of professional motives indicated was 132, while the total number of institutional ones was 62.” [8]. This shows that the majority of the recruits surveyed had economic reasons for joining the service.

According to Jared Keller, who analysed the same study, “Americans join the Army for plenty of reasons: for country, family, and honour. According to a new study of enlisted soldiers, however, a core motivation is relatively simple: for money.” [9]. This shows that for most professional military personnel, service is first and foremost a job, and second, it is a calling.

The answer to question № 22 of a Bulgarian serviceman is also interesting: Our country is trying to smash the army

since 1992... The government has interests only for big deals for lots of money... they don't think about the soldiers. To serve in the Bulgarian army, you have to pay for almost everything at work. Buying computers, printers, paper and spare parts for vehicles! I'm sad about that! Sending a Bulgarian military officer to study in the US with \$ 7 a day... no words to explain how I feel about it!”[1]. This response eloquently demonstrates the disappointment of the service in the Bulgarian Army, which causes many young military men who have already chosen this profession to leave in search of a new career field.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study of the motivation for choosing the military profession and the analysis of its results:

The choice of the military profession is conscious and made independently, but the public is poorly informed about the possibilities for a military career. The view is still prevalent that the military profession is prestigious, but this prestige is much lower now than before and not enough care is taken to promote it.

The analysis of factors related to the choice of military career shows their complex structure. Most of the respondents stated that factors related to working conditions are more important when choosing a profession, while the nature of the job is what keeps them in the workplace. Therefore, we can summarize that external factors influence the choice of a profession, while internal factors influence the satisfaction of exercising it. The way to reach the internal factors goes through the satisfaction of the external ones.

Respondents are of the opinion that the interest in the military profession is in direct proportion to the relationship between the society and its army, but the public is not familiar with the activities of the army at the moment. Today, military careers are not popular in society, and this trend is deepening not only in Bulgaria but also abroad. More efforts are needed to

promote it, public awareness should be raised of military activities and military career opportunities. However, most of those who have already chosen this profession are satisfied with their choice and would not hesitate to make it again.

The concept of a professional army predisposes to view the service first as a profession and then as a calling, but this does not automatically exclude the patriotic incentives for service. On the contrary, in a state of war or martial law, as well as in every case of threat to national security and sovereignty, it is necessary to place the country first, because it is also part of the military professional ethics itself – patriotic education.

In peacetime, the military profession needs to give everything that all other professions give – decent pay, security, vocational training and last but not least “compensation” for deprivations caused by military service. For the fact that the servicemen are available 24/7, for the difficult working conditions, the restrictions on the exercise of another profession, the high level of risk and mental tension. Such compensations can be free education, free health care (including for family members), early retirement, compensation for

changing place of living and when leaving the army, etc. The serviceman should think of nothing but how to better prepare himself to perform his duties when called upon.

4. Conclusions

The summarized and analysed results of the conducted study show that military motivation is a complex system of various interrelated factors. External (hygienic) factors play a major role in the search and selection of a profession, while internal (satisfactory) factors play a key role in retaining a job. For this reason, it is necessary to constantly analyse all the factors, examine them as a common system, and use them in a balanced manner in order to receive and retain qualified personnel and to solve the problem of motivation for pursuing the military profession.

The tendency to attract motivated personnel is alarming, and despite the efforts of the authorities, vacancies in the army are increasing instead of decreasing. For this reason, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive resource-based strategy that includes all the identified main factors to attract and retain the most important resource in the military – personnel.

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