

## THE PROFESSIONALISATION AND PERFORMANCE OF THE ARMED FORCES – KEY ELEMENTS IN FACING CHANGING GLOBAL TRENDS –

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*The changing trends in military organisations have accelerated in recent decades against the background of societal changes, changes in the security environment and the rapid development of technology. These phenomena impose new requirements on armies in terms of effective human resources management and a key role is assigned to the provision of a high quality professionalisation process ensuring the performance of the armed forces and thus the ability of the military to fulfil its missions. By exploring literature, this paper starts with a conceptual background of the field that outlines the framework for transforming the training process from the perspective of interrelated key elements. In addition, the paper highlights challenging trends that have an impact on military organisations, emphasising the exploration of the way in which professionalisation is transformed so that military personnel can respond to challenging contexts, thus contributing to the performance of the armed forces. Finally, we propose some guidelines for future scientific approaches on this subject.*

*Keywords: professionalisation; performance; training; armed forces; trends; change;*

### INTRODUCTION

The imperatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, marked by complexity, uncertainty, dynamism, technology and competitiveness, are obvious in the trends of reconfiguration of human resources management across organizations around the world. While approaches may not be exactly the same in terms of policies and instruments, from civil organisations to the armed forces, we are starting from the premise that people are the key resource in achieving institutional objectives, and education and training of staff is a strategic link for “high quality” employees, and hence the ability to produce better value-added performance.

Moreover, as these requirements increase, the level of risk also rises, and organizations face new crisis situations. Based on the review of literature, this paper focuses on how the professionalisation of the armed forces can contribute to organisational performance when faced with new conditions for action. In this respect, this approach is based on the state of knowledge in the field, examined through bibliographic study, a thematic analysis and observation based on our experiences resulting from the status of beneficiary or provider of education. This is why we will identify theoretical prospects for the professionalization and performance of the armed forces as interrelated key elements in military transformations. This thematic analysis of changing trends will take into account the implications that the challenges associated with the contemporary world have on the spectrum of conflict and, by extension, on professionalisation.

Finally, we will take into consideration some guidelines for future research on the training of military personnel in synergy with the principle of performance based on skills and the integration of new technologies.

### CONCEPTUAL NOTE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONALISATION AND PERFORMANCE

Under the impact of societal change and security challenges that require global, political and diplomatic efforts to ensure sustainable peace and growth, the interest in studying the professionalisation of the armed forces is largely an expression of the transition of the military from conventional missions to those associated with the conduct of military stability operations. In addition, the integration of technologies

into the missions of the armed forces has marked the way in which they operate and, consequently, the importance given to the professionalisation of staff in correlation with performance, as a guarantor of successful contemporary missions.

Therefore, before highlighting the challenging trends that have an impact on military organisations in terms of how professionalisation is transformed in order for military personnel to respond to challenging contexts contributing to the performance of the armed forces, it is necessary to outline some key conceptual considerations. In order to analyse the professionalisation and performance of the armed forces, we need to define the general terms and concepts.

The term of “*profession*” has mainly been analysed by sociologists, who define it as “*an activity which incubates a theoretical and applied corpus with a high degree of autonomy and control over the pursuit of activity, a professional group’s own ethics and a corporate feeling linking professional practitioners*” (Nurcia, 2018, P. 42). In the same vein, profession is seen as a two-phase process: primary or forward-looking, associated with the willingness of an individual to adhere to the values of an occupation of interest, i.e. secondary or professional, based on the person’s desire to enter a particular group, thus becoming a specialist (Ongiti, 2012, p. 33). We can notice, however, that there is a strong congruence between the two approaches as regards the need to join a combination of organisation-specific values, to deepen them and to build on them by contributing to the group.

In view of these aspects, the concept of *professionalisation*, examined in the sense of the organisational sociology (Parry, Stavrou & Lazarova, 2012, p. 16), includes four dimensions:

1. the knowledge required for the performance of professional tasks;
2. the incentives linked to the people in the profession;
3. the ethical and regulatory code supporting the practical action in someone’s profession;
4. the autonomy related to the profession in respect of other jobs within the organization.

In this case, we can say that professionalisation implies the development of people with a certain level of qualification in a position and a higher degree of commitment to both the profession and the organisation.

From a military point of view, the study of the profession has been a topic of interest for pioneering research in the field of military sociology. In its classic sense, military professionalization is analysed by Samuel Huntington from the perspective of the modern warfare, which, evolving from the aristocratic dilemma, is engaged

in three distinctive characteristics of the military profession, namely (Huntington, 1957, pp. 8-10):

- a. expertise, distinguishing the professional from the secular soldier due to the skills acquired through education and training;
- b. responsibility seen in the light of the soldier’s obligation to use altruistic skills acquired in the name of the state;
- c. the corporation based on the “*feeling of organic unity*” and the “*conscience*” that they are a different group of laypeople, acquired through discipline and training.

In line with the evolution of the security environment, the study of the professionalization of the armed forces has become a challenge, starting with the experience gained in operations other than war (abbreviated OOTW), which has required the analysis of the training of military personnel. In this respect, Anthony King argues that military professionalism is based on skills that allow human resources in the armies of the world to interact with each other, to cooperate and engage in contemporary operations (Anthony, 2011, p. 235). In the same vein, Charles Kirke promotes the idea that theoretical knowledge and practical skills defining his training no longer accept a conduct based on unconditional obedience to the order of traditional armies (Kirke, 2010, pp. 359-380). Following these considerations, Caforio conceptualises the professionalisation of officers in his research (Caforio, 2018, pp. 273-296). He notes that, in general, the officers’ professionalization phase has two major objectives. The first one is to equip the individual with the expertise necessary to pursue the profession. The second one is to turn forward-looking socialization into real and complete professional socialisation, through educational programs that cover both pure military subjects (usually military history, tactics, military exercises, combat training and so on) and academic disciplines (generally: international relations, law, foreign languages, economy and so on).

Together, these approaches form the basic features of the professionalisation of the armed forces which, in our opinion, are the key process in providing high quality human resources on which the success of military organizations depends.

From the point of view of modern society which is obsessed with efficiency and effectiveness, the term of “*individual*” or “*organisational performance*” serves as a measure of productivity, output or quality based on minimising inputs and maximizing benefits (Beer, Paul & Brewster, 2015, pp. 427-438). However, from the perspective of the criteria specific to organisational management, Professor Lebas Michel J. claims that performance refers to the capacity that is materialized in the future by some essential attributes, such as: job creation; the status of “*social*

good”; employment security for company staff; innovation in production/service provision; “customer” satisfaction; increase in market share; “environmental impact”; technological advancement etc. (Lebas, 1995, pp. 23-35). From a psychological perspective, performance involves focusing on practices needed to capitalize on the employees’ skills and meet their needs, with the basic elements being ability, motivation and opportunity, known as the AMO model (Ability, Motivation and Opportunity, Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007, pp. 3-20). Additionally, based on organisational and behavioural performance criteria, Herman Aguinis concludes that performance “refers to behaviour or what employees do, and not to what employees produce or the results of their work” (Herman, 2013, p. 88).

However, we believe that reducing the discussion on performance when observing its behaviour against the results is not appropriate for the approach in this paper. In this respect, we consider the position of the Center for Evidence-Based Management, which encourages a discussion on “how human resources can further increase their impact on long-term performance” (Center for Evidence-Based Management, Could do better? Assessing what works in performance management, 2016). Thus, we are in line with the view that defining performance involves a set of interlinked activities aimed at setting goals by which staff members can become aware of their role in the organizational strategy, linking them to training, development, evaluation and reward for improving individual and organisational outcomes (Hutchinson, 2013, p. 2).

Therefore, as we stay true to the issues of the importance of addressing the interdependence between professionalization and performance, the theoretical perspectives presented in this section serve as the theoretical basis for our analysis of the changing trends in the armed forces and our proposals on potential guidelines for future scientific studies on this subject.

### **TRENDS IN CHANGING MILITARY ORGANISATIONS. HOW HAS THE VISION OF PROFESSIONALIZATION CHANGED TO MAINTAIN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ARMED FORCES OVER TIME?**

*“The army is adapting, relearning and continuously changing to overcome potential opponents” (Pomper, 2020)*

As adaptation to economic, socio-cultural, geopolitical and technological developments influences the objectives of companies and public institutions, both civil organisations and the armies of the world have undergone a series of changes aimed at adjusting their operation in line with the new circumstances. Consequently,

a cornerstone of the armies’ efforts to fulfil their missions at the highest level is to have at their disposal high quality military personnel and, in particular, leaders with vision and expertise, who are capable of leading current structures and producing added value for the military in the future. As such, one of the most discussed aspects of the transformation of military organizations over time is the professionalization of the armed forces.

Keeping these issues in mind, in this section, we aim to provide a clear picture of how the professionalization of the armed forces has changed in order for human resources to adapt by finding new and better ways to improve their individual performance and organisational results, as unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances occur.

To this end, this section provides a review of the literature revealing the complex subject of understanding the professionalization of the armed forces, from the perspective of its widely accepted approach: transformation to improve performance and fulfil missions assigned to the military field. More specifically, we are analysing the way in which the changing trends in the armed forces have been treated in the event of professionalisation – as a fundamental dimension of the restructuring of armies in the face of the new conditions for action. Starting from this analysis, we will finally propose some guidelines that illustrate how the examination of this relation can advance empirical research and theory, for the benefit of decision-makers who draw strategic directions in the military field.

In general, empirical research on military organisations is linked to the period immediately after the end of the Second World War, when the orientation of the post-industrial economy toward services has led to the term of “human resources” being popularised (Rogers, 2012, pp. 276-277). Then the critical status of human resources was given to gain competitive advantage and the performance assessment process was established – as an independent function specific to staff management (McMahan, Bell & Virick, 1998, pp. 193-214). The promoters of this approach are the American sociologists Samuel Stauffer, known for the study “*The American Soldier*”, and Morris Janowitz, who has made a remarkable contribution to the research of military organisations through the thematic distinction on scientific approaches in the army, which they divide into three categories: “*studies relating to the military organization and the military profession; studies dealing with relations between the armed forces and society; and studies relating particularly to conflicts and war*” (Stouffer et al, 1949).

Bearing in mind these considerations, we can say that a first relevant trend is to focus on structural change in the armed forces in order to advance the universal approach based on recruitment in peacetime and national mobilization in wartime (Manigart, 2018, p. 408) – considered to be the decline of the mass army since the 1960s. In practice, removing the military from the formal structure of the bureaucratic model has become significant for the review of the way in which military personnel were professionally related to the new organizational conditions.

In this respect, a relevant approach belongs to *“the most influential military sociologist of the American nation”*, Charles Constantine Moskos Jr., who, in order to highlight the dichotomy between the institutional and occupational format of the military organization, proposes the institution/occupation model (I/O), in 1977 (Moskos, 1977, pp. 41-50). In order to better reflect what the transition of the military profession from the institutional typology to the occupational one implies, in 1986, the researcher reviewed the model in terms of aspects that showed both opposite and common manifestations.

On the one hand, when referring to the institutional (I), Moskos takes into account the traditional soldier, defined in terms of values and norms, by virtue of which the mission of the military organisation transcends the individual interest. On the other hand, he deals with the occupational sphere (O) by referring to the soldier whose personal interest is a priority over the organisational one, a legitimate position against the background of the *“supply and demand”* principle, which shapes military jobs just like any other job in private companies (Moskos, 1986, pp. 377-382).

The end of the Cold War and implicitly of the bipolar world has meant, in economic terms, the development of the functioning of organisations in a global way, and implicitly the propagation of the financial, political and other consequences specific to one part of the world in other parts of it. As a result, states can no longer act on their own and they join efforts to prevent a possible state of instability, which is also obvious in the military field, where the cooperation between armies in strategic alliances becomes a necessity for the carrying out of multinational operations. This means that achieving a global character by military organisations is another changing trend in the post-modern armed forces. Moreover, at the same time as military-related global character is achieved, most European countries face budget deficits.

Firstly, this led to a general trend towards a reduction in defence expenditure, which was demonstrated by the reduction in military staff numbers, the limitation

of equipment purchases and the reduction of training costs (Manigart, 2018, p. 408). Desiring to validate the hypothesis that the new *“post-modern army”* is the consequence of the adaptation of the military organization to the international environment marked by the rise of global civil organizations, Moskos and Burk propose a new model to evocate the structural transition from the traditional army to an army oriented towards professional soldiers (Moskos & Burk, 1994, pp. 141-162). Under these circumstances, the two specialists claim that this new structural perspective requires the transition from a warrior soldier to one capable of maintaining the peace.

Secondly, along with the trends in the field of the restructuring of the armed forces – against the background of the sensitivity of the state budgets under the critical scrutiny of the society – the well-known aversion of the military personnel towards the assessment process accompanied by a low interest in efficiency, judicial systems, clear responsibilities and performance determination have been blurred. More precisely, this trend meant that a shift towards *“standardization of actions, exercises and skills guided by the direct management of more educated and older staff – hence of a higher rank which is based mainly on the use of rules, formal procedures and the power to reward, punish or promote”* (Soeters, 2018, pp. 256-257) has changed in the sense that military organizations have become more responsible, transparent and better in cost control and time management (Sommer, 2011).

As regards the professionalisation of the armed forces, this has resulted in an increased use of the *“mission-oriented command”*. Although this is *“accepted and even encouraged if and only if it takes place in the context of the commander’s vision, the objectives of the mission and the general reference frameworks for the action, such as standardized exercises and rules of engagement”* (Hajjar, 2014, p. 131) – the approach is very close to performance management.

From a geopolitical point of view, the countries of the world have faced new security challenges. Phenomena such as global competition for resources, terrorism, transnational crime and ethnic violence generate instability in the strategic environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and implications across the spectrum of conflicts. In this context, sovereign states have become aware of the importance of carrying out military operations other than war (MOOTW) under UN’s authority or a recognised regional organisation. Considered to be stability operations in which *“the military force is designed to influence the civil and political environment, to facilitate diplomatic action and to stop illegal activities”* (Alexandrescu & Băhnăreanu,

2007, p. 88), the actions in the MOOTW spectrum have complicated the military landscape, as armies now exist not only to defend national territory, but also to maintain durable peace and sustainable economic development at global level.

As the stakes are of critical strategic importance for maintaining overall stability, professionalization in the armed forces is much more significant. In this respect, we bear in mind the contribution made by Giuseppe Caforio, who, in an intercultural study, tested the hypothesis that professional officers oriented towards the typology of the warrior or that of the peacekeeper react differently to the various challenges that characterize MOOTW. His assumption was that the former had more difficulty in responding to the difficulties of uncertainty, while the latter showed flexibility and willingness in non-hierarchical cooperation relations. The study focused on a working group made up of officers from nine countries (Bulgaria, Russia, South Africa, Hungary, Italy, France, Poland, Sweden and USA) with extensive and diverse experience in MOOTW. Starting from their responses to the implications arising from the actual preparation and deployment of the missions, Caforio defined the features of the two typologies already known, the warrior and the peacekeeper, and outlined a third type under the name of *“the flexible soldier model”*.

In its conception, the flexible type is the image of the professional able to combine different qualities, some of them belonging to the warrior model, others to the peacekeeper one, in order to adapt their performance to uncertain and variable demand from a turbulent environment, as is often the case in the OOTW theatre (Caforio, 2007, 232-233). From this perspective, we believe that moving towards the flexible type called for the need to rethink the professionalization process, which had to ensure a compilation of skills between the characteristics of the *“warrior”*, defined by traditional attributes (willingness to sacrifice himself to the detriment of personal interest, discipline, obedience and so on) and those specific to the *“peacekeeper”*, characterised by more non-conventional attributes (general training, capacity for expertise, cooperation).

In the light of these considerations, Caforio conceptualizes professionalization in one of his research papers by referring to the corpus of officers, pointing out that the training process needs to be adapted so that they can respond effectively to the challenges of MOOTW. He states that the *“academic”* approach in the specific institutes ensures their professionalisation and provides basic training, but it is considered insufficient by those concerned. It is therefore considered that this stage of vocational education of officers should be followed by a pre-operational phase in the country of origin and an operational one on the ground, carried out

predominantly through the transmission of experience by previous commanders (Caforio G., 2018, pp. 273-296).

Moreover, practitioners' concern for optimising the training process in order to achieve the best individual and organisational performance has led the economic environment to balance the best approach to military personnel development: the one based on typical military training or the one focusing on much more general university training. In line with this concern, Caforio notes that the outrunning of typical military educational programs by those approaching national university systems is justified by the fact that the latter provide basic education, thus better integrating the officers into the context of the surrounding society, facilitating the collaboration with officials and agents from other institutional sectors, making them more prepared to operate on non-traditional military missions, opening up better opportunities for the second carrier, should they leave the army, and increasing the prestige and attractiveness of the profession in the national environment (Caforio G., 2018, pp. 273-296).

Despite this, a UK Army study shows that training programs were not changed to make the training of the units less kinetic, and the traditional approach, although no longer preferred from a theoretical point of view, was used *“on the ground”* (Catignani, 2012, pp. 513-539). However, in a study carried out by Uzi Ben-Shalom, President of the Association of Civil-Military Studies in Israel, he emphasizes the complementary nature of the typical military approach and of the academic one, since the former is essential for the performance of the tasks specific to commanders at the beginning of their career, while the latter is important for the challenges associated with high-ranking tasks (Uzi, 2014, pp. 51-72). Therefore, we believe that the balanced integration of these two approaches must be based on a serious analysis of the needs and specificities of the defense system.

From a technological point of view, the revolution in this field has not only affected companies but also military organisations that are beginning to use complex systems of generating, collecting, processing and disseminating information, weapon systems, digital programs and so on, with three major consequences in terms of professionalisation.

Firstly, by reducing the less specialised positions that can be automated while jobs are being downscaled in general, in order to finance new technologies. Secondly, by meeting the need for highly qualified staff which requires additional training and, implicitly, new costs. Thirdly, the *“warrior”* soldiers stand apart from those taking care of the service.

In this connection, it is considered that the advanced technologies used by the armed forces and the complexity of contemporary military operations require a corpus of officers composed of highly talented individuals with technical knowledge (Kapp, 2016), so that the military can achieve the performance expected in increasingly complex environments of action. We also note that the orientation of the armed forces towards the introduction and improvement of technologies, the relation with the media and the openness to the external labor market are in line with developments in civil organisations.

As a result, the issues presented seem to point out that one of the most discussed scientific topics in the transformation of military organisations is aimed at the professionalization of the armed forces. This is a strategic direction of action to develop defence skills, as the quality of staff determines how the army performs its missions while keeping its performance regardless of whether the operations are conventional or modern.

## CONCLUSIONS

*“We certainly know that more will be needed: more attention, more learning, more effort.”*

(Dempsey & Brafman, 2018, p. 171)

This article was conceived as a brief representation of how the change in the perception of the professionalisation of the armed forces in line with the dynamics of changing military organisations facilitated the staff’s ability to keep its performance in the face of new challenges. The basic aim of this approach was to make the article so challenging as to create a vision that can continue to advance the research issue through guidelines that would engage stakeholders in serious debates, which could result in the deepening and adoption of new paradigms and practices for developing the professionalization of the armed forces.

Starting with a brief outline of the current context, the introductory aspects highlight the convergent path towards the importance of human resources in terms of their professional development so that they deliver better value-added performance for organisations. Being at the heart of the literature concerning the relation between human resources management and performance, a brief examination of the technology used in this paper makes it easier to understand how the subject has been conceptualised, highlights its priorities for analysis and draws attention to the meaning of the content in the second section. By analysing the debate on how the military profession has evolved in order to adapt

to the new trends in the field, the article emphasizes the importance given by literature to research on engaging the military in the adoption of the most appropriate measures for the professionalisation of personnel.

Along with this analysis, we have noted that the research prospects associated with the professionalisation of the changing armed forces are of interest to the academic world, but it is not clear which aspects of the relation between this and performance management are most relevant and the way in which their implications for improving the training process could be determined. In order to help fill this research gap, we believe that future scientific approaches in this field should follow some guidelines.

As such, we focused on the content analysis of the specialized papers explored to produce this article in terms of the challenges faced, the methodologies addressed, the limits, motivations and meanings exposed. Therefore, in our view, taking into account the following recommendations may prove useful in taking serious scientific steps to manage performance in the professionalization of the changing armed forces, as follows:

- the conceptual refinement of theoretical and practical approaches to performance management in relation to the specificities of the training process seen from the perspective of the triple objectives, results and tasks;
- exploring and taking into account theoretical and practical models considered functional in the performance management line, in particular;
- exploring the contexts in which military organisations have been determined to experience transformations in the professionalisation of the armed forces;
- focusing on the analysis between what needs to be done, in formal terms, and what is actually implemented;
- studying the circumstances under which the military assess the level of personnel training (focusing on how professional development is measured from the perspective of instruments and assessors);
- focusing the efforts on case studies and empirical research.

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