

PROXIMAL OUTCOMES OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION IN MILITARY ACADEMIES

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Abstract. *In this paper we present the results of a study whose main objective is to identify proximal outcomes of student socialization of the Land Forces Academy in Sibiu. Based on the six dimensions of organizational socialization identified by Chao et al., we have built a questionnaire which lists the expected results of this process. Following the factor analysis, 23 results were detained which were grouped into seven factors. The factors identified as a result of analysis enroll in five of the six dimensions of socialization: performance proficiency, people, politics, language and organizational goals and values.*

Keywords: organizational socialization, proximal outcomes, military

1. Introduction

The military organization is a social entity with specific goals and targets and a clear hierarchical structure in which prevail formal relations. These features create a social environment within the organization with its own system of stratification that facilitates the emergence of diverse groups which allow the establishing between themselves of formal and informal relationships within which individuals interact on multiple levels. Within the military organization, activities, relationships and interactions are heavily regulated and this has an impact on the organizational socialization process.

The existence of laws and regulations, unconditional subordination and restriction of daily behaviors require a number of clear requirements pegging out the professional socialization process in the armies of the world. This process begins in military academies but continues throughout the career of a professional soldier. The concrete results of the socialization process are measured by the military organization at the end of each stage, through various ways. This assessment of the success of professional socialization has direct consequences for military organization

practices in the recruitment and education of its members.

Bauer, T.N., Bodner, T., Erdogan, B., Truxillo, D.M., Tucker, J.S. proposed the following definition: Organizational socialization refers to the process by which newcomers make the transition from being organizational outsiders to being insiders. (Bauer et al, 2007, 707).

Feldman (1981) believes that the process of socialization should be approached from three points of view, depending on the type of change experienced by organization members. Therefore, we can talk about:

- a) socialization as the acquisition of a set of appropriate role behaviors;
- b) socialization as the development of work skills and abilities;
- c) socialization as adjustment to the work group's norms and values.

Current theories consider that organizational socialization should be seen as a learning process. Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein and Gardner, for example, consider that "Organizational socialization is concerned with the learning content and process by which an individual adjust to a specific role in an organization.....

Thus organizational socialization is often identified as the primary process by which people adapt to new jobs and organizational roles.” (Chao et al., 1994, 730).

2. Outcomes of organizational socialization

By examining the literature on organizational socialization, Chao et al. identified two distinct areas of research. In the first area we find those studies which analyze the stages by which a newcomer becomes a member of the organization, with a focus on information acquisition processes and feed-back seeking behaviors. In the second area, we find those researches that analyzes the content of socialization, with an emphasis on identifying areas of content or dimensions of socialization. Based on the works of E. H. Schein, D.C. Feldman, and C. D. Fischer, Chao et al. identifies six basic dimensions of organizational socialization:

- a. *Performance proficiency* includes the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the successful execution of the tasks related to work/job;
- b. *People*; this dimension refers to labor relations created within the organization, influenced by many factors related both to the individual (personality traits, interests, social and interpersonal skills, etc.) and the organization (group dynamics, the structure of organizational interactions and relationships etc.);
- c. *Politics*; in this dimension are found those actions of the individual that ensure his/her success in identifying sources of power and relational structures within the organization (both formal and informal);
- d. *Language*; in this dimension of organizational socialization learning involves the acquisition and proper use of the professional language including the acronyms and jargon/slang elements specific to the organization;
- e. *Organizational goals and values*; this dimension requires understanding and internalization of goals, values, rules and principles of the organization both those

formal, written and those informal, unwritten

f. *History*; in this dimension we find the knowledge of the traditions, customs, myths and rituals of the organization; and here we find informations about acceptable or appropriate behaviors in different organizational contexts and "the little stories" that transmit key elements of organizational culture.

Saks and Ashford proposed a model of organizational socialization that seeks to integrate the most relevant models, concepts and research findings of the field. Starting from the idea that “organizational socialization is primarily a learning process” (Saks și Ashford, 1997, 238) these authors build their model around two concepts: information and learning, specifying their antecedents (contextual and socialization factors) and outcomes (proximal and distal).

In this model, the *contextual factors* influencing the organizational socialization process are represented by extra-organizational variables such as national culture, laws and regulations, organizational variables such as structure and strategies, group variables such as size and demographic diversity and job/role variables such as job design and physical isolation.

Socialization factors include:

- Organizational socialization factors, represented by variables such as socialization tactics, orientation programs, training programs and mentoring programs;
- Group-level socialization factors, represented by institutionalized socialization tactics, social support (expressive and instrumental) and social learning processes highlighted by the social cognitive theory, especially by Bandura (observation, instruction, reinforcement and negotiation)
- Individual socialization factors, represented by proactive actions of the newcomer (information seeking,

relationship building, self-management etc.)

Saks și Ashford explains that „...the socialization factors, along with cognitive sense-making processes, are predicted to directly influence the acquisition of information. ...information acquisition results in a reduction in newcomers' uncertainty and learning in various content domains of socialization (e.g., organizational goals and values, power structures, and task knowledge). ...learning is predicted to result in proximal outcomes (e.g., role clarity, person-job and person-organization fit, skill acquisition, social integration, social identification, motivation, personal change, and role orientation). ... the proximal outcomes are then expected to influence a wide variety of more distal outcomes at the organization and group levels (e.g., stronger culture, higher morale and cohesion, more stable membership, higher effectiveness, and reputation) and the individual level (e.g., lower stress, absenteeism, and turnover; higher job satisfaction, organization commitment, organization citizenship behaviors, and performance; and, depending on the group's and organization's values, some mix of role conformity and role innovation)., (Saks și Ashford, 1997, 240)

Klein, Fan, and Preacher (2006) analyzed how early socialization experiences affect newcomers' mastery of socialization content and socialization outcomes. Taking as a starting point previous studies carried out in this area of research, these authors stated that early socialization is significantly influenced by three variables:

- a) formal efforts to facilitate newcomer adjustment
- b) informal efforts of the organizational members
- c) proactive behaviors of the new employees

In their research, Klein et al. have considered only two indicators of early socialization namely the realism of preentry knowledge (the amount and the accuracy of

information new employees gain prior to entry about their new jobs and organizations) and the helpfulness of socialization agents (peers, supervisors etc. who help the new employees to make sense of their experience and to develop an identity within the organization). They analyzed the influence of these two parameters on five of the six dimensions of organizational socialization identified by Chao et al.: organizational goals and values, performance proficiency, people, politics, and history. They also analyzed the influence of the two indicators on three socialization outcomes: affective commitment, role clarity and job satisfaction. The main conclusions of their research were: a) realism of preentry knowledge and agent helpfulness were associated with greater role clarity, job satisfaction and organizational commitment and b) the mastery of specific socialization content dimensions was explicitly shown to mediate those relationships.

3. Methodology

We aimed to identify the proximal results of the process of socialization of Land Forces Academy students. In our approach we started from the six dimensions of organizational socialization identified by Chao et al. We have built a questionnaire consisting of 39 questions which lists the expected results that we consider essential for the process of socialization in the Land Forces Academy. Students were asked to specify to what extent they agree with each of the statements of the questionnaire using a Likert-type scale with values from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire was applied to 300 students of the academy. The sample structure was as follows: 219 boys (73%) and 81 girls (27%), 138 (46%) military high school graduates and 162 (54%) civil high school graduates, 90 (30%) college freshmen, 90 (30%) second year students and 120 (40%) third year students

Results from the questionnaire were analyzed and the chosen procedure was that

of Principal Component Analysis. KMO value (.55) was considered acceptable; the probability associated with the Bartlett test was <0.001 . After studying the anti-image matrix, those items of the questionnaire with a KMO index less than .50 were eliminated. As a result, 29 items have remained and were subjected to Principal Component Analysis. KMO value increased to .64 and the probability associated with the Bartlett test was <0.001 . Anti-image

matrix analysis indicated that all items had a KMO value greater than .05. Following the removal of items with communalities less than .50 and of those who were loading several factors simultaneously, 23 items remained in the model, grouped into seven factors explaining 57.9% of the total variance. The data obtained from this statistical procedure are displayed in the tables below.

Table no. 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.649
Approx. Chi-Square		2971.254
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		300
df		.000
Sig.		

Table no. 2: Factorial Structure - Rotated Factor Matrix

Items	Components							Communality
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I understood which are the aims and purposes of the Romanian army				.732				.714
I understood which are the Romanian army functions in society				.810				.800
I know well the structure and organization of the Romanian army				.836				.766
I understood how my future work will fit within the overall activity of the military organization			.873					.812
I understood how to behave to meet the requirements and values of the Romanian army			.856					.772
I understood the management style of the military organization (the chain of command, personnel policy etc.)			.566					.718
I understand and use with ease the specific language of the military profession (Acronyms,	.668							.711

Abbreviations etc.)								
I understood how the Army contributes to fulfilling the goals of the Romanian army	.813							.773
I know what the military organization expects from me	.884							.817
I know how the military should cooperate and collaborate in their work groups	.703							.711
I know the duties and competences of officers with different specializations than mine		.766						.779
I know how one can progress in the Romanian army		.827						.776
I have a clear vision of my future activities in the Romanian army		.757						.702
I know the society's demands and expectations from me as a future military		.591						.545
I understood the command style used in the Romanian army						.660		.621
I understood how to operate with specific tools of the military profession (equipment, weapons etc.)						.768		.685
I understood how to operate with specific tools of my specialization						.737		.643
The interaction with my colleagues in the academy had positive influence on my professional development							.520	.657
I am pleased with the experience I gained in this military educational institution							.701	.640
The training program of the the academy offered me a broad perspective on the							.857	.745

skills needed in the military career.								
In the academy I learned to work in groups and teams.					.548			.663
My experience in this academy showed me clearly my role and my place in society					.854			.632
My experience in this academy helped me to find out what achievements I want to have in my social life.					.821			.777
Eigenvalues	2.76	2.52	2.42	2.22	1.98	1.92	1.78	
Percentage of total variance	10.33	9.34	8.98	8.23	7.35	7.13	6.6	

4. Discussion

Following the factor analysis, 23 statements were detained that were grouped into seven factors.

The first factor, named *Knowledge of characteristics of the occupation*, is composed of four items that relate to the possession and easy use of a language specific to the military profession and to understand how the Army contributes to meeting the goals of the Romanian army, the expectations the military organization has from the students as future professional soldiers and ways of cooperation and collaboration in work groups soldiers are serving.

The second factor, named *Role clarity*, consists of four items that relate to the mastery of knowledge about the duties and powers that soldiers from all military specializations must have and also to career advancement means in the Romanian army. Also, this factor includes items referring to knowledge of the requirements and expectations that society has from the professional military and also to the fact that students have gained, from the process of socialization of the academy, a clear vision of their future activities in the army.

The third factor, named *Knowledge of organizational rules and values*, contains two items which relate to the understanding of essential organizational behavior rules in

accordance with the requirements and values of the Romanian army and the style of the military organization management (the chain of command, personnel policy, etc.) and an item which relates to understanding how the work that students will develop in the future can be included in the overall activity of the military organization.

The fourth factor, named *Clarity of organizational goals and structure*, contains three items that relate to the knowledge and understanding of goals, objectives, functions, structure and organization of the Romanian army.

The fifth factor was named *Group integration* and it contains three items that relate to the fact that, following the experiences of the academy, students have learned to work in a team, gained a clear vision of the place and the role they will have in society and on the goals they want to meet socially.

The sixth factor, named *Task clarity*, contains items related to the understanding gained by students on the command characteristics used by the Romanian army, the mode of operation with specific tools to the military profession (equipment, weapons, etc.) and with tools specific to the specialization they have been formed in.

The seventh factor, named *Satisfaction with socialization outcomes*, refers to the state of

student satisfaction about the positive influence of interactions with colleagues on their professional development and to the fact that the academy training program offered a broad perspective on the skills needed in the military career and it provided them the experience necessary to professional understanding.

5. Conclusions

Within the military organization there operates a powerful social control oriented towards the institutional imposition and maintaining of normative patterns, towards a strict centralization and a strict hierarchy. The rules of behavior in interpersonal relationships are clearly defined by the military regulations and the status-role system has a very high degree of formalization. Functions are clearly defined in terms of duties, responsibilities, level of authority and place in the hierarchy. Cohesion and continuity are maintained through discipline, through unconditional subordination and compliance that are designed to eliminate the lack of predictability from the military behavior and activity.

The manner of conducting the formative process within the military organization has an overwhelming influence on the success of socio-professional integration of young officers. Made properly, the resulting organizational socialization properly internalizes patterns of conduct, accepts organizational rules, enables the adaptation to the requirements of employment and collective behavior, the commitment to the organization etc.

Students who responded to our questionnaire deemed that in the process of socialization of the academy, they have acquired a clear understanding of the characteristics of the occupation, roles and tasks they will perform, values, goals, rules and organizational structure. Also, students are satisfied with their level of integration in the group and society and also report a high level of satisfaction with the results of the socialization process. The factors identified following analysis enroll in five of the six dimensions of socialization identified by Chao et al.: performance proficiency, people politics, language and organizational goals and values.

An effective program of socialization has long-term effects on both employees and the organization because it increases the person-organization fit and person-job fit: „when characteristics of people and the work environment are similar, aligned or fit together, positive outcomes for individuals such as satisfaction, adjustment, commitment, performance reduced stress, and lower turnover intentions result.” (Ostroff & Judge, 2012, 4)

The success of socialization programs depends on the quality of organizational socialization tactics, of orientation programs, training, coaching and mentoring used by the organization. As demonstrated by Allen (2006) socialization tactics reduce uncertainty and anxiety about the shock of entry into the new environment as effect, increasing the capacity to adapt to it and acquire behaviors, attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to conduct new activities.

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