

Motivation for choosing an officer career

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Abstract. Changes in the security environment and opportunities in the modern world present increasing challenges for the armed forces of democratic states to staff their structures. The article examines the issues related to the motivation for choosing the military career of an officer. Based on a survey conducted with cadet candidates and a comparative analysis with previous research, the main variables influencing the choice of the officer profession and joining the armed forces are derived. The obtained results could contribute to the improvement of the current system for motivating military personnel and increase the image of the military profession.

Keywords: military profession, motivation, personnel

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of motivation in modern professional military armies in democratic countries is considered by many authors due to the fact that these organisations face the challenge of recruiting qualified and motivated personnel on par with other employers in the free labour market. Nowadays, due to freedom of movement, globalisation and easy access to information, the opportunities for people of working age are great, and the restrictions imposed by military organisations are often a deterrent to job seekers.

The analysis made in previous studies [15], [16], [17] shows that motivation has a complex structure and is inherent only to the individual or personality, being characterised by a high degree of consciousness [1]. For this reason, it is considered by authors such as Taylor [2], Mayo, Ouchi, Maslow [3], Herzberg [4], Vroom [5], McClelland [6], Skinner [7], Murray, Porter and Lawler [11], Adams, Heider and Kelly, Locke, Kohn [8], Bandura [12], Thomas, Lancaster [13], Pink [9], Lawrence and Nohria [14], etc. Each one of them develops his own theory of motivation and discusses the factors that are predominant in the motivational process. We will focus on a compilation of these theories, deriving the thesis that when looking for a job, external factors related to the working conditions have a predominant influence, while when retaining a job, the dominant influence is the

motivational factors related to the nature of the work itself. External ones correspond to the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy, and their absence directly affects the choice of occupation because they are visible to the environment surrounding the organisation. Internal ones are related to the specific workplace and lead to an increase in job satisfaction. In other words, a person's satisfaction is the result of the work itself, and dissatisfaction stems from the conditions in which he works. Bad working conditions repel employees, but suitable ones attract them. Routine demotivates them, and interesting work satisfies them. [17]

The aim of the present study is to establish the main motives (factors) for choosing the officer profession and present their importance and interconnectedness.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of the motivation for choosing the officer profession is based on a methodology developed specifically for the needs of the present study, based on data collection by means of a survey. The object of the study is one target group (category) – cadet candidates at Vasil Levski National Military University.

The scope of the research is the number of respondents by category:

- male cadet candidates – 68 persons;
- female cadet candidates – 12 persons.

The total number of respondents is 80.

To achieve the objectives of the empirical research, a questionnaire [19] in Bulgarian was developed. It includes two main parts: the first part – passport, and the second part – questions structured by groups to reflect the opinion of the interviewed persons.

The passport part includes general information about the respondents.

In the second part, nineteen close-ended questions are structured, to which the interviewees should answer. The possibility of giving an answer is in the form of a Likert

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scale, i.e. it is formulated as an assessment with which the respondent may agree (or disagree) to varying degrees.

The scale contains five grades as follows: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – medium; 4 – relatively high; 5 – very high.

Question twenty is open-ended and the respondents can give an answer freely, in the form of a text. The survey was conducted in April 2023.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results of the conducted survey was prepared on individual or group questions from the survey card, considering the opinion of all surveyed categories.

Question № 1 of the questionnaire is formulated as follows:

'To what extent do you feel that the choice of the military profession is personally yours?'

The results for question № 1 are shown in Fig. 1, and their analysis indicates that the majority (95%) consider to a relatively high or very high degree that the choice of the military profession is theirs.

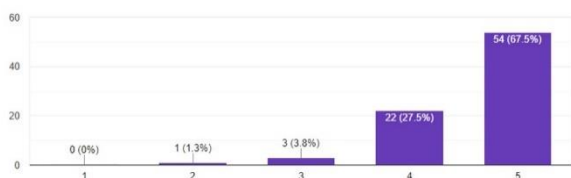


Fig. 1. Response to question № 1

Questions № 2 and № 3 of the survey are phrased as follows:

Question № 2: 'To what extent were you familiar with the character of military activities before joining the Army?'

Question № 3: 'To what extent did your friends or family influence your decision to join the armed forces?'

The analysis of the results for questions № 2 and № 3 indicates that the number of respondents who were or were not aware of the nature of military service before joining the armed forces was approximately the same. Over 32% of the respondents said that their friends and family did not influence their choice of a military career, while over 21% said the opposite. More than 36% cannot give a clear answer, which indicates that the combination of personal motivations in interaction with the opinion of family and friends has led to the intention to make a decision to apply.

Despite the responses given on the interview questionnaire while applying, more than half of the applicants stated that family, relatives and friends connected to the military contributed to or had an influence in relation to the initial impulse to apply.

Questions № 4, № 5, № 6, and № 7 of the survey card concern the prestige of the military profession and the respondents' opinion of its current state and how it has changed over time.

Question № 4: 'To what extent do you think the military profession is prestigious in society?'

Question № 5: 'To what extent do you think the prestige of the military profession is increasing?'

Question № 6: 'To what extent do you think the prestige of the military profession was higher back in time – before?'

Question № 7: 'To what extent do you think the prestige of the military profession is higher now?'

The responses to the questions indicate the unanimous opinion of the respondents (over 92%) that the military profession is prestigious in society. More than 81% of respondents are of the opinion that the prestige of the military profession is increasing, but they cannot express a clear opinion about the comparison of the prestige of being in the military before or now. This shows that the respondents either do not have a good idea of the reputation of military service over the years or the answers they give do not correspond to the specifics of the questions.

Question № 8 of the questionnaire is formulated as follows:

'To what extent do you think the following factors are important in choosing a military career?'

It should be noted that in the article, the concepts of motive and motivation factor are identical.

This question is structured into twenty-one sub-items containing various motives (factors) influencing the choice of a military profession. In this way, the respondents are given the opportunity to indicate what, in their opinion, is the degree of importance of each of the mentioned factors.

Part of the results for question № 8 are shown in Fig. 2, and it is clear from their values that the respondents have put four factors first with almost equal percentages – the opportunity to work in an organisation with clear rules (93%), to work in a team (92%), to serve the homeland (91%), for career development (91%), and second, with the same percentages, are the security and predictability of the workplace and the possibility of working in an international environment (87%), and thirdly – the possibility of working with weapons and equipment (86%), followed by the possibility of wearing a uniform (85%) and receiving free education (over 82%).

In his report, D. Dimitrov wrote: 'Patriotism is a special motive in the activities of military personnel. Without being a patriot, it is impossible to become a reliable defender of the Motherland.' [18], which reflects his opinion that patriotism is one of the main motives for a military career.

The other important motives that are highlighted are the opportunities to participate in missions and operations outside the country (78%) and receiving a good remuneration compensating for the deprivations and adversities resulting from military service (77%). The opinion of those interviewed is also unanimous that important reasons for joining the army are the opportunities for early retirement (76) and the social status of the profession (75%).

If we compare the answers to this question with the results of an identical study [15] (Fig. 3) conducted with Bulgarian military personnel in 2018, obvious differences can be found. In the study conducted in 2018, the factors related to remuneration, early retirement and job security were listed in the first place. The explanation for the discrepancy between the significant factors in the two studies is probably rooted in the fact that in the 2018 study, servicemen had accumulated experience in military service, and the idealistic urges generated by intrinsic motivation were displaced by the absence of purely hygienic factors based on unsatisfied physical needs.

The results of another similar study [17] conducted with over 82% of US military personnel in 2019, shown in Fig. 4, show that the respondents put first the opportunity to participate in missions and operations abroad (80%), and second – the opportunity to serve their country (78%), followed by the opportunity for career development (75%), the opportunity for working with weapons and military equipment (71%), for acquiring free education (67%), for working in a team and in an international environment (65%). The opinion of the respondents is also unanimous that the main motivation for joining the army is remuneration (56%), security and predictability of the workplace (54%), and early retirement (54%, as the right for it in the US armed forces is acquired after twenty years of service).

Comparing the three studies, the internal motivational factors are clearly visible in the studies from 2019 and from 2023. In the study from 2018 with Bulgarian servicemen with experience in the military, they are displaced by the external factors related to working conditions, since they are not satisfied. However, these factors are also evident in the 2019 study with a prevalence of US military personnel, as it is no secret that these factors are the reason many expats and poorer applicants join the military for citizenship, free education, good pay and a number of social benefits. The patriotic motivation expressed by the candidate cadets indicates that they were willing but inexperienced and had not faced with the typical domestic problems of the military. The unrealised announced intake in the last few years shows that internal factors alone are not sufficient to fill the large number of announced candidate cadet places. The efforts of the University management to increase the cadet scholarships have finally been crowned with success, and from the beginning of 2024, they are around the level of the minimum wage for the country. It remains to be seen whether this is a sufficient motivator for entering the military education system, although it alone is unlikely to produce the desired result.

The remaining factors motivating the choice of a military career generally overlap.

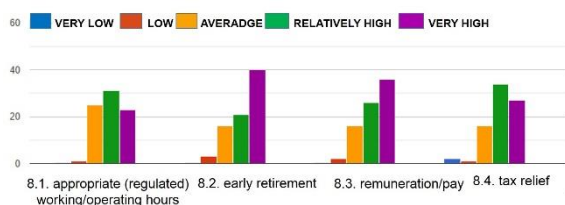


Fig. 2. Response to question № 8 from 2023

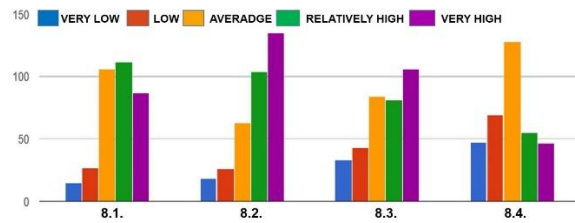


Fig. 3. Response to question № 8 from 2019

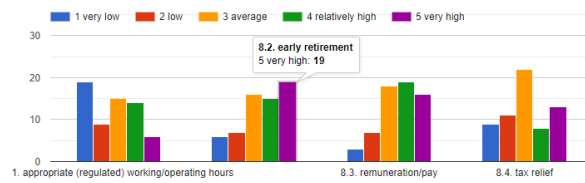


Fig. 4. Response to question № 8 from 2018

As less significant factors for choosing the military profession, the respondents indicated appropriate and regulated working hours, restrictions on personal rights and freedoms, tax benefits and freedom in making decisions at the workplace.

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 connected with the experience of the interviewees and the specific situation in the armed forces of different countries.

Question № 9 of the questionnaire contains six sub-questions and is formulated as follows:

‘To what extent do you feel you received information about applying to the University/armed forces from the following sources?’

From the answers given (Fig. 5) on this question, we can conclude that the main sources of information are the website of the organisation/Military University (73%), followed by the information provided by family and relatives (58%), friends (51%), and advertising campaigns in schools, ‘Be a soldier’, etc. (43%). It should be mentioned, however, that the initiating information comes primarily from people connected to the military, such as relatives, close people, and friends, and only after an interest in the military profession has been provoked, information is sought on the University’s website. This means that the public is not aware of the possibilities of service in the armed forces and the nature of the military profession.

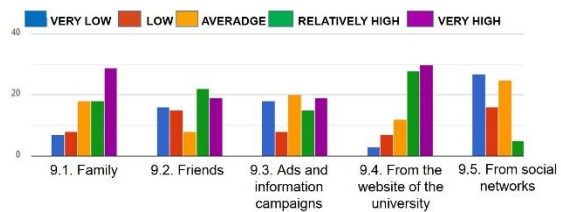


Fig. 5. Response to question № 9 from 2023

Question № 10 of the questionnaire is formulated as follows:

‘To what extent do you think that the frequent legal changes regulating the conditions for exercising a military profession influence the personal choice to enter the University/armed forces?’

The results of question № 10 indicate that almost 34% of the respondents consider the negative impact of legal changes in the army. The answer to this question shows that the respondents do not yet have the experience and the necessary information to give an unequivocal answer.

Questions № 11 and № 12 of the questionnaire concern the interrelationship between the choice of the military profession and resource provision, the state of armaments, equipment and infrastructure. The questions are phrased as follows:

Question № 11 – ‘To what extent do you think that interest in the military profession has decreased due to systematic and insufficient resource provision?’

Question № 12 – ‘To what extent do you think that interest in the military profession has decreased due to obsolete equipment, weapons and infrastructure, and the delay in their modernisation?’

The results of question № 11 show that almost 38% of respondents believe that resource provision is insufficient, which adversely affects motivation in the military. Comparing the responses given to this question with those from the 2018 survey, it is not difficult to spot the difference. In 2018, over 80% of the Bulgarian military stated categorically their dissatisfaction with resource provision [17]. In many cases, this leads to the demotivation and departure from the military of qualified personnel faced with the adversities of military service caused by the lack of material resources.

Comparing the responses to question № 12 of the 2023 survey with that of 2018, the differences in opinion contrast very strongly. In the survey from 2018, the respondents were categorical (more than 75%) that the morally outdated equipment, armament and infrastructure as well as the delay in their modernisation lowers the interest in the military profession. The responses to the 2023 survey of officer candidates are the opposite – over 31% of the respondents agree that motivation is not affected by modernisation. Candidate cadets still have no real idea of the actual state of the equipment and its provision; therefore, their motivation cannot possibly be at a low level or negatively affected.

Question № 13 of the questionnaire is formulated as follows:

‘To what extent do you think civil-military relations in your country are effective?’

The results on this question indicate that the respondents cannot give a definite opinion on it. This could be due to poor awareness of the issue of civil-military relations or taking them for granted at the level they are – average.

Question № 14 of the questionnaire is formulated as follows:

‘To what extent do you think that if the relationship between the public and the military improves, interest in the military profession will increase?’

From the results of question № 14, it is clear that about 83% of the respondents are consolidating around the opinion that interest in the military profession is directly proportional to the strength of the ‘society-military’ relationship. The results of the studies conducted in 2018 and 2019 are similar.

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

The questions are formulated as follows:

Question № 15: ‘To what extent do you think the public is aware of the activities of the armed forces at this time?’

Question № 16: ‘To what extent do you think a military career is popular in society?’

Question № 17: ‘To what extent do you think the media needs to promote the military profession?’

Question № 18: ‘To what extent do you think civilians are aware of military career opportunities?’

The analysis of the results of the questions shows that the majority of the respondents (more than 42%) believe that the public is not familiar with the activities of the military at the moment, and about 39% cannot give an unequivocal answer.

The answers to question № 16 show that over 41% of respondents are of the opinion that a military career is popular in society, and again, there is a great percentage of those who cannot judge (38%).

The majority of respondents (75%) are of the opinion that the media should be actively used to popularise the military career because the public is poorly informed about the possibilities of practicing it. Almost 40% of the respondents are of the opinion that civilians are not aware of these possibilities, and 35% cannot judge.

The analysis of the results of these questions in this and the previous studies are identical and show that there is a need to improve the ‘society-military’ relationship, which would lead to an increase in interest in the officer and military profession in general.

Question № 19 of the questionnaire is related to satisfaction with the choice of the military profession.

Question № 19: ‘To what extent do you think choosing a military career will meet your expectations?’

From the analysis of the results of the questions, it can be said that the majority of respondents (81%) are of the opinion that a military career will meet their expectations. The answer to this question indicates that cadet applicants have high expectations for the military profession, but subsequently they have to be justified or rejected.

Question № 20 is open-ended and is worded as follows: ‘In your opinion, what would motivate you to join the army today?’

Most candidates gave an answer to this open question.

Some of them are as follows: ‘Desire for the profession and love for the country.’, ‘Improving personal qualities.’, ‘Serving your country and wearing a uniform.’, ‘Secure work.’, ‘Security in the profession and pay.’, ‘The

opportunity for development and the hierarchy.’, ‘Wearing a uniform.’, ‘The military provides many opportunities for career development and secure employment after graduation.’, ‘The order, discipline, security and organisation.’, ‘The fact that I will serve the country motivates me, the secure career, early retirement and many other benefits.’, ‘I am motivated by the choice to develop in BAF through Vasil Levski NMU.’, ‘Because I want to serve my country.’, ‘Work in the service of the nation.’, ‘I am motivated by the order and discipline in this environment.’, ‘I am motivated by the fact that I will serve the country and have a safe and a good job.’, ‘Opportunity for career development and on a personal level as well.’, ‘Patriotism and the great scope for realisation in the country and abroad.’, ‘The military provides opportunities for development that civilian life does not offer.’, ‘The privilege to serve my country.’, ‘Career and personal development, building new relationships and friendships, getting a quality education.’, ‘The opportunity to serve my country and career development.’, ‘I am motivated by the fact that serving in the military is vocation and responsibility.’, ‘The sense of duty to the country, new friendships and the fulfilment of a childhood dream to study at NMU.’, ‘What motivates me is that all my relatives had access to government jobs, specifically the security we get after graduation. For me, wearing a uniform is an honour and a dignity.’, ‘Getting a high-level education and good realisation.’

The analysis of the results on this question shows that, in the first place, more than 2/3 of candidates indicate the patriotic reasons for joining the army, such as service and duty to the country. Workplace security, discipline and order are listed in second place. In third place in the hierarchy are the good opportunities for career development and receiving free education, followed by early retirement, wearing a uniform, the opportunity to build new friendships, work in a team, etc.

As less important motives, character building and desire to try something new and different, work with clear rules, desire to work in an international environment, etc. are mentioned.

The results of the conducted research led to the following conclusions:

The choice of the officer profession is individual and conscious, but often family and friends are the ones who contribute to it by sharing information, experience and family traditions. The majority of those interviewed shared that they are familiar with the nature of the officer and military profession in general, it is prestigious, but not popular in modern society. It is necessary to increase the awareness of it, as well as the opportunities to do it.

The analysis of the motives for choosing an officer’s profession puts the factors related to the nature of the work itself in combination with patriotic motives in the first place, and the factors characterising the workplace in the second place. Of particular importance are remuneration, opportunities to participate in operations outside the country, and social benefits. The comparative analysis of this study and the study conducted in 2018 shows that first-hand information, through accumulated experience, changes the motivational structure, placing first the external factors describing the specific workplace

and the organisation, and second – the internal factors related to the nature of the work itself. That is, in order to reach the internal motivation, it is necessary to go through the external one, corresponding to the factors from the lower levels of Maslow’s pyramid. When the satisfaction of these factors is reached, motivation through the work itself is inevitable, and physical motives begin to lose their importance.

There is a similarity with Galbraith’s theory about the influence of the system of motives – compulsion; monetary remuneration; identification; adjustment. In his research, Galbraith found that a paradox related to the monetary motive occurs: ‘The higher the level of remuneration, the less its value relative to other motives.’ [10] He finds the explanation for this not in the decreasing and insignificant value of money, but that with the increase in income, in most cases, the dependence on the specific workplace decreases. At the same time, the element of compulsion will also decrease, leading to identification with and adjustment to goals and devaluation of money as a motive.

The studied factors show that motivational behaviour has a complex structure and is influenced by the awareness of job seekers. The more informed they are about the nature of the work and the characteristics of the workplace, the more informed choices they will make.

The analysis of questions related to civil-military relations confirms the linear dependence of the strength of the ‘military-society’ connection and the interest in the officer profession. The officer and the military profession in general are not desirable nowadays despite the conflicts in Europe and the Middle East. Popularisation is needed by conducting media and information campaigns with the aim of popularising it and raising its prestige.

It is necessary for those in power to realise that the officer and military profession in general in peacetime is a profession like any other, and apart from patriotic motives and the nature of the work itself, it must be financially, materially and socially secured in order to be competitive in the labour market. Modern generations have different perceptions of the world and expectations of work. They hardly tolerate limitations and want goals to be achieved quickly, leading to the desired end result. The conducted research shows that the profession of an officer is still prestigious, but contrary to this statement, the applicants for it and for joining the armed forces are decreasing at an alarming rate. It is necessary to build a motivational model for attraction and retention in the armed forces, which takes into account the modern realities of the labour market combined with the changed expectations of new generations. Everyone knows the saying, ‘A nation that does not feed its own army will end up feeding a foreign one!’, but the problems are still swept under the carpet.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the results of the conducted research shows that the choice of an officer’s career is independent, but is influenced by the opinion of family and friends. The officer profession is losing its popularity in society and there are fewer and fewer candidates for it. The motivation for its choice has a complex structure composed of various external and internal motives

(factors). In the first place, the factors related to the nature of the work itself stand out in combination with patriotic motives, and secondly, the factors characterizing the workplace. Of particular importance are the remuneration, opportunities to participate in operations outside the country and social benefits. Each of these motives alone cannot solve the problem of motivation. An up-to-date interrelated model needs to be implemented, comprising all the main motivational variables, in order to fill the shortage of personnel not only for officers, but for military personnel in general.

In today's globalised information society, motivating staff is a difficult task. All information is one 'click' away, and if one wants to attract motivated and qualified personnel, meeting the needs of the military organisation, one should meet the expectations of job seekers. The problem of the lack of officers is getting worse and will not tolerate delay. Immediate action is needed to fill the growing vacuum and build a modern military to meet the threats in today's security environment.

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