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MILITARY DECISIONAL PROCESS

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Abstract:

The military decisional process is a method of analytic approach for the variants of action and, thus, a means that helps the commander and the general staff in solving the problems properly. A complete military decisional process is an integrated part of planning, while it focuses on details and achievement. This kind of process usually corresponds to cases when assessments and operation plans are drawn up, when a new mission is planned, or for the general staff training, so that a military decision can be taken

Key words: The decisional targets, decisional variables, commands and control, commander, decisional criteria, military decision, mission, Operational Order, Operational Plan

1. Introduction

To decide means to choose among various variants of actions, taking into account some criteria and then selecting the one which is considered the most advantageous for fulfilling some targets. The choice can only be made if the set of the decisional variants has at least two elements. The decisional act characterizes the decisional situations with a reduced complexity, namely the situations that ask for decisions with repetitive nature. The decision maker knows very well the variables involved, therefore there is no need to gather information and to analyze it. For most cases, the decisional acts have an empiric nature, as they are based on the experience and intuition of the decision makers.

For most military actions one has to take multiple decisions that are part of an integrated plan and this is the reason planning becomes so important. Planning aims at drawing up an action order and the analytic aspects of taking a decision characterize all the hierarchical levels during operations [13].

2. Elements of the decisional process

From the management point of view, the decisional process includes several phases conducted by leading persons, while involving some departments and specialists, in order to adopt, apply and evaluate a decision. [6].

A decisional process includes the following:

- The decision maker;
- The set of the decisional variables;
- The set of the decisional criteria;
- The decisional targets;
- The environment;
- The set of consequences [2].

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The decision maker is represented by the person or the set of persons that is going to choose the most advantageous decision from several possibilities. In a military organization, both at the national and at the department levels, the decisional element is represented by the commander, who decides on the way the missions are achieved.

The set of the decisional variants can be finite or infinite. In order to choose the optimum variant, one should use either a series of methods that corresponds to model properties, mathematical or so, or the qualities and the knowledge of the decision maker in terms of decisional situation. In determining the set of the decisional variants, the commander is counseled by the general staff. The tasks of the general staff officers include the information disclosure, the elaboration of estimates, recommendations, plans and orders as per the commander's intention and operation plans. The commander will use all the general staff means in order to identify and analyze all the actions of his own armed forces and of the enemy's. [12].

The set of the decisional criteria is represented by the decision maker's points of view which isolate reality aspects within the decisional process. In the management of the military organization one uses a series of criteria as: the importance and urgency of the mission, the risks involved, the possibilities of action, the commitment rules, the enemy's weak points, the possibilities of destroying and so on. The estimates based on the analysis of the situation performed by the general staff for the commander provide the clearly understanding of the factors related to the mission, so that a decision can be taken.

The decisional targets represent the levels of the decisional criteria which correspond to the situations of the objective conditions sought by the decision maker in applying their decision. The main target is represented by achieving the mission given by a superior, while all the measures are taken so that the armed forces found in a favorable situation at the end of the military operation.

The environment is represented by the set of internal and external conditions of the organization. The conditions refer to the general background where the organization develops, as well as all the factors that influence it. The elements that influence the way a mission takes place and the information needed for taken decisions are: the structure of forces, the type of mission assigned, the disposing of forces, the possibilities of fighting, the strong and weak points, the limits and constraints, the available resources, as well as other data as the moods and the preparedness of the soldiers.

The set of consequences includes the potential results that may be achieved according to each decisional criterion and to each state of objective conditions by applying the decisional variants. In order to decide and act faster than the enemy, the commander and general staff focus on the situation and anticipate the course of action. In case he has a clear picture of the decisional situation and of the courses of action out of which he has to decide, the commander must foresee consequences and finality for each of the variants. By transposing the possible results of each course of action, the one in charge for taking a decision will be able to pick up the most appropriate choice. [5].

After a thorough analysis based on various criteria of the environment, the managerial decision involves the following:

- The set of variants should have at least two elements;
- The finality (one or more targets to be achieved);
- The influence of the actions and/or of the behavior of another person except the decision maker, by choosing a variant [6].

In case one of the conditions is not fulfilled, the process will not be a decisional one. Therefore, without several decisional variants, the choice will not be possible. If there

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is no finality, namely one or more targets to be achieved, the process will not imply an action, so there is no decisional process. In order to have a managerial level decision, its application should influence the activity and/or the behavior of another person except the decision maker, because the management process itself is an activity through which a person determines other persons (subordinates) to perform activities that lead to achieving the established targets.

The commander is the central element of taking a decision process in a military environment. The main characteristic of order and control is taking decisions, which means exercising authority and leading armed forces in achieving military missions. The commander is responsible for commands and control.

The command represents the authorized act of drawing up decisions and operation order and the control represents the act of supervising and determining this process. The command and control system includes a complex set of elements, as well as a way of organizing and using the resources by the commander in order to exercise the command and the control of the military actions for their efficiency.

3. The mechanism of the military decisional process

The act of command includes a complex of activities and means through which the decision process takes place, as well as the way of achieving it. In any military managerial process the command represents the link between the elaboration phase and the fulfillment phase. The control activity assesses and improves the way and the extent to which the decisions are fulfilled in accordance with the specific requirements of the mission.

Planning the operations is a major part of the command and control process. Planning represents a complex process of assessing and analyzing [32] the armed forces, respectively the enemy, as well as the mission, in order to determine and evaluate the possible procedures for achieving the targets. The aim is to choose in the end the best method of fulfilling the established targets. Planning can be considered as an anticipated decision. In cases the decisions deal with a larger field of action or detail, one should assess more thoroughly all the factors related to these issues and this assessment must be done in due time, within the planning process. Planning can be useless in cases the decisions are simple or the commander has a comprehensive experience.

The military decisional process is a method of analytic approach for the variants of action and, thus, a means that helps the commander and the general staff in solving the problems properly. A complete military decisional process is an integrated part of planning, while it focuses on details and achievement. This kind of process usually corresponds to cases when assessments and operation plans are drawn up, when a new mission is planned, or for the general staff training, so that a military decision can be taken.

The military management, which is the process of taking a military decision, must solve issues that apply to other fields of activity, too but it distinguishes itself by the specific of the military action. The decisions that must be taken in cases of armed struggles are different than any other decisions, first of all because of the dynamics of actions, as well as because of the requirements and risks when it comes to battle field. This background requires major options and each error can lead to serious consequences. Decisions are more difficult to be taken in armed struggles because of the permanent pressure involved. The actions are hard to be implied and the result is influenced by a various random factors.

From the managerial point of view, taking leading decisions means to organize and systemize the commander's activities, so that the activities take place in a logic sequence. The decisional process involves several distinct phases: [7]:

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- Drawing up (preparation) the managerial decision;
- Identifying and defining the issue which requires decision;
- Establishing the decisional targets and criteria;
- Gathering , processing and selecting the information needed in preparing and taking decision;
- Information analysis;
- Drawing up the decision variants;
- Determining the best solution;
- Assessing the consequences of each possible solution;
- Analyzing and comparing the decision variants;
- Choosing the best variant;
- Justifying , communicating and controlling the decision
- Achieving the decision;
- Communicating the instructions for applying the decision;
- Exercising a permanent control, focusing on advising and improving.

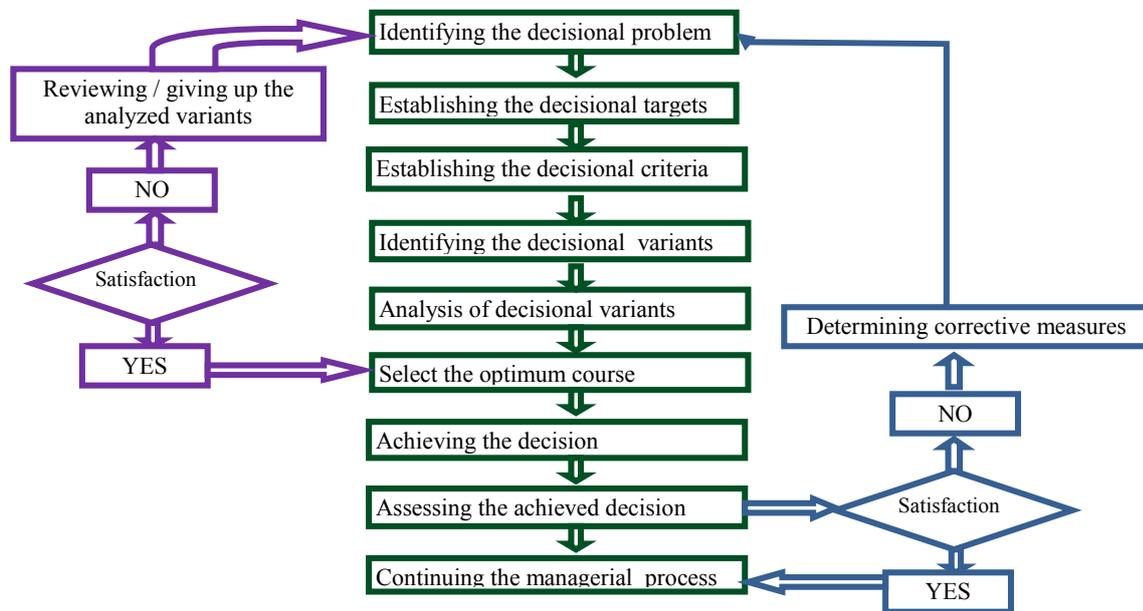


Fig.1 Phases of a Decisional Process

The process of drawing up a decision within a military organization is similar, but it also presents several characteristics that are specific to army.

Taking a military decision is a complex process that includes: receiving the mission or the target to be achieved by the military unit, the strategy of the general staff, sending the preliminary orders, appreciating the necessary period of time, analyzing the situation, studying the data reports, calculations and proposals that will be completed in the moment the decision is made. During the process of receiving the decision, the commander is the one who should analyze the situation as well as possible, so that the best and most appropriate decision is made. The commander's decision is unique and it comes out in the moment the commander takes the responsibility for achieving it and his responsibility is confirmed through his signature. During the whole process, the commander can study and analyze the course of actions, while preparing the decision with the help of the entire staff (members of the general staff, deputies, and chiefs of staff). Nevertheless, the outcome of

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these actions will have an individual character, as the commander is the one who takes the decision.

In a military organization “the process of taking a decision represents a detailed, elaborate and multiphase algorithm which is used when there is enough time for detailed planning” [10].

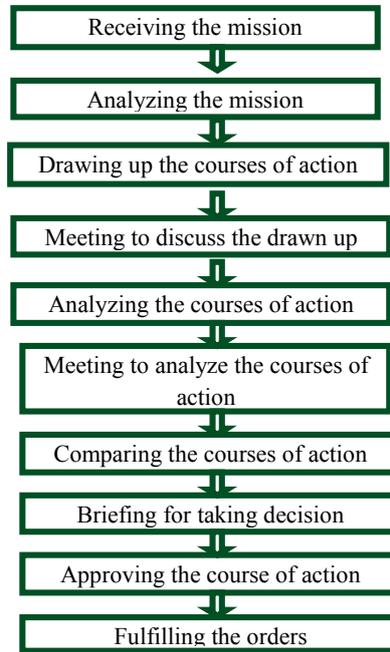


Fig.4. The phases of the complete decisional process at the level of the military

3.1. Receiving the mission

The decisional process begins in the moment some superiors in rank send orders, but the mission can be implied by the commander or the general staff. This is the moment when the planning process starts. Planning aims at incorporating the efforts of the commanders into a general, effective and coordinated [4]. Efficiency is higher when this process takes place simultaneously at all the echelons. When the commander receives the mission, first he assesses the situation and the mission and draws up the initial guidance for planning, in order to establish the major planning issues, the necessary period of time for preparing and completing the mission, the members of the coordination group, as well as the future phases of the decisional process. After establishing the most important changes in the situation of the armed forces and of the enemy, of the targets in the superior echelon, of the main duties, limitations and constraints, one will draw up and issue the warning order to the subordinate and support structures.

3.2. Analyzing the mission

It is an essential phase of the decisional process. One must clearly understand the details related to the principles and strategy of the superior echelon commander: mission, targets, intention, the desired final state, political, economical or military constraints, and the conditions for a successful mission and the planning ideas. [9]. The activities of analyzing the mission include the following phases [32]:

- *The analysis of the order received from a superior echelon*: understanding the data from the superior echelon, the mission and the deadline for achieving it;

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- *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield – IPB* [11]: a systematic, continuous process that analyzes the threat and the environment used by the commander in order to understand the battle field and the options offered by it both for his own armed force and for the enemy's. Based on the information received, the commander will be able to establish the way of using his battle forces at maximum capacity in the critical areas on the battle field;
- *Establishing specific, implied and essential*: Out of the OPORD – *Operational Order* or OPLAN – *Operational Plan* received from the superior echelon one shall choose the duties that are clearly assigned to the military structure, namely the implied assignments which must be carried out in order to fulfill a specific duty. The essential duties are decided after the detailed analysis of that specific order and they represent the priority activities in determining the essential duties. [13].
- *Identifying the available means*: updating the information related to the fighting capacity and the constraints related to the armed forces , in order to assess the possibilities to fulfill the assignments;
- *Identifying the constraints*: forbidding to perform some actions or to use the armed forces through the order received from the superior echelon.
- *Determining the certain data and the critical assumptions*: the certain data represent all the information known about its own armed forces and about the enemy and the critical assumptions on present or future situation are made within the decisional process if it is needed and in case there are no certain data available;

3.3. Elaboration of the courses of action:

In order to develop the *Courses of Action – COA* one should use CPG [10]. The course of action is , a plan or a scheme that includes the logic sequence of actions that are going to be performed” [13] by the armed forces in order to fulfill a mission. The courses of action present the ways the main mission assignments are carried out. These assignments should comply with the planning guidance made by the commander and they refer to the major issues that can prevail over the enemy's strong points, while protecting his own forced army and means. The operational design is thus fulfilled.

The more possible variants for using forces and planning the actions, the greater flexibility has the commander in taking a decision.

In the first phase, all the courses of action shall be presented through a scheme and a brief explanation. Each course of action must answer the following questions: what type of operation takes place, what forms and procedures are used, when the action takes place, how are the available forces and means used, which is the outcome of the operation, why does the operation take place. The courses of action are elaborated in general terms, but they must contain enough details in order to be distinguished. It is the differences that answer the questions beginning with where and how.

A re-assessment of the accepted risk level should be made before outlining the possible variants of action. The assessments of the general staff will be related to the military information, operations, logistic support, medical support, travel capacities, communication and IT systems, financial resources, cooperation between the civilians and military, as well as the alternative operational capabilities.

The experts in the field shall establish the action variants based on their ideas. They will decide on the way of using forces and means in such a way as to fulfill the major assignments of the mission. The activity ends in the moment all the ideas and suggestions regarding the variants of action are exhausted and the specific details will follow next

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3.4. The meeting to inform on the elaborated courses of action

It is an optional activity which is organized at the commander's order, so that the elaborated variants can be reviewed. Within this meeting, one should present aspects related to the enemy's possible courses of action, updated information about the battle field, reformulated mission, the commander's intention and the intention of the superior echelons' commanders, the elaborated courses of action— the text and the graphics, ideas about the effects of the enemy's course of action, implications of each COA on its own fight power as compared to the enemy's, the arguments that lead to the operational design for each variant of action.

After the planning group informs the commander on the updated situation, the meeting is concluded with his approval to continue the decisional process, taking into account some or all of the elaborated COA variants. In case all the variants are rejected by the commander, the general staff must go again through the phase of elaboration the courses of action. [10].

At the end of the debates, the commander gives the general staff additional indications in order to develop then ones of the variants, so that each COA should be completed and appropriate. Moreover, he can interfere from time to time in order to eliminate or review the ongoing options out to add a new variant.

3.5. The analysis of the courses of action

After approving the elaborated courses of action, the members of the general staff in charge improves them, adding necessary details, in order to get a detailed analysis and simulation verification.

The next phase deals with carrying on the analysis of the courses of action and testing them to be sure that they still comply with the requirements, fulfilling the major assignments and targets of the mission and justifying the estimate costs. It is also necessary to make a distinction between each course of action, underlining their advantages and disadvantages.

The COA analysis is made through verifications performed by the general staff, in order to pin down the strong and weak points and to decide whether the variants are advantageous or not.

Meanwhile, each course of action is checked through simulation, as opposed to each possible course of action of the enemy [32]. The simulation is done through war games, while assessing the chance of getting a successful course of action.

3.6. The meeting to inform the commander about the analysis of the courses of action

After the COA analysis, only in case there is still time, the chief of the general staff chairs a meeting to inform on the analysis of the courses of action, so that all the members of the general staff can understand in details the results of the war game and of the other analyses.

3.7. The comparison of the courses of action

This phase examines the results obtained during the analyses and simulations, the advantages and disadvantages based on the criteria which the commander considers to be important. Each officer of the general staff assess the courses of action and after that identify, from his own point of view, the enemy's most appropriate course of action. When one compares the courses of action, he should use any methods he thinks it is proper

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to lead to the best solution to be communicated to the commander. The most used method is the decisional matrix.

3.8. The briefing for taking a decision

The general staff shows the commander the viable courses of action within a *Decision Briefing* – DB [10] and he decides whether he approves it or not. The briefing must provide the commander with all the necessary information so that he can justify his decision. During the decision briefing, the issues analyzed in the previous phases of the decisional process will be presented again in order to choose the best variant.

3.9. The approval of the course of action

At the end of the decision briefing, the commander can decide to approve COA proposed by the general staff, or another course of action, with or without changes. He can decide on a combination of certain issues of various variants of action, out of which a new COA comes out. The commander's decision must be a clear declaration on the best course of action that he agrees with [14]. Depending on the types of orders received from the commander, additional decision briefing might take place.

Moreover, the commander gives additional advice on priorities, preparation of the orders and for performing the mission.

3.10. Achieving the orders

Based on their commander's decision, the general staff immediately issues a warning order to the subordinate structures. Then, the personnel in charge develop the selected COA into a conception of operations and an operation plan which provide a clear and exact presentation of the commander's intention regarding the way of fulfilling the mission, including the final desired situation. The orders are reviewed and approved by the commander before they are sent to the subordinates.

4. Conclusion

Therefore, the military decisional process includes several logical steps and phases, each of them developed depending on its importance and the hierarchy level of the decision.

As mentioned above, in the army, all the activities needed for taking a decision are specified under the forms of algorithms in the specialty rules. These regulations approach only the theoretical part of the decisional process, which is generally used as an ideal model for the military managers. These models are drawn up for the commander and his way of acting rationally in a world of certainty. From the theoretical viewpoint, the military manager must keep under control each situation; get all the necessary information, so that in any moment he can act according to a clear and pre-established algorithm, which can lead to successful action. From the strict military point of view, the detailed and algorithm decisional process represents a way of improving the military decisions.

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