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**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIAN ARMED
FORCES CAREER MANAGEMENT**

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Abstract:

Professional development plays a central role in human resource management systems. It helps the employees to perform better in their jobs but also helps organizations to fulfill their goals in a more effective way. In Romanian Armed Forces, professional development is mandatory and a career management system has been designed in such a way that professional development is unavoidable and desirable. My paper will show how and why the professional development plays a central role in career management system within MoND.

Key words: career, professional, management, rank, position, promotion, development.

1. Introduction

The aim of my paper is to identify the relationship between the professional development of military personnel in MoND and the career management system designed by the Ministry of National Defence through its specialized structures. The documents I base my analysis on are the following:

- The Law No. 80 / 1995 "The statute of military personnel";
- The order of the Minister of National Defence No. 30 for approval of the "Instructions for recruitment, selection, professional forming and military career evolution in Romanian Armed Forces";
- "The Guide of Military Career", approved by the prime minister Order No. 106 from 9th February 2011.

The method employed in doing my analysis is a straightforward one and it requires a throughout reading of those documents and selecting only relevant information that adds value to the limited scope of my paper. Intricacies and detailed information will be dismissed, I will try to position my point of view at a higher level, so that all details covered by the reference documents would be particular cases or exceptions to the overall picture of career management. Actually, my method, if succeeds, will provide the core mechanism through which advancement in career should be made possible by any military personnel.

During my lectures I identified two such mechanisms, that are virtually separate but practically they are intertwined. The two mechanism are the cores of two career development systems: position, or job promoting system (which in civilian world is the

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real career management system) and the rank promotion system, which influences very much the former.

My paper is structured according to those two systems, attempting to depict both of them to reach their core.

Before dwelling into analysis, I will introduce in Chapter 2 some useful and broadly accepted concepts that pertain to career management theory.

In Chapter 3, the career management system will be analyzed in its relationship with the concept of *position*. In fact, this should be the only management system that counts, but the particularity of the military system introduces another level of management, the rank promotion system which will be studied in Chapter 4.

In both systems, professional development has its roles. This paper is trying to identify those roles and if succeeds, it will provide a unified mechanism that drives the professional development and advancement in career of military personnel.

As a secondary aim of my paper, I will identify any weakness or flaw of the career management system but I won't suggest solutions since it is beyond the purpose of my work.

2. Overview

Professional development is a function of human resource management aimed to improving the performance of individuals or group of individuals in an organization (Wikipedia).

Depending on the stage of the individual carrier of employees, professional development may take one of the following forms:

- *Training* : an activity that focuses on the position that an individual currently holds;
- *Education and development*: focused on the future positions an individual may potentially hold;

The stakeholders of professional development are the following:

- *the sponsors* of training and development are senior managers;
- *the clients* of training and development are business planners;
- *the participants* are the employees that are subject of training;
- *the facilitators* are Human Resource Management staff;
- *the providers* are the specialist that deliver the training.

Career development is a process initiated by the employees or the employers within an organization aimed to improving employee's work experience. Career development is necessary for the retention of any employee, no matter what their level in the organization chart.

3. Career management system

In Romanian Ministry of Defence, a military employee can be of one of the following types: military personnel (officers, non commissioned officers and warrant officers) and professional (ranked or not) soldiers.

The process of filling the spaces is split across a career development pipeline that basically contains the following stages:

1. candidates recruitment
2. candidates selection
3. candidates admission
4. *initial professional training*
5. *perpetual professional training*

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6. career development

3.1 The initial professional training (forming)

There are two ways in which admitted candidates can follow the military career path:

1. the *direct way*, by which they become students of a military school or university
2. the *indirect way*, by attending and graduating forming courses organized by different military educational/training institutes.

3.2 The perpetual professional training

According to [1] the perpetual training of military personnel consists of any form of training or learning if graduated from military or civilian universities, military schools, international institutions and the list is kept open as provided it complies with specific regulations and laws.

3.3 Career development

According to [1], the career path of a military personnel consists of the succession of *positions* from the hierarchy he or she will be assigned to, starting from the employment to the retirement or departure. *Stricto sensu*, career development has nothing to do with military ranks, at first sight, but the strong relationship between them will be revealed in subsequent chapters.

When speaking about one employee's career, the central point is the concept of *position* (or function, job, etc.). In any hierarchically designed organization, employees should strain to advance as soon as possible from entry level positions to the highest ones, up to the executive or policy maker positions if possible. Thankfully, [1] states that the evolution in career is up to the employees will, provided that there are well defined routes established by the responsible structures from MoND (army branches, HR departments, etc).

The document points out some general criteria that could influence one's career advancement, such as:

- level of education
- the forming way (direct or indirect)
- the place of positions in the hierarchy
- the knowledge and skills acquired by the employee
- and some reference to external norms regarding rules about promoting in rank and positions.

Since this general description doesn't help much in depicting clearly one's individual career, I will need to go deeply into the matter and find more detailed criteria, constraints and references. One first step was quite easy since the same document gives more specific criteria few paragraphs away. Those criteria must be met in exactly this order for one to be promoted on a new position:

1. the need for military personnel in MoND units
2. personal options of the candidate according to his/her own career strategy
3. the position specifications
4. for executive positions, professional experience needed as following:
 - 2 years in execution positions in hierarchically superior units
 - or 2 years in executive positions in hierarchically inferior units

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- or 1 year in the same unit in one or more of the next inferior positions
- 5. the place that the candidate has been given by the *selection board* depending on:
 - knowledge
 - skills
 - aptitudes
 - competence
 - and professional experience acquired.
- 6. participation to international operations could be an advantage.

Looking at those criteria, specifically at number 5, there are two things that drive my curiosity further. One is the introduction of the *selection board*, which will be studied later in the chapter, and not at least, the list of criteria that looks like pertaining more to cognitive psychology field, there are big words there, and I don't know if *competence* doesn't somehow include *knowledge* and *skills*, or maybe *professional experience* includes all of above. And since I don't know I will search the mainstream on the Internet and come up with a digression in the next paragraph in an attempt to better clarify the concepts.

3.4 Cognitive psychology in a nutshell

The broadest concept seems to be the "competence". I will rely on Wikipedia since it summarizes more theories from different authors and gives a broader accepted definition of concepts. In short, here is what Wikipedia says:

"*Competence* is the ability of an individual to do a job properly. A competency is a set of defined behaviors that provide a structured guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of the behaviors in individual employees. [...] Some scholars see "competence" as a combination of practical and theoretical *knowledge*, cognitive *skills*, behavior and values used to improve performance; or as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified, having the ability to perform a specific role. For instance, life, management competency might include systems thinking and emotional intelligence, and skills in influence and negotiation."

Then again, the same site gives a nice definition of the aptitude:

"An *aptitude* is a component of a *competency* to do a certain kind of work at a certain level, which can also be considered "talent". Aptitudes may be physical or mental. Aptitude is not developed knowledge, understanding, learned or acquired abilities (skills) or attitude. The innate nature of aptitude is in contrast to achievement, which represents knowledge or ability that is gained through learning. "

Also, there are four phases of competence: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence and unconscious competence. What employers look for is the unconscious competent people. Competence comes only with experience, so what's left from the 5th criterion is only the competence. Professional competence should be good enough.

However, this small diversion does not affect much my understanding of career development and does not necessarily introduce a flaw in the system. But what worries me is about who is going to assess that competence. Meet the *selection board*.

3.5 Selection board

The selection board is defined in [2] art. 5.

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It's role is to provide transparency and equal chances to all the candidates concurring for a position. The committee's goal is to make a hierarchy of the candidates, based on their competencies and decide who is accepted to fill the desired position.

The members of the board are designated from the pool of employees of the structure where the position is vacant or from higher structures when it is the case. The assessment of the candidates competencies is made by the members that should theoretically have the same level of competence or better. However, subjective opinions might occur anytime, and without objective methods and/or technology that would support the members decision, the selection process is weak. Lack of professional personnel or worse, lack of personnel might also add to the weakness of the selection procedure. Although this can't be considered a *flaw* of the career management, it could be seen as a *weakness*.

3.6 Position specifications

Another important criterion for selection of one candidate is position specifications. Those specifications are defined by at least two parties. Firstly, the position is initially planned when the organizational map of the structure has been designed. In this initial phase some constraints and conditions are defined in order to filter out some candidates that does not comply with the conditions. Then, the structure itself might introduce additional constraints and conditions, according to the level of competence that is needed for that position. As a result, the job description of the position will include all the information necessary for any candidate to decide if he or she is suitable or not for that position.

Position specifications is the only criterion where the link between the career path and the professional development is made.

Position specifications is out of reach of the selection board, it is an objective criterion, so it can be considered reliable, while job description is more restrictive and contains requirements that must be assessed by the selection committee.

Among many requirements that do not make the subject of this paper, specifications include requirements about the *rank* and *formal education*. A position is associated with a military rank. While this does not necessarily imply that only employees with that rank should apply for the position, it introduces a level of complexity that will be studied in a future chapter after the concept of military rank will be depicted.

As regards the *formal education* requirement, this is the specific place where the professional development of military personnel interacts with the career path. For the purpose of this paper, *formal education* is a generic term that includes all the form of military or nonmilitary education that one has been subject of. To make a clear distinction between the formal education and professional competence, it must be said that the competencies of an employee doesn't necessary steam from formal education, but as a general rule it does. However, formal education is not enough for one to gather and develop high quality competencies, there might be as well needed long term experience and other personal traits that are beyond the formal education. This might be another *weakness* of the career management.

3.7 Position promotion scheme

In Fig. 1, a simplified scheme of the promotion of military personnel is shown. The thicker dotted arrow represents the unreliable process of assessing employee's professional competence by the selection board.

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The thinner dotted arrow represents the non mandatory requirement about rank of employee to match the rank associated to the position. However some constraints do exist, and they will be shown in the next chapter.

The black arrow represents the only requirement that is mandatory and objective in the same time. This requirement is about the formal education that an employee must have in order to fill a position.

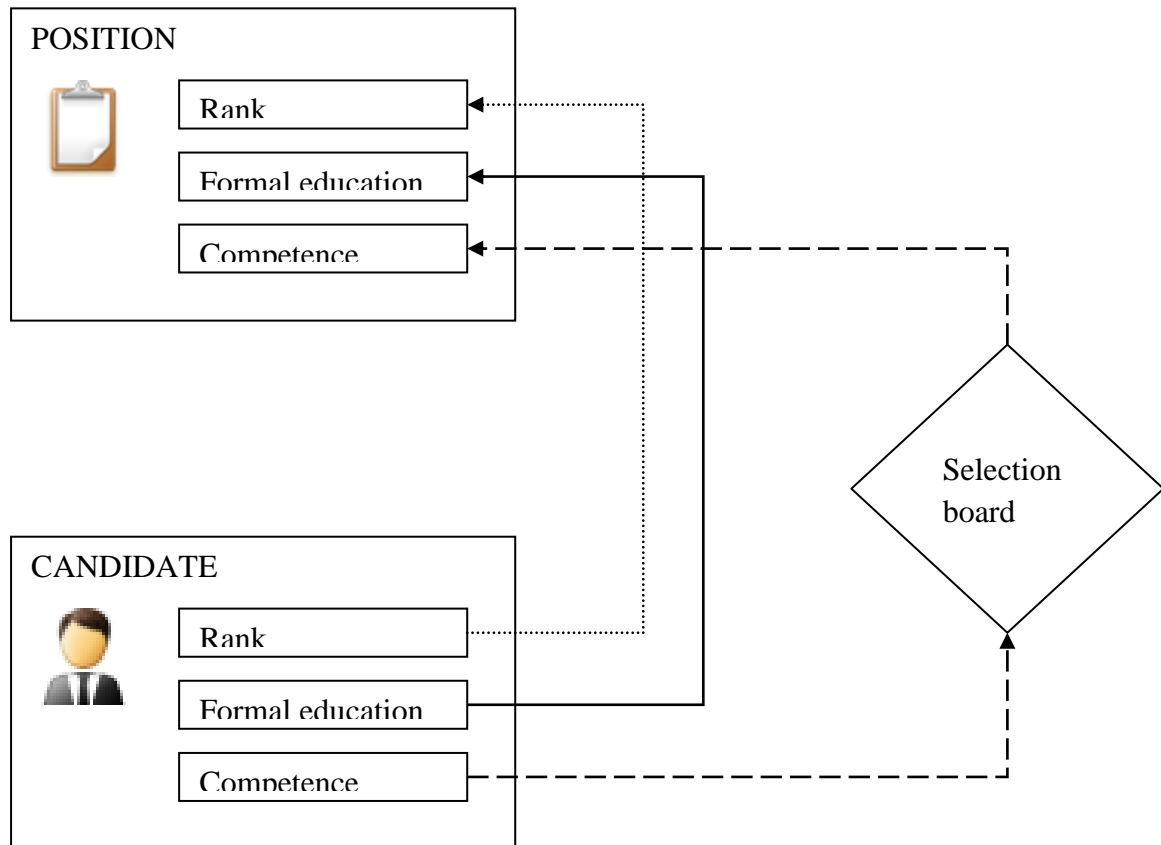


Fig.1 Scheme of the promotion of military personnel

4. Ranks

As in any military organization, MoND's employees are given military ranks. Military ranks system is the core of the career development, even though [1] and [2] don't include ranking system in the career path as a mandatory requirement.

The career path is strongly intertwined with the ranking system. In this chapter I will look at the rank system as defined in [2] and in the next chapter I will show how ranking influences professional development which in turn influences the career path of an officer.

A rank is a right, propriety of the employee while a position is an option, a temporary status [2] art. 3 .

Military personnel have the right to attend any form of academic education, military or civilian, PhD, or post academic studies. However, some military professional education is restricted to inferior ranks and mandatory for other ranks.

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4.1 Rank advance system

According to [2] art. 54, the advancement in rank of an employee in times of peace is due after he or she has completed the stage in the previous rank. There is, however, one constraint, as stated by [2] art. 55, stipulating that the employee should have been filling a position associated with the new rank for at least one year.

Just like promoting employees in higher positions, there are some formal education requirements when military personnel get rank updates, but the only ones that are stated as mandatory in [2] are the following:

1. upgrade to major (or equivalent) conditioned by graduating from a specific specialty course. No other supplementary formal education required;
2. upgrade to colonel (or equivalent) conditioned by graduating from a career course for colonels and a supplementary formal education requirement, in the form of military or civilian academic education.

4.2 Employing ranks

Ranked personnel is employed on positions within the organization's structure. According to art. 74 [2], the employment of ranked personnel on specific positions should take account of the needs of the army, the professional competence and the moral behavior of the employee. Since the first two conditions have been discussed in the previous chapter, a little attention should be directed towards *moral behavior*. The only place where moral behavior of officers is mentioned is the evaluation document issued once in a year for each officer. Based on that document, the officer is liable to rank upgrade or not. This is how the human resource management's function of *evaluation* interact with career development. The evaluation function has practically a very small role in career development of military personnel, but the reason of why it is so is beyond the scope of this paper.

A ranked employee can fill positions that are at one level higher than employee's rank. There is however a restriction that is worthy to be mentioned here since it might be a source of a weakness: no military personnel should be a subordinate of someone with a lower rank([2] art. 74). Moreover, an inferior rank officer filling a superior rank position is more than a weakness, it is a *flaw* of the career management system, since the professional competence and formal education requirements of the position could be eluded by employing an inferior rank officer on that position. The inferior rank officer would have the power of decision of a superior ranked officer but in the same time he or she lacks the formal education or even the professional competencies. This is clearly one case in which professional development is bypassed and it is made possible by the regulations.

4.2 Rank upgrade scheme

In Fig. 2, the simplified schematic logic of rank upgrade is presented. The black arrows represent mandatory requirements. The dotted arrow is also mandatory but only for two ranks.

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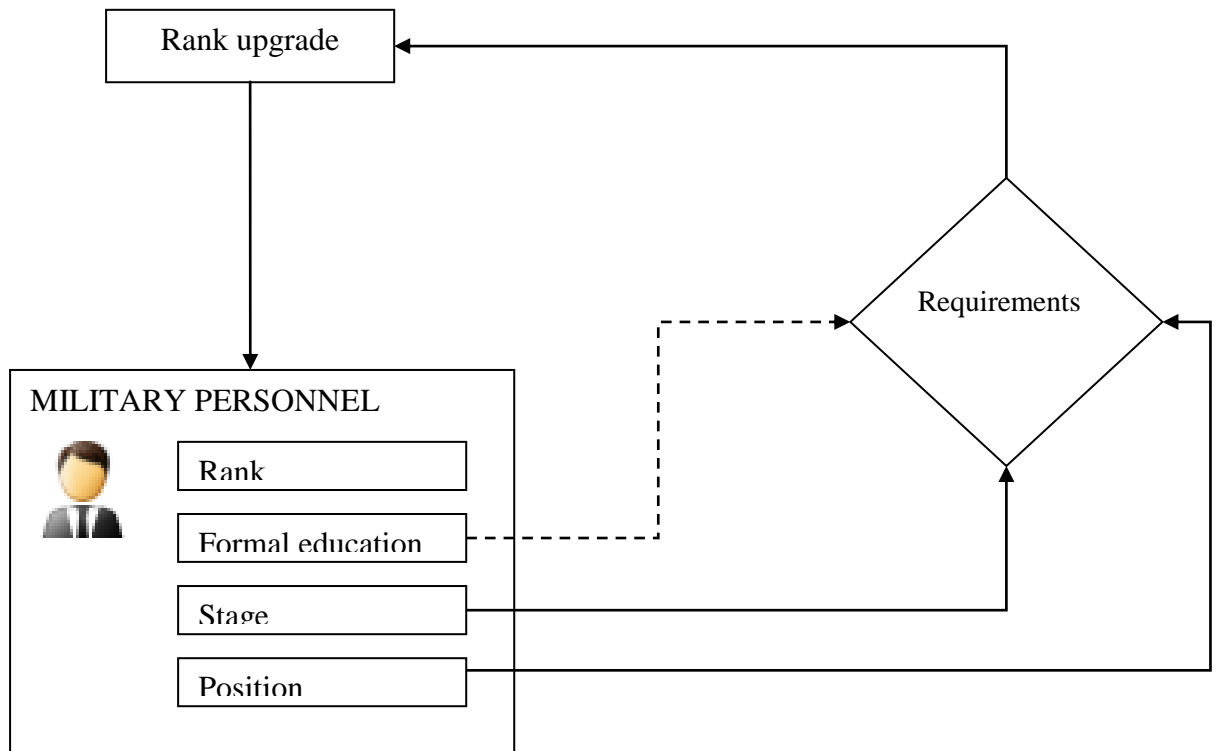


Fig.2 Rank upgrade

5. Positions, ranks and professional development

In order to establish the link between the two career management systems identified in the previous chapters it is mandatory to have a closer look at the types of formal education that military personnel is able to access during career path.

As stated in [2] art. 12 military personnel has the right to attend any form of academic education, military or civilian, PhD, post academic studies and courses. However, some of those forms of education may have different roles when talking about ranking advance system versus position advance system. The next paragraph briefly summarizes the types of courses and other professional education that officers need to attend for rank upgrade and/or for professional development.

5.1 Formal education

Base and career courses are two forms of initial or perpetual education that are aimed to train the employees for the next rank ([2] art. 70). These courses are held in military educational institutions. Besides base and career courses, there are many options for professional development that MoND offers to its employees. Below are summarized the main types of courses and studies that employees might have access to during their military career (the list is focused to officers case only):

- *Base course* for forming the officers as a military specialist or platoon commander;
- *Advanced course* for advancing to captain rank. This course is about training officers as military leaders;

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- *Headquarters course* for advancing to major rank. It develops headquarters work competencies;
- *Post academic professional development course* for advancing to lieutenant colonel rank. This course is a career course that provides professional competencies in the specific field that the job description requires.
- *Post academic professional development course* for advancing to colonel rank. This course is a career course that provides leadership competencies in order to fill a managerial position within military units;
- *Post academic strategic leadership development course* for colonels that may fill positions associated to the rank of general. This course provides competencies in the field of strategic leadership, military operations and resources planning;
- *National security programs and courses* aimed to prepare officers to fill the chief or commander position within the central structures of MoND;
- *Master academic studies* - in civilian or military institutions - develop inter-arm knowledge and command competencies, improve professional competencies, etc.
- *PhD academic studies* in military or civilian institutions.

5.2 Ranks vs. professional development

It should be clear by now how advancing in ranks foster the professional development of employees. The career path designed by the responsible structures of the MoND is very restrictive regarding the professional competencies one must have in order to be ranked at a certain rank. No one can surpass or avoid career courses or academic studies requirements that define a rank. These are not optional and moreover, advancement in ranks is mandatory in Romanian Armed Forces, up to colonel rank. That means that the professional development is mandatory, a thing that is not always true in civilian companies career management systems. As a conclusion in studying the rank system I could say that it is not the professional development that generates the ranking process but by the contrary, ranks requirements force employees to develop their education, knowledge, skills and abilities, in one word, the professional competence.

5.3 Positions vs. professional development

As opposed to ranking system, positions are optional. There are many positions at different levels of management hierarchy that can be filled by personnel with the same rank. What makes the difference between them is the professional competence, in other words, the formal education that military personnel may have when they candidate for a position. In this case, it is only the employee's choice that drives professional development further, so unlike in ranking system, professional competence determines the career path that military personnel is willing to follow.

5.4 The big picture

The bad news is that there is no a big picture at all when trying to combine the two systems. In a way, the ranking system gets precedence because it is the only one that would enforce professional development of employees. Improving professional competence by upgrading ranks gives employees the chance to fill higher positions, all along their career path. This is how the ranking system influences the position promotion system, by silently supporting it.

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Meanwhile, the employees that are willing to promote to higher positions have their chance by choosing the professional training that is specifically needed to fill the desired position. However, there are some limitation here, and the most obvious one is the requirement that nobody can fill a position associated with a rank that is one rank higher than the actual rank of the candidate. Another limitation is that there is no possibility for one to have subordinates with higher ranks. This is how ranking system hinder a little bit the promotion scheme.

6. Conclusions

Even though the scope of this paper was a very narrow one, trying to fit every piece of information on its right place by only reading laws and regulations is a puzzling experience. Hopefully I have managed to correctly identify all the details that had connections with professional development, filtered them out them and had a broad view about how important is professional development and where is its place in the career management system.

The career management system designed in MoND is complex but it is effective. As I showed in my paper, two subsystems could be identified inside this system: the rank advancement system and the position promotion system. They are intertwined, but it seems that, surprisingly, ranks system tends to initiate and foster professional development more than the position promotion system.

References:

- [1] *Law No. 80 / 1995 "The statute of military personnel"*;
- [2] The order of the minister of National Defence no. 30 for approval of the *"Instructions for recruitment, selection, professional forming and military career evolution in Romanian Armed Forces"*;
- [3] *"The Guide of Military Career"*, approved by the prime minister Order No. 106 from 9th February 2011.