TRAINING AND EDUCATION IN THE SERVICE OF MILITARY TRANSFORMATION

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The magnitude and challenges posed by the military transformation process cannot be overcome unless the personnel involved in implementing it is well trained and motivated, for this endeavor requires a set of special skills and knowledge. Therefore, this article attempts to present two possible tools to facilitate this complex process.

Key words: *education, training, military transformation, personnel, skills and knowledge.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Given the complex nature of transformation in general, and military transformation in particular, the hereby paper argues that education and training are essential for the success of the endeavor. In this respect, two concepts are suggested in order to facilitate the process while keeping the staff motivated: learning organization and total quality management. I support this idea starting from the assumption that the personnel's permanent education accompanied by the concern to offer high quality services and/or products play a critical role in any organization's success, the military one included. Since in the case of the military organization one cannot talk about products and services, I shall assume that the military must "produce' security and display professional conduct within the NATO and other international missions in which it takes part.

In order to support my initial hypothesis, I will examine the two concepts and then I will conclude upon the need for the education and training of the staff involved in the process of Romanian military transformation.

2. TWO LEARNING METHODS TO ENHANCE TRANSFORMATION

I would like to mention from the very beginning that the idea of combining the two aforementioned concepts is not new. As McAdam et al. (1998) argue, the two approaches share numerous commonalities in spite of the fact that their synergy has not been exploited in theory or in practice. Since I support their usefulness in our study, I shall start by defining them followed by an analysis related to their contribution to the optimization of military transformation.

2.1. THE CONCEPT OF LEARNING ORGANIZATION

The main characteristic of this concept is knowledge expansion, but not knowledge in its academic meaning. Instead, we refer to knowledge as a central hub of productivity, when learning itself becomes a way of working. Moreover, this type of organization changes continuously and creates all the necessary conditions for its members to learn permanently.

Although it may be regarded as a new trend or fad among many others in management theory and practice, learning plays a critical role in securing an organization's success and progress, as its employees' professional standard is the very guarantee of these aspects. In fact, it is all about building a professional and personal philosophy that emphasizes the permanent concern for knowledge and skill acquisition, which can only result in better professional performance, that is, better products and/or services (Hicks: 1996). Considering the synergetic principle according to which every employee's professional performance leads to the overall performance of the entire organization, one may assume that this permanent improvement will also result in the improvement of the organizational processes as a whole.

After examining the trends and contradictions displayed by the process of managerial development, Talbot (1997) identifies three elements of the learning process:

• education, which targets the acquisition of knowledge, skills, moral values and an understanding of some general aspects of life rather than a certain field of activity;

• development, which consists of becoming aware of one's personal skills by means of conscious and unconscious learning such as courses, experience, counseling or mentoring;

• training, which is a planned process of changing attitudes, knowledge or skills as a result of the gained experience, whose purpose is to obtain performance in a certain field of activity.

As far as the organizational learning methods are concerned, they comprise three techniques: case study, simulation and consultancy project (Jennings: 2002). According to the purpose of learning, every method offers advantages and disadvantages. Thus, the case study places the student in a neutral position, when he/she is free to explore certain problems in connection with theory by using his/her own analysis, communication and synthesis skills. On the other hand, case studies pose limitations because they do not present the entire image of an organization and consequently pose the risk of judging simplistically a certain context.

Simulation allows learning from a new situation in the absence of real and unnecessary risks, and also allows gaining some decision-making skills. Furthermore, this technique stimulates research, communication and team work, but displays one

significant drawback: it lacks the realistic dimension.

Finally, the consultancy project involves learning by doing and it takes place outside the classroom. More precisely, the subjects are placed in a real organizational context, and then they are asked to suggest both methods to improve services and/or products and ways to implement them. Projects must be realistic and doable, which means that learning takes place by taking risks and assuming their consequences, based on the idea that problem solving and confronting the related anxiety are viewed as natural elements of learning by doing. Other advantages of this method refer to the awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses as well as the strengths and weaknesses of one's partners. However, there are also shortcomings in this endeavor. First, it is essential that the process organizer and coordinator should know the participants very well in order to accurately estimate their ability to interact. It naturally follows that this method is time consuming and it does not guarantee outstanding results, because the participants may feel frustrated or overwhelmed by the encountered obstacles, which can lead them to superficial solutions.

As one can notice, each of the three techniques has good points and bad points, but one may consider using them alternatively, which may minimize the disadvantages and maximize the advantages of the learning process.

Although I strongly believe that searching for recipes for success in management is at least risky if not impossible, there are theorists who have tried to develop such recipes or models. I consider that their intention was not to find a generally valid template, but rather to offer their own vision and understanding of some organizational phenomena from their own personal viewpoints. In a way, we may regard management theories and models as lessons learned: they are the result of some real experiences and they reflect what the author understood from those situations, whose implications are synthesized and put at the disposal of other people who may find themselves in a similar context.

As Smith et al. (1996) point out, learning is a dynamic concept, and its use illustrates the ever changing nature of organizations, in which globalization and competition are fundamental components. In the authors' opinion, learning is a strategic capability of paramount importance for gaining competitive advantage. This stance contradicts the previous ones, which claimed that competitive advantage was due to the availability of the organization's measurable resources – financial, material, etc. – without paying too much attention to the organization's intangible resources such as intellectual capital or educational potential. Also, there has not been enough emphasis of the need to sustain this advantage in the long run by means of implementing an organizational culture centered on learning values.

Mention should be made that there is no one single resource able

to ensure organizational success. Instead, one should adopt a dynamic and synergetic manner of managing the organization by managing a bunch of its resources.

I cannot conclude this analysis of the importance of learning for organizational success without clarifying some aspects related to the significance of the terms "competitive advantage' and "organizational performance'. If a civilian organization – be it public or private – they are measured by means of profits or product/service quality, a military organization must use different tools. One method to do it is to take into consideration the way in which the Romanian military staff act within international missions, as their performance mirror quite accurately the system's level of efficiency and effectiveness by mission accomplishment or, in extreme cases, by the number of victims.

2.2. TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

This is defined as a holistic philosophy of business excellence which covers a wide range of terms such as leadership, strategy, policies, human, material, informational and financial resources, professional satisfaction, customer satisfaction, social impact etc. at the same time, this type of management is based on clear principles: leadership commitment, top-down communication, subordinates' empowerment, building a real team spirit, collective

responsibility and accountability for high service/product quality, and permanent concern for organizational processes improvement (Montes et al., 2003). Moreover, the cultural and structural change management – with clear consequences upon the process of decision-making at all hierarchical levels – is regarded as the main ingredient of organizational performance. We thus can conclude that total quality management is much more than a managerial fad. Next, I will briefly explain the importance of each of them in an attempt to delineate the connection between organizational learning and total quality management, as well as the way in which these two concepts can contribute to the transformation of the military system.

Leadership commitment. According to management literature, it secures the credibility of the entire process. Also, the leader must play two roles: to establish organizational values and to build the change infrastructure (Dale and Cooper, 1994). This has to unfold at every hierarchical level in order to make sure that the system is adopted at a total scale across the organization.

Top-down communication. This ensure the vital connection between the decision-makers and the subordinates, and also the cooperation and mutual support in every organizational process. An important benefit of it is the decrease in change resistance and system inertia caused by the uncertainty and suspicion associated to change.

Subordinates' empowerment and team spirit. Without these two ingredients, total quality management can be regarded as "humane autocracy' or "backdoor Taylorism', because this type of management is imposed from the top of the hierarchical pyramid and involves the use of some measurable tools to evaluate one's work performance. Consequently, total quality management must be based on autonomous and mature employees, able to make decisions and solve problems related to quality. This also leads to a flexible structure consisting of agile teams of professionals.

Collective responsibility and accountability for the work done. Since total quality management implies the permanent improvement of organizational processes, a frequent obstacle to its implementation has been the subordinates' fear of making mistakes. In order to overcome this barrier, the superiors must accept and tolerate the likelihood for this to happen and consider it a positive learning experience. This can only be done by creating a culture based on efficient and honest vertical and horizontal communication.

Permanent improvement of organizational processes. This is the dimension that completes the imaginary circle of total quality management and removes one of the reasons why employees may reject this type of leadership: the fear of job loss since total quality management could mean more work for fewer employees. On the contrary, by learning and professional improvement, employees become more and more valuable. On the other hand, superiors must devote more time to provide feedback to subordinates in order to correct potential problems.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the clear complex nature of these management models, as well as the difficulties their implementation entail, I consider that they are a viable solution for organizational process improvement in the military system, particularly if accompanied by organizational learning. In fact, I think that the two concepts have many common aspects, particularly the emphasis on permanent acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience. Both models stress upon the active involvement of the leaders in order to ensure the endeavor credibility as well as on identifying obstacles, making optimal decisions, constructively solving problems, and honestly communicating with peers, superiors and subordinates. All of these mean, in fact, a profound cultural change of the entire system, with a direct impact upon the whole transformation process.

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