GENERAL MILITARY HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND SPECIAL FORCES HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. A COMPARATIVE OUTLOOK

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The switch from conscript's army to an all volunteer force military brought new challenges for the military organization. This is more obvious in the human resource domain than in any other area. In the competition to recruit and retain quality personnel, the military organizations should strategically align the human resource management to the overall strategy. The challenges are greater for the Special Forces because the need for a rigorous selection process to recruit from within the military. The rift already in place between the conventional military and the Special Forces need to be overcome to transform the strain relationship into a positive sum game.

Key words: *human resource management, special operation force, all volunteer force, human capital, manpower, recruitment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Most of the countries define Special Operations Forces (SOF) (1) as being military and/or paramilitary forces that are specially selected, trained and equipped to conduct missions that other conventional forces cannot perform. The combination of highly skilled people, advanced technology and weapon systems, and innovative operational approach is the cornerstone in creating a force that although small is achieving disproportionate impact [1]

Throughout their existence, the Special Operations Forces developed a list of so called "SOF Truths": (1) humans are more important than hardware, (2) quality is better than quantity, (3) SOF cannot be mass produced, (4) competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur, and (5) most Special Operations require non-SOF support. As one can see, the SOF Truths are mostly human centric. Thus, there ought to be a strong emphasis on screening, selection and training of the individuals that will become Special Forces operators [2].

Human resource management (HRM) is a system of systems – manpower system, resource system and personnel system – that performs specific functions. Although there are a lot of similarities between the corporate and the military human resources management, there are also some important differences. The strategic importance of the HRM concept cannot be separated from the understanding of HRM evolution as a concept.

The shift from a conscript army to an all volunteer forces for military organizations generated a great deal of challenges from the human capital perspective. Having to compete for quality personnel in an external environment, the military organization needs to define and implement a coherent and comprehensive strategy to achieve its goals.

One significant difference between military HRM and corporate HRM is that military organizations recruit only at the entry level and then there is an upward

mobility from within the ranks. One the other hand, SOF selection is, in the most cases, based on internal selection from within the bigger military organization. The high standards required for selection in the SOF and the propensity for top quality military personnel to ascend in the elitist SOF community create the premises for a bumpy relationship between conventional units and SOF.

The evolutions in both advanced military weapon systems and in novel military concepts seem to gradually smooth the strained relationship between conventional army and SOF. This positive trend can be further developed to make the relationship looks like a positive sum game, especially in the area of competition for better military personnel.

2. HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. SOME THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This chapter is not intended to details all the human resource management (HRM) theory, but rather to provide a framework for better understanding the differences between corporate HRM and military HRM. Furthermore, it will try to answer the question if there should be a difference between conventional force HRM and SOF HRM.

2.1. Defining human resource management

Historically, HRM as we know it today, evolved from the nineteenth century in stages. Those stages were a response to changes in external and internal factors that impact differently on the organizations. The evolution in both the external and the internal environment, and the response to those changes led to the development of the human resource management of today.

Throughout the history, different theories shaped the way HRM evolved.

Initially, it was a paternalist approach by some employers, who took a father-like figure for their employees and established some kind of early welfare programs. Early 1900s was the time when the scientific management was developed in United States. This scientific management was further refined in the concept of assembly line. Both the scientific management and the assembly line development presented a mechanistic view of the people that rewarded the right work output with a "differential pay rate", and implemented management control [3].

The period between the beginning of First World War and the end of Second World War witnessed a combination from the manufacturing peak, government trying to regulate the employment and the implementation of welfare in personnel management to improve employees' performance.

The HRM as it is known today was developed in the late 1970s. The central tenet was the transition from the personnel management to the strategic role of HRM in reaching the broader organisational goals.

The HRM can be viewed from two perspectives, the so called soft HRM and, respectively hard HRM. Both are employee centric, but while the hard HRM has a marketing view of the people as a resource to achieve organisational goals, the soft HRM put a premium on employee commitment and has a constructivist approach [4].

Whatever approach one is taking, the HRM has to perform a number of different functions to find the equilibrium between the external factors and the one's internal to the organisations. Those functions can be generally described as: (1) planning, resourcing and retention; (2) recruitment and selection; (3) learning, training and development; (4) remuneration and rewards; (5) and employee relations [5].

2.2. Military human resource management

Understanding the specificity of military HRM becomeS important from the perspective of a military organization that is based on AN all volunteer force (AFV). This is especially related to the problems of recruiting and retention. The problems are quasi universal for the countries that switched from conscription to an AFV. In most cases, these problems are related to a declining motivation among young people to join the military because the changing in social values, the competition from the private market, higher level of education and usually low unemployment [6].

HRM includes all processes that facilitate the matching spaces with faces, or in other words the meeting of the demand with the supply. Although there are many similarities between non-military and military organizations, there are also some significant differences related to the way the HRM functions are performed.

One of the most important differences is the clearer, more stable job definition in the military than in the so called corporate HRM. The positive side of this clarity is also coming with a lack of flexibility.

Another difference is the long term impact of the recruitment in the military organization when compared with the non-military organisations. This is mostly because the military is recruiting only for entry level, and cannot do it for any level.

After the recruitment, the military promote from within, and only rank by rank. The promotions are related to the years in service, previous assignments, and experience. The previous particularities generated a strong requirement for the development of an elaborate and well structured in house training [7].

The corporate HRM and the military HRM should not be perceived as totally opposite, but rather as a continuum. As the military organization look more and more like a corporation in the case of an all volunteer force, the implementation of the alternatives borrowed from corporate world will most probably led to the improvements in terms of rewards, flexibility and organizational culture. In the same time, there are some downsizing aspects, mostly related to the weakening of the command relations and social values specific to the military's culture.

2.3. Special forces human resource management

At a first glance, it seems that Special Forces have the smallest problem in recruiting personnel. This assumption relies on the misperception that because of the inherent prestige of SOF, the problem is not to find enough capable people to recruit and retain them, but rather the high standards for selection, assessment and qualification.[8]

One aspect worth more attention is that in the vast majority of cases, SOF is recruiting from within the military organization. As such, if the military is facing problems with recruitment and retention, those problems are generally emphasized in the SOF case because of the high standards. In other words, if the selection pool is shrinking and the quality of personnel is decreasing, the SOF will be more affected than the whole military organization because of the high standards.

Another factor to consider in the SOF case is the time required for a person to become a high skilled operator. In the most cases, it is not only longer than for other branches, but also with the highest attrition rate. Therefore, if the military organization is facing problems in terms of the long time requirement for training the personnel, high attrition, high turnover, and low retention, those problems are in the most cases higher

with an order of magnitude in the SOF's case.

One aspect that is often overlooked is the marketing side of the recruitment for SOF. Inherently, there is a certain degree of secrecy related to the SOF operations. This propensity for secretiveness is hindering the way SOF marketing themselves in recruitment campaigns within the military organization. The image of SOF is usually centred on the kinetic aspects. While this may be good for receiving political and resource support, is also shrinking the pool of prospective candidates by perhaps, attracting mostly the "thrill seekers."

3. SPECIAL FORCES MANPOWER

Military manpower can be broadly defined as the systems and related processes to provide the right person, with the right qualifications, in the right position at the right time, or in other worlds to meet "spaces" (the demand side) with the "faces" (the supply side)

3.1. Military manpower in an era of an all volunteer force

Whatever advanced weapon systems a military organization has, what really makes the difference is the adequate number of quality personnel it can recruit, train and retain. The evolution related to both external and internal environment will likely pose a number of challenges to the military organization to meet the manpower requirement.

The problems related to the changes and dynamics in the social values, the labour competition, and education are just the tip of the iceberg. Some other challenges may not be so obvious. They are related to the evolutions in military technology, the emergence of innovative operational ideas, the rigidity of traditional military personnel management systems, and the growing costs most notably in the area of indirect benefits for military personnel [9].

Advanced military technologies and new operational concepts will require a different category of personnel. The military should recruit and train people able to reach not only a high level of technical expertise and able to integrate different platform in an innovative and comprehensive way, but also capable to innovate and assume calculated risks.

The main goal of military HRM is to support the organization to reach its goals. It should be linked with the organizational strategy, and also with people behaviour and characteristics. Based on the strategy and behaviour specific HRM processes should be developed and implemented. From this perspective, a strategically aligned HRM system has three inter-related processes: personnel management, compensation, and organizational structure [10].

The external environment differences between various countries and their different approaches to the transition from conscription based force to an AFV make the task to create a pattern that can be replicated very difficult. However, there are some trends that can be identified. First, the transition from conscripts to volunteers was followed by a reduced numbers of military personnel. Second, the reducing number of personnel required to man the AFV and the pool available from the personnel who had to leave the military establishment during the transition phase compensate the problem of recruiting quality personnel in the aftermath of the creation of AFV. And third, although the AVF is generally more cost-effective, there are significant increased costs in the transition phase from conscripts to AVF [11].

3.2. Special forces manpower challenges in an all volunteer force – competition for human capital

The development in the contemporary operational environment -

the latest ones being the rise of the so called hybrid warfare and the increasing terrorism activities - led to an increasing demand for development and employment of special operations to counter those threats. As such, there is an increased demand in SOF manpower. At the same time, in the countries that developed an AFV there are problems related not only to the recruitment of quality personnel, but also to the budgetary constraints that required a trade-off between the investments in the advanced military weapon systems and investment in the manpower area.

What differentiate SOF from the conventional forces are both the missions and the personnel conducted them. Whatever the perspective, the personnel is at the core: the types of missions required specially selected, trained and equipped personnel, or the specially selected personnel determined what type of mission will be carry out. Therefore, the nature of recruiting and selection process, and the specific personnel attributes of almost equal importance. Additionally, the costs associated with the Special Forces are higher than in the case of conventional forces. The sensitivity and high political risks inherent in the SOF missions make the cost of failure way higher than the cost of selection and training [12].

From the beginning of the relatively new of what we know today as Special Forces, there was always a tendency on behalf of the conventional military to reject them, or more exactly to regard them as mavericks. The causes lie in the SOF's different organizational culture, perceived lack of discipline, the independent status, and the competition for resources.

Probably the most important friction point is the competition for human resources. Most, if not all, of the military organizations relying on AVF have to compete for recruiting, selection and training for quality personnel in the context of external competition and a scarcity of defence resources. In the vast majority, SOF personnel are recruited from within the rank. The high standards imposed by the selection process and the prestige associated with the SOF membership led invariably to the best personnel from conventional units being attracted to volunteer for SOF units. What is aggravating these perceived "poaching," is the need for both conventional units and SOF units to select and retain the personnel with similar intellectual qualities required by the advent of new technologies and the evolutions in military concepts.

4. MANAGING SOF MANPOWER

The differences in SOF organizational culture and war philosophy tend to attract a different type of individuals into SOF units. Those individuals are usually capable of using concepts and methods alien to conventional army. Because these qualities are highly sought after by Special Forces, the entire process of recruiting, selection and retention is designed to select and retain people who pose them.

As a result of military organizations drawdown when switching from the conscripts to volunteers, the pool of potential candidates for SOF has decreased. If combined with the average rate of completing the selection and assessment phases for ascending in the SOF, and the decreasing retention rate, the aggregate net result is that Special Forces are losing more people than is able to produce.

The manpower requirements can't be met unless sufficient resources are provided for recruitment and retention. Studies has shown that by using a combination of three theories – expectancy theory, social justice theory, and transaction cost economic theory- can be used to provide performance incentives, increase the professional development, and control the retention incentives. [13] As such, a combination

of increasing the resources devoted to recruitment marketing, targeted bonuses, and benefits to enhance professional development could be employed to increase the recruiting and retention among Special Forces personnel.

4.1. A more flexible personnel management system

Faithful to the SOF truth of quality is more important than quantity, the Special Forces need to continue the efforts to ensure the right quantity of people are selected, trained and retain in the system, while maintaining the high quality of the personnel.

On the average, the SOF personnel account for no more than 5% of the military forces. However, the strength of Special Forces is the quality of those small numbers of people that are carefully selected, trained and provided with advanced equipment. To maintain a pool of potential candidates, there must be a continuous effort to target the best military personnel for recruiting purpose. One of the first steps is to create a database of the candidates by matching the profile of a typical SOF operator with the existing data bases for personnel record keeping.

The recruiting effort should be done in an aggressive manner by everyone belonging to, or who was part of, the SOF community, and does not only rely on formal recruiting means. This referral system should be formalized, and also incentivized if possible, thus making it one of the important tools for a ready available pool of quality candidates.

The high standards for accession into SOF community are well known. One of the least known aspects is that nowadays, the Special Forces are a tiered system, based on the mission's type and the risk of political fallout related to the failure in accomplishing them. Therefore, even within the SOF there is an ongoing tough process to recruit and

select people from tier 3 units up to tier 1. This upward "meritocratic" mobility required a somehow counterintuitive recruitment strategy for initial accession, by which the standards should become higher, and not lower, for entry in the Special Forces [14].

The schism between Special Forces and conventional military is well known. However, there are positive signs showing a better understanding and cooperative and integrated work between the two. Capitalizing on this positive trend and consolidating this footbridge, Special Forces should influence, securing the political support if needed, some changes in organizational design of regular units. Those changes should try to create a tier 4 type of units within the regular units, their primary missions being to address the lower spectrum of conflict, like counterinsurgency. The creation of these units will create a pool of potential candidates for accession in the SOF that are already pre-screened and have an initial SOF type training. One additional benefit will be the reducing of the rift between conventional forces and regular units by slowly overcomes the "us versus them" perception.

5. CONCLUSION

Finding a balance between external and internal factor require for the military organization, and even more for special force, to employ strategically the human resource management system. Understanding the subsystems and the functions performed by those subsystems and the differences between corporate HRM and military HRM is a must if military organizations want to successfully recruit and retain quality personnel in the open labour market.

The competition for quality personnel will require not only a better understanding of the practices employed in the corporate HRM, but also the implementation of tailored alternative

borrowed from it in the military. As the military organization looks more like a corporation in the case of an all volunteer force, the improvements related to rewards, flexibility and organizational culture will come with the price, especially in term of weakening of the command relationship and the alterations in social values specific to the military.

Transforming a strain relationship between conventional military and SOF will require a different mindset for the leaders of both. Transforming a zero sum game into a positive sum gain, especially in the competition for human resources, is the way ahead. The positive signs already shown in the operational area need to be extended in the resource area. For the future, the benefit of this understanding should go beyond operational and resources areas, and move towards a shift in organizational culture to overcome the existing biases and misconceptions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES
(1) The terms Special Operations Forces and Special Forces are considered interchangeable in this paper.
(2) *Expectancy theory* offers a model of how rewards for performance affect behavior.
(3) *Social justice theory* predicts that employees' perceptions of the fairness of a reward system are related to their motivation to perform.
(4) *Transaction cost economics theory* predicts that the optimal terms of employment relationships (which range from external, spot-market structures to internal labor markets and relational teaming between employers and employees) are context-specific.

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