

## *Original Research Article*

# Factors for the Optimum Functioning of the Individual in a Military Environment

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### Abstract

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When functioning in any environment, the individual falls under the impact of a lot of factors. Some of them are consciously perceived and by manipulating them, it is possible to optimize the results of human behavior. Another part of the factors remain hidden even to the doer themselves. Albeit hidden, some of them are active participants in the regulatory aspects of behavior while others are latent and are activated only under specific circumstances. The research has been carried out on a limited number of representatives of the command corps with certain command positions, which in itself is an objective criterion for the optimal functioning in a complex and riddled with controversial and sometimes mutually exclusive requirements towards the individual and to their physical and mental stamina, and sometimes even to their inherent programs for self-defense and the need for safety. The methodology that has been used is a multimeasure personality questionnaire adapted to the Bulgarian conditions by Velichkov, Radoslavova and Petkov. Data have been processed with SPSS-21. The analysis outcomes present a limited in its scope study aiming to reveal the role of certain personality traits and emotional states, the constellation of which is capable of optimizing individual behavior. Conclusions lead to the belief that the discovery of the optimal combination of traits and emotional states capable of improving the function of the individual in extreme conditions is the way of finding a working model for the selection of suitable for the realization of specific tasks individuals but also for the planning and implementation of programs for deficit compensation when training personnel who are to carry out such activities.

**Keywords:** Emotions, Optimal functioning, Personality, Traits

## INTRODUCTION

The assumption that different individuals react differently in identical situations is clearly demonstrated in several studies involving laboratory experiments on the impact of factors of the environment on the nature of the action (Ajzen and Timko, 1982). Moreover, it has been conclusively proven that even the same people apply different adaptive techniques in their being in different conditions. For example, in the study of the influence of the learning environment it was proved that some

newly-arrived students respond better to visual auditorium stimuli than others (Bakeev, 1974). Snyder (1974) has found out that the higher self-monitors ("Self-monitoring" is a term indicating the ability to self-control the behavior in compliance with others' expectations) are more experienced in modifying their behavior appropriately for their environment based on social requirements of the situation, and low self-monitors situate their behavior based on internal factors, such as beliefs, experiences,

etc. (Cattel, 1959). Ajzen, Timko and White (1982) have found out, that the intentions of the higher self-monitors more easily deviate under the influence of external factors than low self-monitors, whose intentions remain stable all the time (Crandall, 1984).

All this shows that the differences in adaptive techniques are directly influenced not only by differences in certain personality factors, but the configurations in which they are involved in each case. A configuration of personality factors can lead to behavior aimed at actively coping with the difficulties of the new environment, to attempt to change the very environment or self-modification to preserve the ego- identity and maintaining of the self-esteem. Another - to defensive behavior or seeking replacement behaviors associated with cognitive distortion of perceptions of the environment in accordance with their own expectations.

Since this paper discusses the functioning of the individual in specific in its nature environment - the Armed Forces, discovering that constellation of personality factors which presuppose optimum adaptation to the environment and productive functioning in it makes the study particularly relevant and practically useful.

The Army environment affects servicemen in one way or another. Its specific character is as follows:

1. Experience gained before entering military social experience, formed in a completely different environment, most often proves inadequate to the new conditions, and this raises a number of specific difficulties.
2. The natural social contacts of the military in the course of carrying out their professional duties during most part of the day are relatively limited.
3. In the course of carrying out professional military duties are solved problems and pursued goals that are fundamentally different from the civil ones. Although at first glance this may seem quite paradoxical it can definitely be said that in the military activities the destructive nature predominates. Regardless of how many creative moments can be identified in the end the military prepare to destroy material values and kill people, which is the essence and ultimate goal of the military profession. This by no means excludes the military from performing their duties by enlisting peaceful means as well, but the indisputable fact is that an inseparable functional feature of every and any military formation is to inflict maximum damage to manpower and military equipment of the enemy, which no doubt is associated with destruction and taking a human life. Naturally this causes conflicts in the system of values of the personality.
4. There are and aren't but sufficiently distinct patterns of military behavior such as working with weapons, explosives and military equipment; action in specific weather conditions and in dangerous places; carrying out sentry duty, barracks duties, drill habits, etc. The focus should be on the specifics of military behavioral patterns and the fact that they are involved in the regulation of behavior almost always as a more special, often stressful

environment associated with a continuous threat to the life and health of military servants.

5. There are difficulties for continuous verification of the results of the military work and the inability in this way to close the circle of set targets, personal efforts made for their achievement and performance. The most reliable test is participation in hostilities, but this is the most undesirable option. There is no key factor for gaining a sense of psychological well-being - predictability of upcoming events resulting from personally made efforts. This prevents the possibility of timely correction of personal plans and discourages the individual.

6. Basic human needs are an object of frustration. There is sexual deprivation as satisfying the sexual needs usually involves a number of difficulties.

7. There is an information deficit. It is caused both by the lack of books and printed matter and the detachment from periodical mass media. Here should also be included the monotony of everyday life, lack of entertainment and the occurrence of sensory saturation (Guilford, 1959).

A possible direction of searches in the analysis of this study is to outline the presence of several key factors in the structure of personality that significantly influence the processes of adaptation and contribute to its optimum performance in ever changing conditions. Among them may be noted the construct *social interest* introduced by Adler and designated as a preponderant orientation to the outside world, paying more attention to the events around us, and not to ourselves, deep inner interest in everything that surrounds the personality and a proactive approach in coping with problems (Jacobs et al., 1974). Several studies found out that people characterized by the presence of social interest, have a more realistic and constructive attitude to solving emerging problems, they demonstrate more empathy and also exhibit willingness to cooperate more often. These people are able to perceive things in life in all their richness and diversity, are able to give them meaning and value, but inevitably see the changing and ensuing difficulties as a challenge to their ability to cope and as an opportunity for development and self-improvement. Naturally such people are expected to be more tolerant to changes and related surprises and seek no conflict when adapting to new conditions. Adler himself stresses that social interest is an absolute prerequisite for the adaptation of the individual, but as a major factor causing disadaptation indicates the strong sense of inferiority, insecurity and reduced self-esteem. Moreover, Adler argues that social interest has a specific value in the implementation of coping processes because vital issues such as work, love, household, communication and friendship are key objectives whose achievement requires sufficient social interest.

Along with *social interest* the psychological construct *courage* or also-called *endurance* could be used. Its introduction is an attempt to look at the mental prerequisites for increased flexibility and resilience of the individual, taking into account the participation of several

personality variables. Their specific combination could presuppose the successful or unsuccessful adaptation. From this perspective the psychological courage is seen as a mutually intertwined influence of three personal characteristics - ready for personal commitment and involvement in the ongoing events, internal locus of control and perception of changes as a source of challenges and opportunities for self-development (Kareva, 2019). The constellation of three characteristics favors the perception, assessment and successfully coping with situations created by critical life events.

The personal involvement in events and especially things occurring in the environment to which the personality adapts is a very important link in the puzzle called adaptation process. The willingness to engage is to take responsibility for the process and outcome among others, and this is already a certain degree of adaptation to the new conditions. Another indicator of psychological courage is the perception of a changing environment not as a source of threats to the self but as a source of ongoing challenges, in the fight against which important human abilities are created psyche is strengthened and personality grows. All this, combined with a reasonable and balanced look at one's own options for coping with situations is a content of *psychological courage*. Its presence is an excellent source of adaptive potential for the personality and a prerequisite for the individual's coping with the requirements of the specific military environments. Psychological courage prevents the burnout of the body and reduces the process of a long and painful adjustment. Kobasa and Pussetti found out that the presence of psychological courage reduces morbidity. The style of coping with the individual's problems with high psychological courage besides their confidence in their own strength and capabilities demonstrates personal effectiveness and their ability to use social and environment resources.

An important element of psychological courage is the locus of control. Describing this construct Muzdibaev (1983) states that the subject to the control of human behavior can be the social environment and society as a whole through social norms and role functions attributed to the person in one situation or another. Often, however, the role of subject is played by the very individual. Drawing up a plan and making a decision on their own behavior people weigh their options and assess whether the objectives are within their capabilities or they need to rely on the chance and benevolence of fate. Some people are considered to be masters of their destiny and rely on their own powers and abilities, while others prefer to be left in the hands of fate and responsibility for everything that happens is attributed to external forces. The same is the mechanism when explaining past events. If the person in most cases takes responsibility for everything that happens in his/her life, explaining it with their behavior, character and abilities, this indicates internal (intrinsic) locus of control. If a person has a tendency to attribute responsibility to all

external factors searching for the cause in other people, in the environment or fate, this indicates the presence of an external (extrinsic) control. In the opinion of Rotter (1966), author of the construct and its measurement method, internity and externity of locus of control is a resistant trait of the individual formed in the process of its socialization.

Radoslavova (1987) found out that the locus of control determines the differences in job satisfaction as a support of the sense of competence depending on the content of labor. These studies clearly support the idea to seek and account for the impact of this personality trait on its ability to adapt and optimally function in the environment (Kareva et al., 2019).

Studies to search for other personality variables with a positive impact on adaptive processes and maintaining a subjective psychological wellbeing show that there are sufficient grounds in the circle of the factors of personality to include such indicators as extroversion, sociability, emotional stability, level of anxiety and tension, lack of tendency to self-reproach, lack of loneliness and shyness in interpersonal relations. Depending on the specific army conditions, these factors may form configurations that facilitate the adaptive processes and increase the resistance to stress effects.

Extraversion and emotional stability are factors that belong to the so-called generalized traits (Nelson, 1987; Paspalanov and Shchetinski, 1984). In some modern concepts they are regarded as basic properties of temperament.

Extroverts often act under the spur of the moment. Taking hasty decisions thoughtlessly, gets angry quickly and is prone to aggression. Overall these feelings are not under firm control and such a person is not always a reliable personality. He/she loves gatherings and noisy companies. By contrast, the introvert is quiet and closed, prone to self-monitoring and analysis. He/she prefers reading books to contact with people and is prone to thinking over. They dislike exciting experiences and are able to control their feelings and rarely behave aggressively. They can concentrate on the same thing for a long time. Such people aspire order.

Emotionally unstable people are restless and anxious, often depressed and are more prone to depressive experiences. They are too emotional and impressionable. They often suffer from various psychosomatic disorders and have difficulty in adaptation and therefore inadequate reactions. They are also prone to stress.

Emotionally stable individuals have higher thresholds of emotional excitement. Usually they are calm and balanced, have good self-control and do not succumb to anxiety. Generally they have better opportunities for adaptation, especially in stress (Petkov, 1996).

Regarding anxiety as psychological construct Bakeev (1974) defines it as "a potential predisposition to react in emotional situations even under slight tension and threat. Psychological components included in the concept of anxiety ... have a stable and permanent nature and are

manifested in different periods of life and in different situations" (Radoslavova, 1987).

So far, it has become clear that as a hindering adaptation to specific military environments, different personality structures can occur - peculiarities of self-esteem, dominant motivational trends, the enlisting of specific strategies for emotional regulation, etc. Therefore it can definitely be said that the adaptation processes involving the individual can not be uniquely derived from any feature of the psychic regulation.

Manifestations of hostility and aggression are also considered a risk factor, particularly in the development of coronary heart disease (Kareva, 2019; Kareva et al., 2019). It has also been found that acts of hostility and aggression are associated with emotional instability, introverted focus, proneness to anxiety in responding, difficulty in effectively processing information and orientation to the exertion of interpersonal control (Petkov, 1996). Therefore, aggression is associated with a common anti-adaptive organization of personality and leads to an increased risk of symptoms of mental instability. It can be a source of very serious interpersonal conflicts and determines violations of socio-psychic climate of the group with all the consequent complications that will secondarily affect the generation of anti-adaptive processes.

Self-esteem as one of the central regulatory structures of the personality also plays an important role in maintaining emotional and mental status of the individual. Numerous studies reveal that high self-esteem is associated with a sense of self-confidence, emotional stability and better behavior.

Low self-esteem, on the other hand, is associated with depressive experiences, uncertainty, vulnerability and sensitivity. It is accompanied by a system of attitudes and behaviors that hinder the satisfactory social interaction and thus create conditions for the emergence of a sense of loneliness and isolation of individuals from around the world. As Horney states (1937) "Emotional isolation is a tough challenge for everyone, but combined with bias and uncertainty in itself, it becomes a disaster" (Rotter, 1966).

Researchers experimentally verifying the self-assessment report that individuals with low self-esteem are particularly responsive to partners friendly to them and especially hostile to partners who reject them. More importantly, people with low self-esteem interpret more negatively the ambiguous social exchange than people with high self-esteem (Snyder, 1974).

As mentioned, low self-esteem affects the social behavior of people. Zimbardo (1977) argues that "individuals with low self-esteem are more prone to passivity and suggestions and are less popular. These people are extremely sensitive to criticism, regarding it as a confirmation of their inferiority. It is also hard for them to appreciate compliments" (Velichkov, 1989).

The differences between individuals with high and low self-esteem give a reason to assume that self-esteem can be considered a factor for the increase or decrease in

mental stamina and catalyzing the adaptive capabilities of the individual at the clash with new and unknown conditions.

The outlined aspects of adaptation and optimal functioning are related with different configurations of the individual factors. Some of them can be effective when adapting to a certain environment but they can be counter-effective in another. Due to this fact, it is only justified to state that different aspects of psychic adaptation and optimal functioning should be explained by means of configurations from various individual factors.

## METHODS

In order to assess some of the traits listed above as suitable for the optimal functioning of the military in the specific environment of the army were used tried and tested psycho-diagnostic tools. Attached is the adapted to Bulgarian conditions method for assessment of innovative behavior and propensity to original approach; the Bulgarian version of Julian Rotter's methodology for assessing the locus of control; scales to assess the functional and dysfunctional impulsivity (Vossel, 1987). 97 officers from the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria were studied.

## RESULTS

The results of the analysis of the data obtained show that there is a constellation of eminent personality traits that are an excellent prerequisite for optimal functioning of individuals in the army environment (see Table 1).

It can be said that the respondents are a self-selected sample of established in the military profession servants with over 20 years of experience in the military. They have received an independent objective appraisal from their superiors in certain senior positions in the army structures. This means that the results of their work are accepted and highly appreciated. Perhaps there are others unaccounted for in the study of factors that have affected the professional performances of the surveyed soldiers, but the presence of these traits in the table and the level of expression are indicative of their key role in maintaining optimal forms of working in such an environment.

Traits manifest themselves so that they support rather than hinder the professional activities of the military. The surveyed individuals are emotionally stable ( $M = 3.40$ ;  $SD = 2.65$ ); with a high self-esteem ( $M = 2.47$ ;  $SD = 2.66$ ); low levels of spontaneous aggressiveness ( $M = 2.69$ ;  $SD = 1.78$ ) and reactive aggressiveness ( $M = 3.43$ ;  $SD = 1.82$ ); low level of irritability ( $M = 2.47$ ;  $SD = 2.12$ ); moderate friendliness (affiliation) ( $M = 4.80$ ;  $SD = 1.46$ ); low levels of loneliness ( $M = 3.35$ ;  $SD = 2.47$ ); moderately open ( $M = 6.20$ ;  $SD = 2.92$ ); moderately balanced ( $M = 5.53$ ;  $SD = 1.98$ ); a lack of psychic deviations in all their forms ( $M =$

**Table 1.** Psychometric indicators of measured personality traits

Personal traits	Min	Max	M	SD
Neuroticism	0.00	11.00	3.40	2.65
Low self-esteem	0.00	13.00	2.47	2.66
Spontaneous aggressiveness	0.00	8.00	2.69	1.78
Reactive aggressiveness	0.00	8.00	3.43	1.82
Irritability	0.00	10.00	2.47	2.12
Friendliness	1.00	7.00	4.80	1.46
Loneliness	0.00	9.00	3.35	2.47
Openness	1.00	13.00	6.20	2.92
Balance	0.00	10.00	5.53	1.98
Psychopathic behavior	1.00	11.00	3.85	2.13
Thrill seeking	3.00	19.00	10.27	3.99
Functional impulsiveness	4.00	10.00	8.83	1.43
Disfunctional impulsiveness	0.00	5.00	1.68	0.99
Control locus	0.00	7.00	1.97	1.87
Originality	33.00	38.00	35.50	3.54
Compliance	13.00	15.00	14.00	1.41
Creativity	25.00	29.00	27.00	2.83

3.85; SD = 2.13); a moderate proneness to risky behavior (M = 10.27; SD = 3.99); functional impulsiveness (M = 8.83; SD = 1.43); dysfunctional impulsiveness (M = 1.68; SD = 0.99); internal locus of control (M = 1.97; SD = 1.87); a developed proneness to original solutions (M = 35.50; SD = 3.54); a readiness to meet the requirements within consensus (M = 14.00; SD = 1.41); an increased search for creative forms of solving problems (M = 27.00; SD = 2.83).

## DISCUSSION

The outlined configuration of manifestations of personality traits shows a stable, well-built personality participating fully in the regulation of the behavior of military servants, as a result of which there are emotional comforts, low levels of negative emotions and great performances in the working place. The personality is able to flexibly respond to changes in the organizational environment and quickly to restore the positive emotional status of the military. The tendency towards risky behavior is under good cognitive control, behavior is deliberate, purposeful and responsible. The individual is able to act on impulse when it is functionally effective. The personality is emotionally stable, with increased self-esteem, a better control of aggressive impulses. The individual is open in his/her contacts with the social partners prone to innovative solutions. Actions are characterized by a large dose of creativity.

## CONCLUSION

Individuals function in the specific Army environment requiring skills and using mental and physical resources

more than usual. They are highly adapted to this and also do well with their functional duties. As the survey showed they possess such a combination of congenital and acquired during the socialization process personality traits, that this makes them suitable for operations in extreme situations created by their environment. Moreover, they routinely raise their qualification by making it compliant to the requirements of the environment and the daily performed tasks. It turns out that the personality of the individual, the combination of skills, abilities and traits, subjected to the general regulatory mechanism, is key to the optimal functioning of the military. Therefore, besides the fact that the selection of people for the profession of a soldier should be based on reliable assessment of the personality traits, in the process of education and training after appointment the traits should be consolidated and developed.

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