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## **Importance of further education of soldiers in the context of development and career management**

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### **Abstract:**

The paper deals with selected development trends of further professional education in relation to the critical elements of the system of military personnel of the Army of the Czech Republic. It also identifies ways of improving the quality of development and competency management of military professionals and the use of training effects in planning processes and career management. It provides an analysis and interpretation of data from the research conducted in 2016 with the support of the Ministry of Defence. The aim of the research was to investigate the motivation for further professional education and selected determinants defining the direction of development and career management, both from the perspective of a soldier himself, and from the perspective of the Czech Army. The obtained data will relevantly allow setting the direction for next steps of the research within the departmental intention of the development of organization "Development of social competencies of the soldier-leader".

### **Keywords:**

Human resource development, career development of soldiers, competency of soldiers, training system of military personnel.

### **Introduction**

Further professional education of personnel is essential for the success of any organization, its competitiveness and prosperity. It is closely linked to the career policy and the strategy of human resource management, a part of which represents the system of education and the development of personnel. Education and development of professional soldiers create a specific system in this segment of further (informal) education, which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence in the Czech Republic. The management of the Ministry of Defence pays adequate attention to the field of personnel work and education of all categories of personnel. The system of training is adapted to the requirements of the armed forces and the needs to act in international organizations and, therefore, greater compatibility with systems of NATO and the European Union takes place even in the field of education. The Concept of the Build-up of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic 2025 is a basic document, which specifies the requirements and strategic objectives of the Army development (2015). The priority is to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of military profession, to apply the elements of career management systems in personnel administration, to create conditions for comprehensive training and the support of personnel. The professional training is influenced by a specific environment and the number of people, and is carried out in the environment of departmental and extra-departmental educational institutions, facilities and military units.

The development of career theories can be dated back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when F. Parsons founded the first vocational guidance institute. He aimed at the study of an individual career path. According to Patton and McMahon (2014), the current concept of career changes fundamentally and the influence of constructivism, systems theory, action theory and paradoxical theory dominate. The findings from behavioural sciences examining the social context, cultural diversity, development and shaping of an individual's personality are also crucial. The current career theories reflect the impact of constructivist worldview with its emphasis on holism and an individual as key elements of the construction of career. System theories have anchored an individual in the middle of the career development process itself since he/she is perceived as the creator of his/her own career, who can take control of and lead his/her own career path to success.

The aim of the career management policy is to provide personnel with an adequate guidance, support and encouragement to meet their aspirations and talents. It includes a system offering education and development, which aims at improving and deepening qualification and professional competencies as well as acquiring experience (Jarvis, 2010; Veteška, 2011; Grote, Kauffeld, Frieling, 2012 and Patton, McMahon, 2014). Over the last few years, the issue of competencies in the field of military theory and practice has constituted an important area of the research interest. Attention is paid to the psychological, social and cultural context of military training, further education and career development (see Meyer, 2015 and Meyer, Hall-Clark, Hamaoka, Peterson, 2015 and Kubínyi, Veteška, 2017). The development of social competencies of a soldier – leader has been dealt with within the scope of the long-term plan of an organization development (2016-2020).

The characteristic stages of an individual's career include learning and training, developing and shaping the capabilities. The personnel audit is considered to be an effective tool for optimizing human resources; it promotes effective job performance and enables the individual development and career plans of key employees. It facilitates to uncover the potential and preferences of individual employees and favours the correct setting of criteria for their appraisal and motivation. The effective management of employees is dependent on their further education opportunities and motivation. The employee education policy has been fundamentally affected by the European educational paradigm of lifelong learning (Veteška, J., 2014). "The care, which an organization devotes to the quality of its personnel is, in the upshot, a benefit, which is reflected in the quality of services, performance or the quantity of the work provided" (Mitáček, 2016, p. 98).

The starting point of the career management system in the Army of the Czech Republic is Act No. 221/1999 Coll., on career soldiers. On July 1, 2015, the amendment to Act No. 332/2014 Coll., which amended Act No. 221/1999 Coll., on career soldiers, came into effect. The amendment to this Act modified the relevant principles of the management system of professional soldiers' career. The institution of qualifying period in the service assignment has been introduced. Applying the qualifying period allows the control of military personnel mobility in the network of proposed careers and the employment relationship has not been declared as a lifelong profession.

### **Further education of soldiers within the Army of the Czech Republic and its importance for the career development**

Act No. 221/1999 Coll., on professional soldiers, requires the Ministry of Defence "to create conditions for soldiers' further education and the improvement of their skills in the interest of the service" (§ 59). The training of soldiers within the Army of the Czech Republic is based on the concept of lifelong education (learning) and thus it connects the area of initial and further education. The training of soldiers is a systematic process that stems from an identified education requirement and is being improved continuously. The main objective of the military personnel training within the Ministry of Defence is "a professional, who is characterized as a qualified expert in a voluntary employment relationship, educated in the military and specially trained for military practice" (Concept, 2011, p. 17).

According to Saliger "in influencing the educational activities within the Ministry of Defence, mainly the personnel authorities and other "support" systems (e.g. military psychologists, army legal services

and chaplains), next to the commanders at all levels, are irreplaceable; they are involved in education and training directly or indirectly" (2017, p. 266). The theoretical bases of these "support systems" and their practical use in the military sphere are dealt with by a number of authors working at the Faculty of Military Leadership of the University of Defence. For instance, Mikulka (2011) is dedicated to exploring "moral specifics related to the training and management of military activities" (p. 165). Pospíšil (2011) deals with the psychological aspects of personnel selection and training and recommends the establishment of a centre "that would develop human potential for the entire duration of military service" (p. 187) to improve the quality of military professionals' education.

The concept of personnel training proceeds from the assumption that it is necessary to create adequate conditions for the effective training of soldiers and, at the same time, to motivate soldiers for further education. Preferentially, attention is paid to the training of command personnel and then professional military personnel are educated. The basic type of educational activities is to prepare military personnel for the duty performance of a professional soldier; the emphasis is also laid on the professional training of soldiers for specialized activities (2011). The training is carried out in the network of departmental and extra-departmental educational and training institutions in the Czech Republic as well as in abroad.

According to Ambrozová, Koleňák et al. "the cultivation and development of professionalism in the processes of education and training require new frameworks, objectives, principles and parameters of efficiency criteria" (2016, p. 27). The requirements for the training of professional soldiers are set for all service positions in relation to the activities performed with regard to a military rank, military occupational speciality and the latest knowledge of military science. Therefore, the training of military professionals is internally structured and is generally divided into the training to meet the qualification preconditions and qualification requirements, and the additional training for the needs of the Ministry of Defence.

The training to meet qualification preconditions is aimed at achieving the required level of education and is determined according to the most demanding activity, the performance of which is required for a given position. The minimum qualification preconditions for service assignments of soldiers are defined by Decree No. 217/2010 Coll., on determining qualification preconditions for service assignments of professional soldiers.

Table 1: Qualification preconditions for service assignments

<b>Rank corps</b>	<b>Minimum level of education completed</b>
Enlisted personnel	Secondary education with an apprenticeship certificate
Non-commissioned officers	Secondary education with an apprenticeship certificate
Warrant officers	Upper secondary education level
Junior officers	University education in the bachelor's degree program
Senior officers	University education in the master's degree program
Generals	University education in the master's degree program

Source: modified by the authors according to Decree No. 217/2010

It can be stated that if a professional soldier is to be assigned to a given position, he/she must meet the minimum qualification precondition (educational level – see Table 1). According to the data of the Personnel Agency of the Army of the Czech Republic published in the Statistical Yearbook before or on December 31, 2015, all soldiers met the qualification preconditions (2016).

The training to meet qualification requirements is aimed at the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the military and is related to the training for duty performance in a given position and military rank. According to Nekvapilová (2012), in the Postmodern Era, "besides the graduate education, the importance of short-term specialization courses and training in the lifelong learning system is growing" (p. 313). The type of training mentioned can be divided into the basic training, the training in language courses, the language education and further special training. Basic training courses are designed for the training and preparation of all categories of candidates called up for the employment relationship. The basic type of training is to prepare professional soldiers in career courses for the

exercise of activities in the rank corps. The aim of language training is to achieve and develop communication skills of personnel according to STANAG 6001. Further special training provides the possibility to obtain the prescribed expert knowledge and skills required for the competent performance of working activities.

The results of education are reflected in the changes in the quantity and quality of knowledge, the development of skills or also the learners' experience. The effects of education can also be seen in creating new ideas, habits, attitudes and expanding social relationships that can have a positive influence on the standard labour performance. Průcha and Veteška specify further education resting in the influence of the attained level and the field of education on the choice of a profession, the complexity of the work performed and the property differentiation (2012). The transfer of values is a significant result of education, particularly from the viewpoint of military professionals' training.

### **Importance of soldiers' training for the career advancement**

The assignment of a soldier to a given position with a higher rank, which describes the status of a soldier in the armed forces, is connected with the career advancement. The military rank corresponds to the demands of working activities, the scope of responsibility and the requirements for a soldier's qualification. A new reward system for soldiers has been implemented, which is administratively simpler and more transparent as the major component of the salary is a wage scale, the amount of which is determined by law. The wage scale corresponds to the military rank and is to motivate soldiers to the career advancement. The explanatory memorandum to the amendment states that "the basis of the career environment is a principle for selecting the highest-quality personnel and their shift to higher and more demanding positions; to maintain motivation, it must be associated with a more substantial salary increase" (2013, p. 2). The advancement in the career of soldiers is connected with the service assignment to service positions of greater responsibility, which are defined by the military rank, qualification requirements, preconditions, a military occupational speciality and the description of the most complex working activities.

Act No. 221/1999 Coll., on professional soldiers specifies in detail that the service assignment of a professional soldier is to be performed according to "the achieved qualification, the period of service in the rank and the results of service appraisal" (§ 6, par. 3). The advancement in the career of a soldier is dependent on the achievement of appropriate qualification since a soldier can be assigned only to a service position, for which he/she meets designated qualifications. The MoD Order No. 63/2015 and certain regulations on the service of a professional soldier clarify the meaning of the concept of qualification, stating that qualification means qualification preconditions and qualification requirements (Art. 25). Further, the internal legal provision specifies that, if a soldier meeting the designated requirements cannot be assigned to a given service position, another soldier who meets the lower qualification requirements can be assigned to this position, but only on the basis of a written consent of the authority responsible for the administration of military occupational speciality. (MoD Order No. 63/2015, Art. 28).

The results of service appraisal are another factor, which influences the career advancement of a soldier since a soldier with the best results is selected for a higher service position and thus the performance principle is practically applied. The development of professional soldiers' competencies is related to the results of service appraisal and is an important motivational tool. During the appraisal interview, the superior of a soldier has an opportunity to appraise the quantity and quality of the soldier's duty performance, but he/she can also discuss and set goals of the soldier's professional and career development. The accomplishment of development goals is evaluated regularly and the recommendations for the further career development formulated in the service appraisal are a basis for the processing of stimuli for sending a soldier to study. The conclusions of service appraisals are used for the ongoing management and for establishing the order of soldiers to be selected for the appointment to higher ranks, for the service assignment to higher service positions and for the career management.

The issue of deepening and developing the competencies of a soldier is also related to the objective selection of personnel to implement personnel measures. On February 17, 2017, new MoD Order No. 9/2017 came into force, which sets "principles, conditions, criteria and the method to establish the order of soldiers for the implementation of personnel measures of the career management system" (Art. 1). To establish the order, commissions are created; they establish the order of soldiers annually according to the criteria in particular military occupational specialities. To fulfil the principles of transparency and public inspection, the processed provisional lists will be published on the integrated subsystem Portal on service and personnel. The said Order specifies in detail that the criteria for establishing the order are based on the qualification obtained, duty performance and service appraisal.

The fact that the selected personnel measures (for the appointment to a higher military rank, for the service assignment to a position associated with a higher rank and for sending to the career training) will be implemented in the soldiers with the expected advancement in the network of service careers in the following year is an important motivating factor.

## **Methodology**

The aim of the research realized within the Faculty of Military Leadership of the University of Defence was to identify the key reasons for the involvement of soldiers in further professional training (i.e. career courses, language education, special training and self-study) and to identify, which aspects affect their career advancement. The research was carried out in several stages in the course of 2016. The findings of the second stage are presented below.

With regard to the set objectives of the research, the combination of quantitatively oriented empirical investigation was used. It was supplemented by a qualitative investigation aimed at recognizing the nature of the behaviour and activities of respondents with the focus on the motivation for further professional training and the career development opportunities. The heavily structured data collection was used through questionnaires. The theoretical basis of this research project was the concept of lifelong learning and economic and sociological theory of rational choice.

The research problem was formulated in three main research questions as follows:

RQ 1: Is the participation of soldiers significant in further professional training for their career development?

RQ 2: What motivates soldiers to participate in further professional training?

RQ 3: How do soldiers perceive the support for further professional development?

Based on the previous researches carried out by the authors and after the analysis of key characteristics performed, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: The majority of professional soldiers are motivated for further professional training by the career advancement associated with higher financial rewards.

H2: The majority of professional soldiers consider their participation in the system of further professional training to be an essential part of the career development.

The first stage of the research was based on the assumption that the participation rate of adults was influenced by motivation. For research needs the willingness of respondents to participate in education was considered to be a basic motivating factor. Getting the support of the superior was considered an external factor.

The questionnaire survey was chosen to identify teaching issues. The questionnaire included 21 questions aimed at identifying the opinions and attitudes of respondents. The questionnaire consisted of a combination of closed-ended and semi-closed-ended questions. To answer the questions, the respondents were offered a choice of several options. The structure of questions was selected so that, in the context of organizational terms, the redundant or known questions could be avoided.

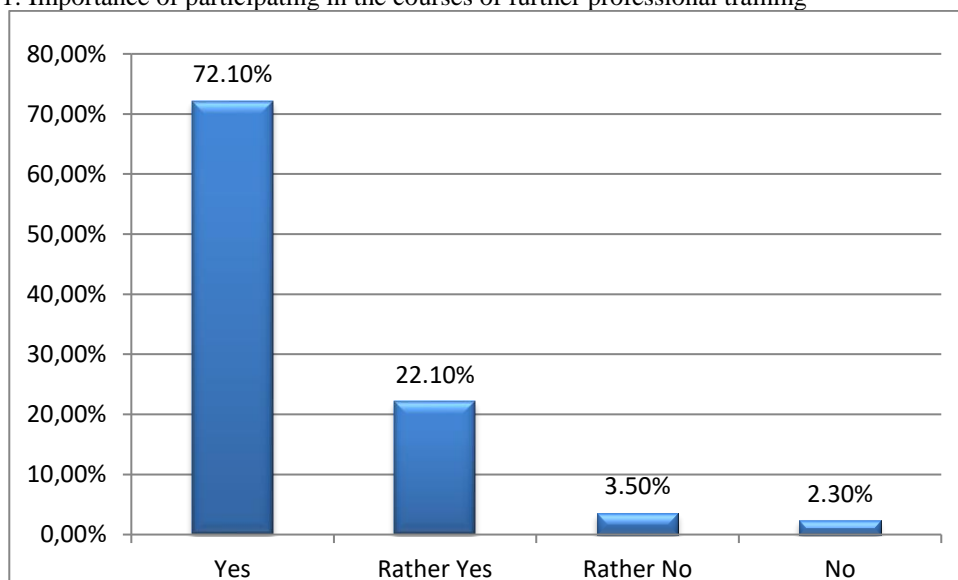
The basic group consisted of randomly selected professional soldiers of selected organizational units. In total, the questionnaire survey of 122 soldiers was realized in the first stage. The research was conducted in the period from October to December 2016. The rate of return was 86%. Nineteen questionnaires, which lacked answers to some questions, were excluded. A total of 86 questionnaires that were completed correctly and submitted by the date stated were included in the final group for the evaluation, which represents a 70% rate of return.

### Interpretation of the data obtained

The interpretation of selected findings is presented in relation to the research objectives and set research questions and hypotheses. A total of 87% of respondents consider their participation in the courses of further professional training important for career advancement (Graph 1).

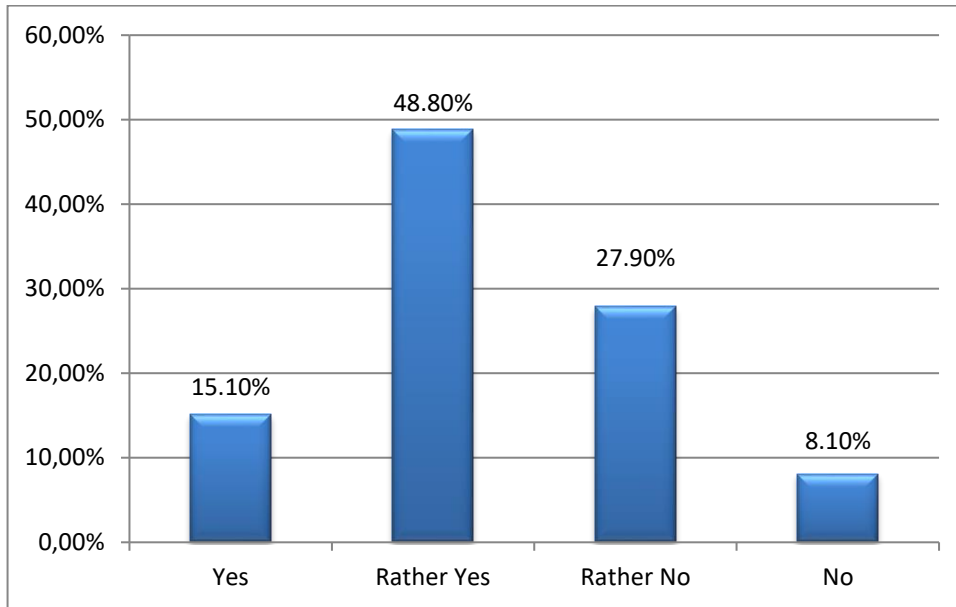
A total of 94% of respondents consider their participation in the courses of further professional training important for their own career advancement. Only 6% said they did not consider their participation important for career progression (Graph 1).

Graf 1: Importance of participating in the courses of further professional training



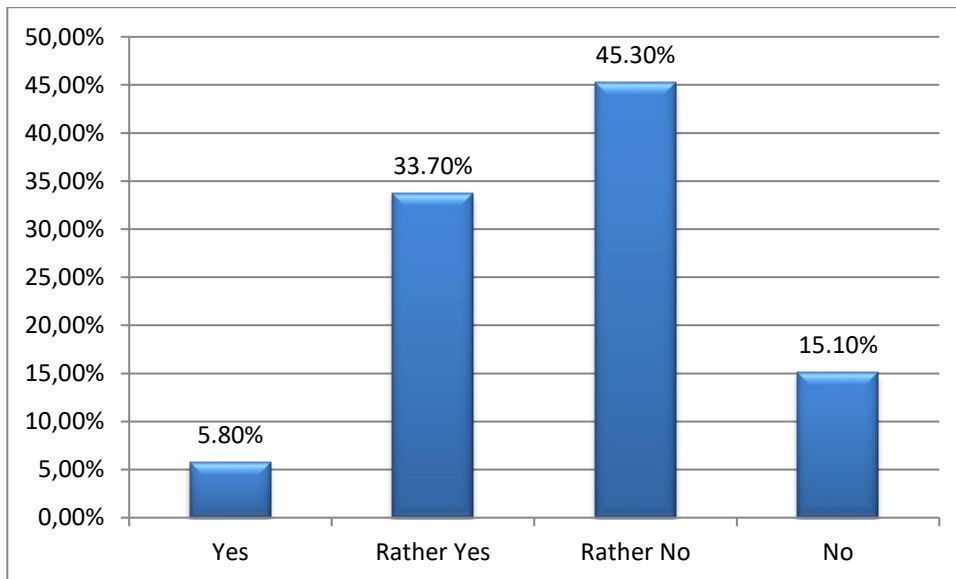
A total of 64% of respondents consider the support for further professional growth from their superiors significant. A total of 36%, however, do not perceive the support from their superiors as sufficient (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Perception of the professional development support



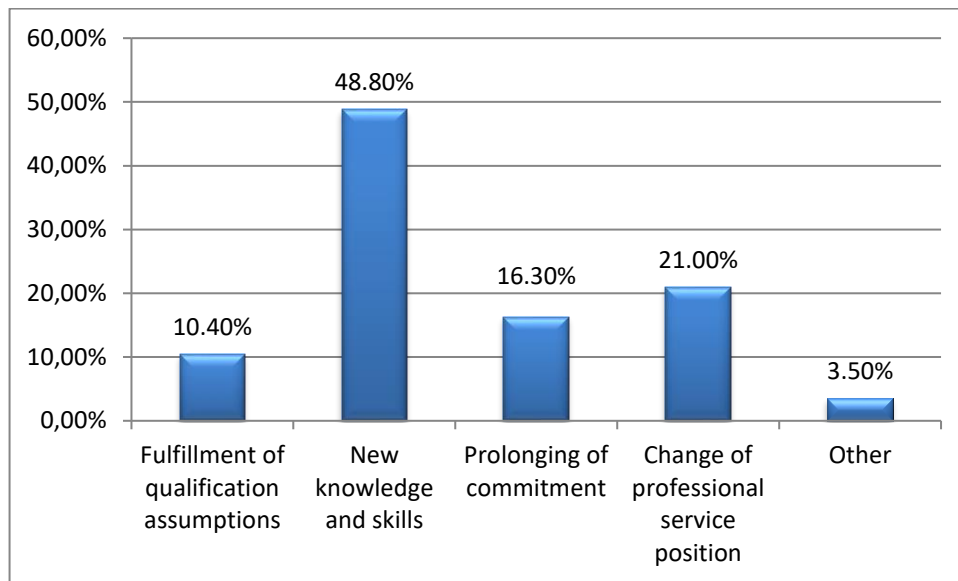
A relatively unfavourable development has been recorded when monitoring the creation of conditions for participation in the courses of further professional training on the part of superiors. Only 40% of respondents answered *yes* or *rather yes*. Most of respondents, i.e. 60%, answered negatively (Graph 3).

Graph 3: Creation of conditions for further professional training



A total of 48.80% of respondents put forward the acquisition of new knowledge and skills as a critical reason to take part in further professional training. Other reasons for the participation in courses are an attempt to change the service position and the extension of time of the employment relationship (Graph 4).

Graph 4: Key reasons for taking part in professional training



From the viewpoint of verification / falsification of the hypotheses determined, we can state that H1 has been confirmed. It has resulted from the research that the majority of professional soldiers are motivated for further professional training by the career advancement associated with higher financial rewards. H2 has also been verified (confirmed) as the data obtained from the research have shown that the majority of professional soldiers consider the participation in the system of further professional education to be an essential part of the career development.

## Conclusions

The research has clearly proved that the training and development of soldiers is a key tool for acquiring and developing specific skills and knowledge in the military sphere. Most respondents are aware of the importance and value of education from the social point of view, on the one hand, and from the professional point of view, on the other hand. The issue of further professional education of soldiers is significant not only in terms of improving the quality of duty performance in the service position, but also in terms of their training for participating in the activities of international organizations and foreign operations.

The research has proved that the majority of respondents are motivated for further professional training by the career advancement. A total of 94% of respondents consider the participation in the system of further professional education an essential part of the career development.

The area of support from an immediate superior has proved problematic. In this area we can see room for the possibility of changing and adopting such measures, which would motivate both soldiers within the further professional development and their immediate superiors for the systematic setting of an effective learning and education model.

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