

# Cooperation Skills in Professional Activity of the Military

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**Abstract**—Cooperation skills of the military service members are investigated in this paper in the context of their professional activity. Interpersonal relations in the army have always been under discussion among specialists in education and psychology. Building positive relationships with other people, achieving consensus, supporting other people and generating enthusiasm among group members for accomplishing the goals — all of these are components of the cooperation skills as suggested by the Council of Europe. Cooperation skills are of great importance for the success of the military mission. Positive relations and understanding are necessary in professional communication between officers and soldiers in the conditions of the Extreme North and the Arctic, in the mountainous areas, in peacekeeping operations, in engineering and recovering weapons and armored vehicles, airborne equipment, security systems, etc. Ideas of group dynamics and teamwork based on the cooperation skills are also discussed in the research. To measure cooperation skills, a special questionnaire in the form of self-assessment and peer assessment was offered to officers and soldiers doing their military service by contract in the airborne troops. The research was done by adjuncts of Ryazan Guard Higher Airborne Command School named after General of the Army V. F. Margelov. The descriptors of cooperation skills were taken from Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. The results of the study show that officers indicate rather high cooperation skills, about 86 %, all of them having higher education, aged 27-35 years old. The soldiers have a bit lower level of cooperation skills, about 81%, most of them being rather young, aged 21-25 years old. The authors conclude that cooperation skills and group dynamics among officers and soldiers of the airborne troops are very good for

positive and constructive professional activity, which help them fulfil their mission.

**Keywords**—cooperation skills; professional culture; the military; airborne troops; officers; soldiers

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the army, which seems to be dominated by individualism and competitiveness, why is it that more value has been given to cooperation skills? The answer surely lies in the psychological factor and in the belief that for the success in professional activity military service men should place a high value on cooperation realized through group work or teamwork. Groups have always been essential to human life. Our ancestors protected themselves from dangers and disasters by joining together in groups.

L. S. Vygotsky emphasized the social dimension of intelligence, and he focused on cooperative things such as culture, collaboration, communication and teaching [1]. K. Lewin wrote about group dynamics and explained its influence on the individual [2]. D. Forsyth defines a group as “two or more individuals who are connected by and within social relationships” [3] p-3. Both group dynamics and teamwork are based on cooperation skills of the participants. However, there is a certain difference between groups and teams.

Teams are the nucleus around which the majority of the Russian military force (as well as military forces of other countries) is built to accomplish its mission. This structure allows modern service men to fulfil tasks larger in scale and

more complex than can readily be accomplished by individual members alone. Military teams are used for tasks ranging from tactical actions (e.g., acting in the conditions of the Extreme North and the Arctic, in the mountainous areas, operating and servicing weapons and military equipment, parachutes and protection systems) to strategic direction (e.g., monitoring and managing large peacekeeping operations).

The cooperation skills and actions in small units or teams enable the military members, according to M. L. Shuffler, D. Pavlas, & E. Salas, to accomplish missions quickly and efficiently [4]. "The psychological understanding of individual attributes and performance demonstrated military value in World War I, it was not until World War II that team dynamics and performance were noted as potentially important contributors to military effectiveness", writes G. F. Goodwin [5].

For members of a twenty-first century military A. Logan-Terry, R. R. Damari suggests developing key culture-general interactional skills: observing and adapting to unfamiliar norms, building rapport, and recovering from trouble in interaction. These interactional skills are not only useful in any cross-cultural situation, but have particular utility in military contexts, across various cultures, languages, and countries [6].

Naturally, cooperation skills of the military personnel may be well developed only in cooperative work, which means that service men not only work together but they must be working towards common goals in such a way that individual team members are not able to achieve their aims unless their fellow team members achieve theirs. It is true that in cooperative work, nobody achieves success at the expense of others. A set of objectives, which unite the team, the common goal, is of great importance in teamwork. These shared goals must motivate military men to carry out a common task.

*Research question 1: What level of cooperation skills do army officers and soldiers possess?*

*Research question 2: Do cooperation skills help them fulfil their mission?*

## II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The present study considers cooperation skills in the context of professional activity of officers and soldiers of the

airborne troops and is based on the communicative [7] and axiological [8] [9] methodological approaches. In the research, theoretical and empirical methods of study are used.

### A. The Theoretical Methods

The theoretical methods are represented by analysis, systematization and generalization of ideas in publications of Russian and foreign scientists on the problem of the research. We analyzed approaches to modelling cadets' behavior in the process of learning in small groups [10]; to developing cooperation skills and teamwork in the process of paratroopers' professional training [11]; in training Special Forces cadets [12]. We also studied cooperation skills of specialists involved into extreme activities [13] and of the graduate from the military higher school [14]. In addition, to crown it all we worked out the idea of developing cadets' cooperation skills in the context of their professional culture [15].

### B. The Empirical Methods

The empirical methods include: observation of the officers' and soldiers' professional activity in the airborne troops; systematization of the authors' personal practical experience of paratroopers' professional training; observation of the officers' and soldiers' behaviour in situations of uncertainty; informal talks and interviews; questionnaire; comparative data analysis. On the ideas of Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture a special questionnaire was developed. Quantitative data were collected through the analysis of the scores of self-assessment and peer assessment received from questionnaires of 21 respondents, including 5 officers, aged 27-35 years and 16 soldiers of airborne troops, aged 21-24 years. The research was organized by the adjuncts of Ryazan Guard Higher Airborne Command School named after General of the Army V. F. Margelov, all having their own experience of serving in the airborne troops.

The data provide the material for comparative analysis of the servicemen's self-assessment and peer assessment of cooperation skills. The respondents had to assess their cooperation skills according to 8 descriptors [16], indicating the level of the skill using the score scale from 1 to 10, in which 1 is the lowest score and 10 is the highest score ("Table I").

TABLE I. COOPERATION SKILLS OF THE OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS ASSESSMENT AND PEER ASSESSMENT

No	Key Descriptors of Cooperation Skills	(-) Scores (+)
1.	Builds positive relationships with other people in a group	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2.	When working as a member of a group, does his/her share of the group's work	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3.	Works to build consensus to achieve group goals	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4.	When working as a member of a group, keeps others informed about any relevant or useful information	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5.	Generates enthusiasm among group members for accomplishing shared goals	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6.	When working with others, supports other people despite differences in points of view	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
		Total:
	SELF-ASSESSMENT:	
	PEER ASSESSMENT:	

The most reliable score of cooperation skills of the officers and soldiers we can get if we add peer assessment to self-assessment and divide the total sum by two. An average score of the two assessments gives a rather truthful result.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Research Question 1: What Level of Cooperation Skills Do Army Officers and Soldiers Possess?

To answer the first research question we should define the basic notions of the study — “skill” and “cooperation skills”. The authors of Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture write: “A skill is the capacity for carrying out complex, well-organized patterns of either thinking or behavior in an adaptive manner in order to achieve a particular end or goal” [17]. Co-operation skills are

those skills that are required to participate successfully with others on shared activities, tasks and ventures. They include:

- Abilities or skills in expressing views and opinions in group settings;
- Building consensus and compromise within a group;
- Taking action together with others in a reciprocal and coordinated manner;
- Pursuing the goals of a group and adapting one’s own behavior for achieving these goals.
- Encouraging and motivating other group members to co-operate and help each other to achieve group goals;
- Sharing relevant and useful knowledge, experience or expertise with the group members [18].

TABLE II. COOPERATION SKILLS OF THE OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS SELF-ASSESSMENT AND PEER ASSESSMENT (21 RESPONDENTS)

No	The key descriptors	Max	An average score of the officers (5 respondents)		An average score of the soldiers (16 respondents)	
			Self-assessment	Peer assessment	Self-assessment	Peer assessment
1.	Builds positive relationships with other people in a group	10	8,6	9	8,4	9,4
2.	When working as a member of a group, does his/her share of the group’s work	10	8,4	9,4	7,9	9,2
3.	Works to build consensus to achieve group goals	10	7,8	9	7	7,7
4.	When working as a member of a group, keeps others informed about any relevant or useful information	10	8	8,8	8,1	8,4
5.	Generates enthusiasm among group members for accomplishing shared goals	10	8	9,2	7,0	8,0
6.	When working with others, supports other people despite differences in points of view	10	7,8	8,8	5,7	8,1
	Total:	60	48,6	54,2	44,1	50,8
	An average score of the total:	60	51,4 (85,67 %)		47,45 (79,0 %)	

The results of the questionnaire in “Table II” revealed differences in self-assessment and peer assessment in both groups - officers and soldiers of the airborne troops. All the respondents worked separately and had their own individual score. For the sake of analysis, we use average scores of different descriptors of the questionnaire.

The group “soldiers” included 1 lance corporal (yefreytor), 2 junior sergeants, 3 sergeants, and 10 soldiers. Their officer who knew them well gave peer assessment to them. Surprisingly, the questionnaire showed that the junior sergeants’ self-assessment was much lower than that of other respondents of the group “soldiers”. Probably, they felt more responsibility for their work and they were more critically minded.

The group “officers” consisted of 5 officers of the airborne troops and the battalion commander gave them peer assessment. Two officers had higher self-assessment (5 and 6 points of difference correspondingly), two officers had lower scores of self-assessment (3 and 4 points of difference), and one officer had practically equal scores of self-assessment and peer assessment, only one point difference.

Most of the respondents agreed that that they built positive relationship with other people and tried to do their share of group work. It has shown that the relationship among officers and soldiers is mostly friendly and considerate. Positive and constructive spirit is very important for the success in professional activity of paratroopers. Nevertheless, for some respondents (mostly soldiers) it is not easy to build consensus to achieve group goals.

The officers surely have greater scores when they assess their ability to generate enthusiasm among group members for accomplishing shared goals. However, most of the soldiers do support their officers’ enthusiasm as we can see.

The respondents were very critical to self-assessment of descriptor 6 — most participants of the questionnaire found it difficult to support other people having differences in points of view. One young soldier gave only 1 scores to this point. They meant differences in such fundamental values as patriotism, honor and bravery, friendship and respect, gender relationship, etc. The group of soldiers had the lowest average score of this particular descriptor — 5, 7.

Besides, the soldiers very often assessed their cooperation skills with lower scores, whereas officers in their peer assessment gave higher scores, judging by the soldiers' behavior and actions in the context of the duty tour. Probably the difference in self-assessment and peer assessment can be explained by the fact that a discipline and order in the army make soldiers behave better than they possibly could in some other situations. A general picture of the average scores of the officers and soldiers' cooperation skills is presented in "Fig. 1".

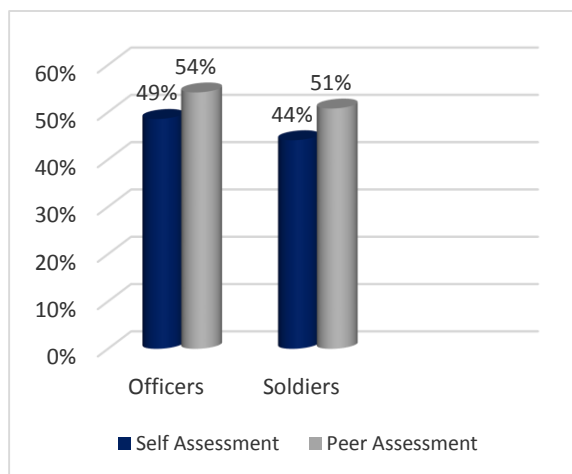


Fig. 1. Cooperation skills of the officers and soldiers, self-assessment and peer assessment.

#### B. Research Question 2: Do Cooperation Skills Help Them Fulfil Their Mission?

As we see, the level of the military officers' cooperation skills is very high and it is equal to 85% of the maximum score. The soldiers possess cooperation skills at the rate of approximately 79% of the maximum score. The results are very good. Well-developed cooperation and interaction skills give the officers and soldiers certain benefits. Cooperation skills promote development of interpersonal skills, responsibility, flexibility and self-esteem, responsibility towards colleagues, generation of support, of enthusiasm and motivation.

They offer moral support and assurance in relationship with comrade-in-arms and are important for carrying out their duties. They reduce negative aspects of the duty tour, since responsibilities and pressure are shared. The most vulnerable aspects of professional activity are shared, thus reducing uncertainty, strengthening personal resolve and overcoming failure and frustration. Surely, success of the military mission depends largely on the cooperation skills of the members of the military.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Cooperation skills have many advantages for the military: they provide the chance to carry out difficult tasks thanks to the support of the comrade-in-arms; they increase coordination among officers and soldiers and involve them in the improvement of the situation. But most importantly,

members of a military give each other moral support and confidence in the process of their duty tour.

This professional cooperative culture of the military is characterized by the depth of relationships and by achieving common goals. The importance of cooperative skills implies committing to common goals, which is opposed to individualism. In short, the numerous positive consequences that cooperation skills offer both officers and soldiers are numerous as they reduce uncertainty.

Further, the combination of unique perspectives and backgrounds of developing cooperation skills can enhance group dynamics and teamwork. Nevertheless, due to the intricate nature of the military and its high-stakes missions, maximizing cooperation skills has proven to be an ongoing challenge.

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