Civilian to Officer: Threshold Concepts in Military Officers Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses threshold concepts in Military Officers Education (MOE) at military institutions that also provide tertiary level education. In this study, threshold concept theory provides a helpful analytical tool to examine the process deemed necessary for transformation from civilian status to thinking and practising as a soldier and consequently a military officer. Combined with phenomenography as the research methodology, the research involved seven higher ranking officers, 24 military trainers, and 29 officer cadets from two reputable military education institutions in Europe. The findings show that there are two ontological shifts that transform a civilian to become an officer. During Phase I, the first ontological shift in becoming a soldier involves the acceptance of discipline and obedience, recognition of a framework of related ethics and values, loyalty to the unit (collective above individual needs) and a sense of obligation. Meanwhile, Phase II will require a soldier to understand the concept of personal responsibility for the execution of mission, putting others before self, and the 'power to command' to complete the transformation in becoming a military officer.

Keywords: Military officer's education, ontological shifts, phenomenography, threshold concepts

INTRODUCTION

This paper is derived from an empirical doctoral research study based on threshold concepts in Military Education (ME). Data

for the study were collected from two major higher military education institutions from two countries in Europe. The research seeks to find out the key conceptual transformations and ontological shifts in the training of military cadets at military higher education institution. As the dual nature of the education includes both academic and professional military education, the research involves a diverse *community of practice*

(Wenger, 1998) which includes the cadets, military trainers, educators and policy makers of the two institutions.

Threshold Concepts Framework (TCF) has a distinct way of identifying crucial concepts in a subject "without which the learner cannot progress" (Meyer & Land, 2003, 2006; Land et al., 2008). The framework has been described as a "portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (Meyer & Land, 2003, p.1), thus it provides a useful perspective in identifying and providing some insight into the challenges of transforming an ordinary civilian into a soldier and subsequently a military leader. Lambert (2002) point out that one particular problem with ME is the absence of practical experience made available for these *students of war*. Unlike any other profession, war is not an everyday event, thus making the professional development of a soldier almost unrealistic (Lambert, 2002, p.85). In ME settings, the curriculum requires a transformation process, which can be seen as being "protracted over a considerable period of time," (Lambert, 2002, p.24) in order to achieve its purpose. Furthermore, identifying such threshold concepts in ME can assist the curriculum designer on the 'jewels in the curriculum' (Land et al., 2005, p.57) which are usually discipline-specific in nature which students must master. Henceforth, the present research attempts to articulate clearly the transformation processes and particular forms of troublesomeness in the "ways of thinking and practising" (Meyer & Land,

2003, p.10) within military disciplines. In addition, Meyer and Land further assert that wherever threshold concepts exist within a curriculum, they are likely to be troublesome for some students, putting them in a state of liminality – "a suspended state in which understanding approximates to a kind of mimicry or lack of authenticity" (p.10). Thus, understanding the concepts involved in educating officer cadets and supporting them more effectively through this suspended state is likely to assist the production of better military officers for the future.

Moving forward towards the 21st century, most European military education institutions have operationalised a form of Officer Development Programme (ODP) in order to develop cadets' intellectual capacities, military professionalism and leadership capabilities (Foot, 2002; Caforio, 2007; Dasseville, 2008). This programme is an important process in order to transform a civilian to become an officer cadet which will help "them to identify themselves with a new role, and thus change their self-conception" (Dornbusch, 1955, p.321). However, the ODP itself may prove to be problematic as the cadet's participation has somehow being marginalised and the importance of cadets' very own learning experience is ignored. For example, Erikson (2010) in his research has problematized the military training method which he later concluded that there is a need to get a better understanding of the 'how to' in optimising the soldier's ability to function in real situations. Erikson's view is understandable

as Luoma and Mälkki (2009) assert that the transformation of soldiership is still missing an understanding of the transformation itself, that is to say, the pedagogies has goals and guidelines of the transformation, but the logic and process of the transformation itself is unexplored. In other words, there is a gap in understanding the 'cadets' experience' to (1) become a soldier and (2) become an officer. The difficulties may be a result from tacit knowledge – the unwritten knowledge of a particular community of practice – which restrict a cadet from moving on and complete their transformation. Therefore, the involved TCF presents an alternative to investigate the core concepts needed to be undergone by the cadets to progress as military personnel well-prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

MILITARY EDUCATION IN A BRIEF

The basic aim of military education is to provide customised schooling for the army personnel to acquire the essential traits as a soldier and a desire to exhibit such conduct as a military man and woman (Franke, 1999, p.68). As with any other professional communities of practice, the intended military education must be able to transform an ordinary civilian into a distinct man and woman of arms. Furthermore, the level of education used at the institution usually mirrors its civilian counterparts to produce academically trained military officers who can face the future security challenges of the nation in regional and global contexts (Watson, 2007; Juhary, 2008). It means that the officer cadets are not only required to be transformed to suit a community of practice, but they must also be calibre leaders among those in the community. It resonates what Clausewitz termed as military 'geniuses' – leaders of character whose lives and conducts are governed by the military and able to produce outstanding achievement while performing their duties. This is in line with the idea that can be traced since Plato's time, where military organisations were considered as the 'guardians' of the public, thus granting them access to the best education and training (Patton, 1937; Juhary, 2012).

At present, according to Watson (2007), the professional military education (PME) is a product of a nation's needs to produce men and women into "an effective fighting force" (41). Due to this, it has now become a norm to find higher military education institution that combines both military training and civilian higher education for officer cadets. As an example, institutions like the National Defence University Finland, Belgium Royal Military Academy, Norwegian Military Academy, National Defence University Warsaw, U.S. Military Academy West Point and Royal Military College of Canada are now commissioning officers upon their graduation in their studies. Apart from completing academic requirement, be it in engineering, computer science, medicine and others, the officer cadets are also required to learn military subjects like military arts, military science and military theory.

Schneider (2005) in his article *Transforming Advanced Military Education*

for the 21ˢᵗ Century provided good thorough accounts of the evolution of military education from the time of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Archimedes until the present day. Presently, more emphasis is being given to military leadership due to its "strong element of identification, where the superior officer acts as a role model for his subordinates" (Schneider, 2005, p.22). This emphasis can be interpreted as a development of professionalism for the cadet officer's officership and military ethics. For example, Eriksen (2010) noted that the "recurrent challenges that soldiers and commanders face within military operations concern the discrimination between combatants and non-combatants" (p.195). Under such condition, a soldier or commander must be able to respond "quickly, yet wisely, sensitively and in an ethically legitimate manner." Consequently, most military education institutions have now adopted an experience-based learning system where "rule-based behaviour, deliberate decision-making, and consequence analysis are a prerequisite" (Eriksen, 2010, p. 196).

In the context of military education, engaging cadets as active participants on their own may be a problem. As, the nature of the institution promotes dual entity of identity to the cadet officers: (1) to become a soldier and (2) to become an officer. Hence, they may experience difficulties in negotiating these two roles collectively or individually. However, these difficulties are the result of tacit knowledge – the unwritten knowledge of a particular community of practice – which restricts cadets from moving on and transforming themselves. Therefore, the threshold concepts, which are further explained in the following sections of this study, present a new alternative to examine the core concepts needed to be implemented by the cadets that would be helpful for them to progress as military personnel and are well prepared to face the challenges of the 21ˢᵗ century.

THE STUDY

The study adopted a phenomenographic methodology which was conducted at two military institutions (Institution A (*Ia*), and Institution B (*Ib*)) in Europe. A total of seven (n=7) policy makers (*PM*), 24 (n=24) military trainers (*MT*), and 29 (n=29) cadets (*S*) were included in in-depth semi structured interviews. Phenomenography began as an experiment with first-year university students at Gothenburg University, Sweden by Ference Marton and his colleagues who explored different levels of understanding (Entwistle, 1997, p.27). In one of his papers, Marton described phenomenography as "a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in the world around them" (1986, p.31). In other words, this method does not give a special emphasis on the individuals' experience, but rather on describing the collective meaning and variations in meaning related to people's experience of a phenomenon (Skär, 2010; Paakkari et al., 2010; Conwill, 2012; Stenfors-Hayes, Hult & Dahlgren, 2013).

According to Säljö (1997), the prime interest of phenomenographic research is in finding and defining the "variation in ways of experiencing reality" through the *categories of description* – a "way of describing a way of experiencing something" (p.175). Thus, adopting phenomenography as an approach to this study allows the interaction between the student, the military trainers and those policy makers that have the influence over "the content of learning material, and the overall learning environment" (Entwistle, 1997, p.129).

It is important at this point of discussion to spell out the epistemological aspect of phenomenographic approach used in the present research. To begin with, this study is a complicated undertaking as it tries to identify the nature of transformation going through the curriculum and the experiences of having done with it. According to Walsham (1995, p.77), such an endeavour requires a difficult task of "accessing other people's interpretations, filtering them through their own conceptual apparatus, and feeding a version of events back to others, including in some cases both their interviewees and other audiences." Hence, I was required to talk with people to engaged them about their 'stuck places' as they described the feelings of being in such a conundrum. Such engagement would be very hard especially in an institution where being 'weak' and having problems is considered as an undesirable trait. This almost automatic social conception among the military personnel may hinder the research from getting an honest and the

real-world experience of the matter under study. For this reason, the present research would not be doing the classic typology of phenomenographic research. Instead, the phenomenographic approach is used to gain participants' views of the experiences and combining them with threshold concepts as lenses to analyse and understand the data. In other words, the interest of the research is to investigate the 'nature of the transformation' rather than the personal experiences of the individuals. In addition, the approach also enables me to tap in rich personal views from the specialists, military instructors, current and former cadets, which enables me to identify the crucial concepts in becoming a military officer.

FROM A CIVILIAN TO AN OFFICER

As depicted in Figure 1, the data collected gives the impression that there are two poignant and crucial stages in transforming a civilian to an officer. The first shift is labelled as "Soldiership"; a crucial stage where the newly admitted cadets learn and accommodate military's values, culture and ethics as a part of their new identities as officers. After this comes the second shift – best viewed as the ultimate goal in the institutions under study, where cadet officers are given university level education with military training that prepares them as military officers, thus labelling this shift as "Officership". At each phase, there will be important concepts needs to be understood by the cadets in order to complete their transformation to become an officer at the said institutions. These concepts, as it will

be presented in the following sections are in actual the "jewels" in military officer's education.

This argument, however, must be interpreted cautiously as this does not mean or in any way trying to suggest that the learning trajectory in becoming an officer at these institutions happens in a singular, linear line, going from left to right as depicted in Figure 1. Rather, described by one of the officers included in the research, the process in becoming an officer is;

> *"...sort of going hand-in-hand. I don't see it as the two different things. [When] I was being trained as a soldier, getting all the military skills, the training as an officer is going on all the time. Even though, we are doing other things, it never stops. You are all the time being trained as an officer... So, it is a whole package sort of thing"* (MT8Ia).

In other words, the discussion of findings included in the coming sections will only describe the "jewels" in MOE that an individual must undergo to become a soldier and then to become an officer.

SOLDIERSHIP

The first ontological shift in becoming a soldier involves the acceptance of discipline and obedience, recognition of a framework of related ethics and values, loyalty to the unit (collective above individual needs) and a sense of obligation. I would like to exemplify this through the 'military initiation' phase, where prospective candidates will be subjected to a certain period of "communal character of life in
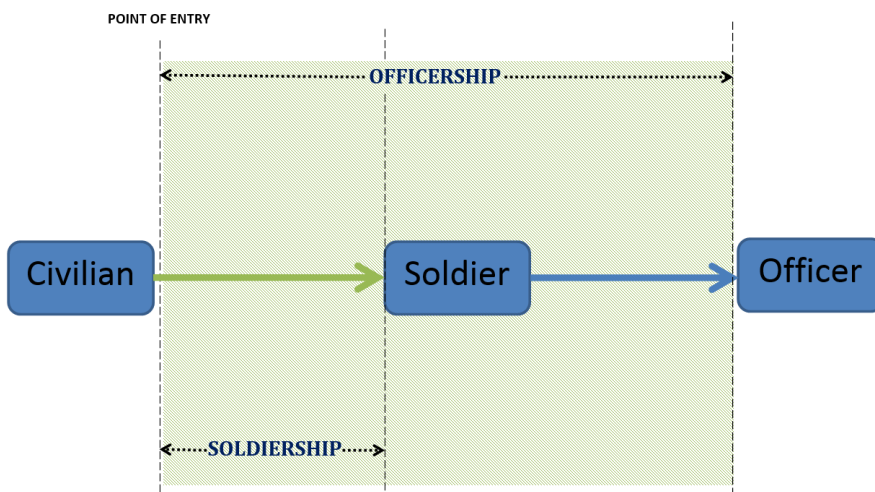

Figure 1. Shift from Civilian to Officer

uniform, bureaucratic character of military life" and the "compliance with rules, the acceptance of orders and authority, and the way the organisation deals with disobedience through overt punishment" (Soeters, Winslow & Weibull, 2006, p.240-242). This finding corroborates the ideas brought upon by Wood and Solomonides (2008) who portrayed this as a *transition period*, if successful, "includes the later transition to professional work, while potentially inspiring deep learning along the journey" (p. 132). One of the officers who is responsible for the initiation phase reasoned that "[the] real reason for this is to see whether you can accept that it (being a military personnel) is not always easy [and] to break from the civilian attitude" (MT4Ib) by pushing them to "start *acting* like military" (PM4Ib). The phrase "*acting* like military" is a strong indication that the military is a practice that "requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context" (Wenger, 1998, p.149). This initial stage can also be troublesome as it introduces the individual to unfamiliar territory. One of the respondents mentioned that prior to his admittance to the institution, he:

> *"…didn't have a clear idea what the real Army was like… I hardly knew what was there… I didn't know the Air Force, the Army or the Navy. For me, Army was like digging holes, marching around… like infantry. That was the basic idea that I had about the Army… shooting, digging holes and marching… something like that"* (MT5Ib).

"Didn't have a clear idea" and "hardly knew what was there" are strong views that suggest the importance of an 'initiation' phase, whose sole purpose is to introduce the newly admitted members of the public to the military communities of practice. This made the stage as an important one to the newly admitted young civilians who may find the military environment as an 'alien' one. Apart from that, my observation of this 'initiation' period has led me to conclude that the phase is a crucial one in eliminating those who did not fit the organisation's ideals. Caforio (2007) describes this phase as *anticipatory socialisation* where a candidate's compatibility with the military is measured through an initial period of actual military life or service (257).

Hence, in order for the phase to be *transformative*, the research establishes that there are three threshold crossings; the preparedness to use legitimised violence, *Esprit de Corps* and prompt and unquestioned execution of the mission command. A further discussion of these three thresholds is as follows.

Preparedness to Use Legitimised Violence

According to Huntington, "[not] all officers are professional military officers. The professional military officer is distinguished from other officers by his skill to manage violence" (1963:785). This suggests that

one key difference that separates the military professionals from the others would be the subscription to violence in performing their professional duties. Being asked to define what the definition of a soldier is, an officer noted that;

> *… for me a soldier is somebody who has skills in applying violence legally, and you act in accordance to the interest of the nation and for me a soldier has three roles - he's a skilful expert in what he does; he's a person of character because he has to have certain values; and thirdly for me a public servant. He has always to serve the public interest* (PM5Ib)

This finding support those observed by Tsygan (2013) who established that in order to become a soldier, one must adapt to military activities especially those related to combat conditions – "to the threat of death, severe injury, and capture, to the need to perform combat missions under fire" (p.813). Recalling his experience while being trained at Institution B, an interviewee recollected that;

> *"There is this one person… as we start to work with weaponry that said; "Oh… this is not for me. I cannot handle weapons." She was afraid of the violence… yeah… those things"* (MT9Ib).

The officer's description of his former colleague who "could not handle weapons" because "she was afraid of the violence" is a clear example how troublesome this threshold would be. In this instance, the person could not go over the idea that 'a soldier must kill people'. This, thus suggest that there are those new young cadets, especially those whose belief system contradict the military's subscription to such legitimised violence may find themselves in a liminal state which will lead them to mimicry or leaving the defence forces all together.

Esprit de Corps

The second threshold for soldiership would be *Esprit de Corps* – "the emergence of shared beliefs and values among the individuals within a group and their desire to achieve a common goal" (Juncos & Pomorska, 2014, p. 302). In one of the interviews, an officer responded that;

> *…in the military there is the group thing… Yes, we have to work as a group, you have to look as a group… in French it is Esprit de Corps… the corps spirit* (PM3Ib).

Reisel et al. (2005) further explain that esprit de corps "should help teams to deliver effective performance" – which in the military context is the fulfilment of missions given by the mission command. A newly admitted cadet would have to understand that even though a soldier is on his/her own an expert, he/she will still need to function in a unit comprises of different people with different expertise in order to

accomplish a certain goal. However, this proves to be troublesome experience based on a conversation with one of the officers included in this research. According to him, embedding esprit de corps within the military context;

> *"…is more difficult for the people nowadays; staying in one room with 12 other youngsters, some people are for the first time sleeping away from home. Especially in today's world you want to have your own privacy.…but suddenly you have a row of beds that you have to sleep …and suddenly he has to live with 10 or 11 other people"* (PM2Ia).

In other words, the young cadets in these two institutions are becoming more and more removed from physical socialisation that affect their ability to work as a group. This condition could further be explained through the culture of maintaining a smaller number of family members. As the number of people in a family reduces, it empowers the parents to provide better living conditions and could now afford luxuries that the previous generation could not. These blessings may now be a nuisance to the military as it makes the training for *Esprit de Corps* a bit more complex.

Prompt and Unquestioned Execution of the Mission Command

The third threshold in becoming a soldier would be following orders given by higher ranking officers which can simply be defined

as "doing *what* are told, *when* you are told*"*. In term of obedience, an interviewee mentioned that to be a soldier, one should know that they will face things which are not 'fun' but they still have to do it. An officer responded that this is;

> *"...a big transformation from a civilian to the military… I would say… to obey orders… sharply being put. It all goes down to that. You are not your master anymore. You are in 'a system"* (PM3Ib).

A critical point noted here is the impact of the total military organisation men and how it manages the men. As compared to civilian institutions, the ability to adhere and obey orders is an utmost important quality of a soldier as without it the fundamental structure of the organisation could collapse. An interviewee mentioned that;

> *Well… the military life it's a… it's quite different from the civilian life… what the young people is used to before the military service. There are certain schedules, it's physically very demanding and you have to follow the orders. And in the first phase we concentrate on that… that you follow the orders* (PM1Ia).

Based on the interviews, one of the interviewee mentioned that most of the candidate who failed the initiation phase were mostly those who were reluctant to receive and obey orders. This is a significant finding as new cadets may face severe

conceptual difficulty in becoming a soldier if they reject the idea that they are now 'in a system' that they must obey. On a different note, one of the officers accounted that;

"I think it is difficult to compare what I had experienced to what the youngsters are living right now because they have different mentality throughout the year. For instance, when I came to the military academy… and they told us "Jump", everybody jumps because that is what we were told to do. Right now if you tell a young guy "Jump," he will ask you "Ok… how high do I have to jump… how long do I have to jump… why do I have to jump…" (PM4Ib).

What the account would suggest is that there is now a social generation gap that makes 'obedience' a threshold that the new generation of cadets need to understand. This finding corroborates Shamir and Ben-Ari's (2008, p.8) idea that the contemporary military forces nowadays are facing problems of legitimising their credibility and legitimacy in the use of force in the current society.

OFFICERSHIP

The second ontological shift involves assuming the mantle of responsibility and acceptance of leadership role. Analysis from this research offers that this stage involves a necessary psychological distancing from the troops and a preparedness to

impose sanctions and punishment which are necessary for mission completion and to achieve 'the greater good.' To begin with, based on an interview with one of the officers, a key to this ontological shift would be to transform yourself "from being told what to do to thinking on your own and telling others" (PM3Ib) by "learn[ing] the work of the soldiers from the lowest level" (PM2Ib). The two comments made by two policy makers at Institution B thus suggest that the shift from a soldier to an officer requires a psychological transference while still maintaining the soldiering points mentioned previously. Comments made was also apparent at Institution A where their policy makers had made a comment that being an officer and a soldier;

"…in principle they are the same. In our system, all of our officers have been a soldier or a private once in their life. In our system you can't just, if you have a military rank, you can't just come to an officer's rank. You start from the bottom. We all had been a private once and then we had been trained and we come higher and higher. So we can say actually that an officer is always a soldier but a soldier is not an officer. So an officer has to be both" (PM2Ia).

Thus, a cadet who has a good grasp on soldiership may now move on to the next shift which requires the following thresholds. As we now move on to officership, the research

has established another three thresholds for the ontological shifts which are;

a. Personal responsibility for the execution of mission

b. Others before self; and

c. The "power to command"

The task of identifying the troublesome knowledge within this phase proves to be a complex attempt. It was considered during the analysis stage that the available data would demonstrate a certain degree of troublesomeness, but this is not the case as; there was an absence of sufficient data, which indicates the troublesomeness encountered during this experience. Thus, this absence of evidence perhaps portrays a less difficult transformation compared to the Soldiership phase. The author disagreed with this point of the study, as, according to him, this stage involved a lesser degree of troublesomeness because the cadets – who have made the transformation to become a soldier – possess strong background knowledge and experience that assist them hugely for the next phase of transformation. It is also likely that they might develop a strong degree of commitment to Officership by the end of the Soldiership phase and *prior to* entering the Officership stage. Therefore, this is a better explanation as to why evidence of troublesomeness is hard to find – they (the present officers included in the present study) have already made the ontological shift to a great degree that it is impossible for them to recall what has become 'a second nature' to them.

Nevertheless, there are still interesting junctures at this Officership phase that can present a degree of troublesomeness.

Personal Responsibility for Execution of Mission

It is important to begin the discussion of the Officership's thresholds with the notion of 'responsibility.' According to Ulmer (2010, p.137), "the purpose of 'leadership' within the Army is to get the job done" and in order to get 'the job done' someone must shoulder and bear the responsibility for making things happen. A policy maker at Institution B described his transformation from Soldiership to Officership as follows:

> *"…[f]rom soldier becoming an officer… I might exaggerate this but anyone can become a soldier but not everybody can become an officer. There is a big difference as I mentioned in the beginning. An officer is a soldier plus all the aspects. In my case… it is accepting responsibility. As a soldier… even as a cadet… it was easy. They told us what to do, we execute it and we get our points. But when I came to my unit, I was made responsible for my unit. Suddenly I have 30 people… I was responsible. I never learned this aspect at the Academy except during the winter and summer camps. But this was also happening to my colleagues…"* (PM1Ib).

This notion of being 'responsible' is seen to be unanimous among the officers from both institutions. One might argue that it is generally accepted that all other professions – no matter in what field – involve the appointment of managers who manage other personnel to achieve the organisation's goal. However, it is the military's structural essence of being strongly hierarchal that gives the organisation and extra façade on their notion of 'responsibility' hence making it both unique and distinctive. To begin with, the officer will be required to make instantaneous decisions that may involve human lives. According to a policy maker from Institution B;

> *"An officer for me is someone who [feels] responsible, who is able to take initiatives, who is able to perform his duty after receiving even the smallest amount of information. He has to think about the situation and he has to make up his mind and find a solution and give his orders to his soldiers"* (PM1Ib).

The excerpt suggests that the officer, once entrusted with a mission, will not just be in control, but also accountable for the outcome of the mission which ultimately would involve human lives. Furthermore, to think about the situation, making decisions, finding solutions, and giving out orders the officer is required to;

> *"…[have] the right mentality. Do what is needed to be done, whether if you are qualified or not… just do the job first then come and complain. And the work must be done no matter what is the circumstance. You have to respect the safety regulation but on the other hand the job must be done"* (MT3Ib).

It is this sense of 'having the right mentality' of being responsible that differentiates the officers from the other professions. This enables them to commit themselves intimately to their undertaking.

Obligation to Put Needs of Troops Before Personal Needs

The second threshold in becoming an officer involves a degree of empathy where the officer must put his/her troop's needs ahead of theirs. In one of the interviews, one of the policy makers at Institution A emphasised how important it is for a cadet not to "just come to an officer's rank" (i.e. entering the Service as a Graduate Officer[1]). A reason for this is so that the officers;

> *"…know the life somewhere down there… if I can put it in this way… how they feel, how they do and how their life goes on. So you have to have the understanding and plan and give the orders away. You can do this in a more proper way"* (PM2Ia).

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[1] A graduate officer is a civilian who holds a university degree and successfully complete a rigorous military training lasting for about 12-week and assume the rank of an officer. See http://www.goarmy.com/ocs.html for example.

This feeling of 'empathy' is an aspect highly regarded among the cadets who are currently being educated and trained at the institutions under study. One of the military trainers at Institution B explained that the institution's curriculum gives a particular emphasis on;

> *"…[knowing] the position of a soldier. Because if you are later an officer, you can't imagine what… you don't know that, it's very difficult to have an image of what soldier feels, think, what is the message of a soldier and so on and so on… That is very important that you start as a soldier and you… in a way of graduation, you evolve as an officer"* (MT7Ib).

As it has been mentioned in the previous section, this concept is particularly important because:

> *"…the levels of violence [in the profession may someday require us (the officers) to ask our men and women to put their lives] in physical danger or even losing our lives"* (MT1Ib).

In other words, in order to have the ability to 'ask' and 'demand' others to put their lives on the line, an officer must display the will to do the same.

The "Power to Command"

The third and final threshold for Officership would not only entail the traits and quality but also the 'persona' – described in this research as having the 'power' to command others – of the desired officer. As established through interviews with the officers from both institutions, one of the reasons for the formation of such establishment is to impart and train military officers with high standards of leadership qualities. One of the interviewee mentioned that an officer;

> *…is up in the hierarchy so he has responsibilities over personnel, over equipment. He must have that leadership quality* (MT5Ib)

This quality is so important that one of the officers at Institution A strongly believes that;

> *"You have to have that <u>BEFORE</u> you go to the military school… it should be inside you… you have to be strong, you have to know how to lead humans. But I think, to become an officer you have to have this leadership skills and commitment… the things that you are doing"* (MT7Ia).

Among all the other concepts mentioned above, this authority to command has proven to be the hardest to develop. For this reason, both institutions have employed a systematic education and training curriculum that develops the cadet's intellectual strength and to imbed in them a certain manner and conduct that properly represents their elevated position. One example is by adhering to the standards of being an

officer as mentioned by a policy maker at Institution A who stated that as an officer:

> *"…you are not supposed to swear or you have to talk using proper language with the youngsters so that you have… you are looked upon as an example. In every sense you should… look like an officer, talk like an officer, and behave like an officer"* (PM2Ia).

This quality of "looking like an officer, talking like an officer, and behaving like an officer" in essence are the qualities that will differentiate a soldier from an officer. For this reason, the education system adopted by these two institutions is basically customised to train the cadets to progress gradually to a leader. One of the policymakers mentioned that;

> *"…they will be trained as future platoon leaders. Leader, leadership… the main focus there is not only getting trained in tactics but also leadership… dealing with people, 'how can I make sure that the orders that I am giving to my platoon, to my squad… that people understand what I expect them to do… how can I control this and how can I even interfere if I see that the execution is not going right'?…'How can I correct some mistakes of my people'? That's leadership. So, that is an important part which, I call military education"* (PM4Ib).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to disseminate some findings on a study in TCF of military officers' education in two European institutions. A significant finding of the present research is that the preparation to develop soldiers and military leaders often involves difficult shifts both conceptually and personally for officer cadets and little is known about this process. This paper, thus, contributes to new knowledge by providing compelling discoveries on the establishment of the important concepts deemed crucial to transform a civilian to become a soldier. Through interviews with policy makers, military instructors, and the cadets themselves, the present research establishes that there are two crucial ontological shifts needed that a cadet must go through in order to become an officer through the PME system. This knowledge is fundamentally important, especially to those interested in elevating military education through this age of uncertainty. In addition, the research has also identified the 'jewels' in the curriculum in order to understand the fundamental concepts for soldiership and officership. This has confirmed the validity of using the threshold concept in investigating military education as "it focuses on difficulties of mastering in the subject" (Cousin, 2008, p.201). As it has been presented in this paper, those *'jewels'* in becoming an officer lay within the present research's attempt to understand the '*how'* and '*what'* in officer's education, which had led the author to conclude that the education and training of officers is

hugely influenced by the task of acquiring the identity of military practice which can be a multifaceted and a troublesome process. Even though, it could be argued that the present study did not look into the structure of the curriculum, still, the findings over the crucial concepts in transforming a cadet to become an officer are of great significance. As the study of threshold concepts tends to 'focus on difficulties in mastering a subject', the present study offers an understanding of the troublesome knowledge that may be useful in promoting better education and training methods for future cadets. Furthermore, the ontological shifts will be helpful in informing curriculum developers to reconstruct the present curriculum's structure to accommodate the future cadets in a much better way.

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