

Dynamics of Organizational Behaviour: The Case of the Turkish Military in the Korean War

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Introduction

Organizational behaviour (OB) is the systematic study of how people act within organizations. It is concerned with all aspects of how organizations influence the behaviour of individuals as well as groups, and how they in turn influence organizations (Duncan, 1981). Seeking “*to revitalize organizational theory and develop a better conceptualization of organizational life*” (Simms, 1994), it applies the concepts of the behavioural sciences to the pressing problems of management.

Such a perspective is of interest in studying the internal and external dynamics of military organizations. With the emergence of an open-systems view of organizations, factors such as human sentiments and attitudes as well as technological and sociological forces originating outside have assumed greater importance in applying OB analysis to the military. The present study purports to take a close look at OB dynamics in the Turkish military during the Korean War and to focus on its managerial and sociological aspects.

The methodology of this paper is based on qualitative research using a historical and anecdotal database. The reason for studying military culture in light of the Korean War lies in the importance of that war in Turkish history from the sociological point of view. It was the first international operation in which the Turkish modern Republic and Army took part. For the first time, the Turkish military had a chance to cooperate and communicate with other armed forces and international organizations. After the war, Turkey joined NATO and became a member of the community of Western nations.

After the Soviet Union’s declaration of war against Japan in the closing stages of World War II, the US proposed that Japanese forces surrender to Soviet forces north of the 38th parallel and to US forces south of that parallel. Subsequent Soviet and American occupation respectively in the north and the south led to the initial partition of Korea. When, complying with a United Nations (UN) Security Council request, Soviet and US forces evacuated the country in 1947, two States came into being – the communist “People’s Democratic Republic of [North] Korea” and the capitalist “Republic of [South] Korea” – separated by the 38th parallel (Yucel & Yilmaz, 1995), thus making the partition permanent to this day.

When in 1950 the North Korean invasion of the South began, South Korea asked for UN assistance, and the Security Council solemnly pledged “*to provide aid to South Korea for the benefit of international peace and security*”. Sixteen countries, including Turkey, made up the UN ‘peacekeeping’ force. On August 5, 1950, a Turkish Brigade consisting of 259 officers, 395 NCOs, 22 army civilians, 4,414 corporals and privates, was deployed and first fought against the Chinese army (Turkish General Staff, 1975: pp.60-61). Beginning

with the victory in the battle of Kunuri on November 29, and ending with the ceasefire of July 1953, that Turkish brigade accomplished its mission with more than a fair measure of success ; Turkey did her duty as a member of the UN.

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Through rotations over the three years that the war lasted, a total of some 15,000 Turkish soldiers were deployed to Korea ; for every soldier, at least twenty family members and friends paid close attention to that war – over 300,000 people for whom it was a topic of crucial interest. It is possible to say that a great number of Turks know a lot about, and have sympathy for, Korea because of the war and Korean War veterans' memories. Many Turks feel that they have brotherhood ties to Koreans, forged in sweat and blood, as a result of fighting together against the Communists.

This study of the Turkish military's OB in the Korean War draws upon Michael Beer's 'organizational behaviour model' (Beer, 1997), and centres on the four different dynamics it identifies : environment, organizational design, people and leadership. Organizations evolve toward alignment of these elements in accordance with the "contingency perspective" which holds that the best way to organize and manage people depends on the situation (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The methodology of this qualitative research was based on anecdotal data in connection with behaviour patterns of Turkish servicemen during the Korean War, organized for the purpose of analysis along the lines of the following model:

Figure 1: *The Dynamics of Organizational Behaviour*



These four dimensions of organizational behaviour dynamics are probed in succession in the following.

Environment

Organizations are complex open social systems that require effective exchanges with the environment to survive and prosper. In strategic management literature, macro-environmental factors are approached in political, economic, social and technological (PEST) terms. For the purpose of the present study, organizational environment is mainly characterized by the technology and societal culture bearing on the organization. While technology has its basis in the hardware used and technical skills required by an organization, values, traditions, customs and habits compose the culture of a nation, which

functions as mental programming (Hofstede, 1980) and reflects the ‘soft parts’ of organizations. National culture is part of the environment, and is an important factor for armed forces as well. Over time, organizations develop distinctive and persistent organizational cultures. As any other organization, military establishments affect and are affected by the cultural environment that surrounds them. Turkish soldiers in the Korean War adapted to the UN forces in a short time by means of their organizational culture. Military culture as an element of national culture is influenced, on the one hand, by national characteristics, on the other by military skills, training and experience. Neither people nor organizations can abstract themselves from the cultural environment they live in ; conversely, military organization is apt, under certain conditions that were present during the Korean War, to exert significant influence on the nation's social experience: military structure and cultural values can affect the society (Ilhan, 1999).

There are many frameworks in which to probe cultures. The characteristics of the Turkish national culture can be assessed by resorting to Hofstede’s variables (Hofstede, 1980). The variables to be taken into consideration as regards the organizational culture of the armed forces are as follows (Varoğlu, Siğri & Isin, 2005):

- slightly collective orientations, which foster moral involvement and loyalty ;
- high power distance, associated with centralized decision-making, hierarchy, strong leaders and little delegation, dependency and emphasis on family and status ;
- strong uncertainty avoidance, fostering planning and formalization, and emphasizes legitimate authority ;
- slightly feminine orientations, emphasizing support, nurturing roles and modesty.

In cultural terms, the military plays an original role in Turkish society. Completing military service in Turkey is seen as a rite of passage into adulthood; lack of military experience makes it difficult for males to marry, especially in rural areas, as it is equated with the sense of discipline, sharing, responsibility and courage which the military alone, it is felt, can drill into worthy young men (Varoğlu, Siğri & Isin, 2005).

The political environment is an important element for any military. When hostilities broke out, Turkey was the second country after the US to espouse the UN cause, declare her participation, and come to South Korea's rescue. Even though it was not so easy for the Turkish internal political system to take the decision of sending troops out to war, the sense of ‘justice’ which was one of the central characteristics of traditional Turkish society, helped the politicians to take it. Indeed, *Kutadgubilik*, an old defining book on Turkish government tradition written by Yusuf Has Hacıp, had described the “*perspective of justice*” as the Turkish way of looking upon the world (Arat, 1974). Turkish culture holds that the main difficulty in building a system of international justice resides in “*international tyranny*” (Divitcioğlu, 1987: p.219). Kagans (ancient Turkish Kings) declared that they fought only for peace and order, to “*put down a riot in the country*” and “*defeat an attack from outside*” (Turan, 2006: pp.8-9).

Considering ‘values and traditions’ as a part of the ‘environment of an organization’, the Turkish poet Yunus Emre impressed the importance of ‘human values and human rights’

in Turkish culture and tradition: “*One who does not approach all nations on equal terms commits treason against God*”. The weight of such cultural heritage predisposed Turkey to conduct her mission in this UN-mandated foreign war launched in the name of world peace and order (Arat, 1974).

Organizational Design

Organizational design shapes OB, and decisions about structure and systems are key to implementing organizational strategies. Turkish military behaviour should be approached by considering ‘hierarchy’ as one of the most important elements of its organizational design. As mentioned in *The History of the UN Forces in the Korean War* (MoD of the Republic of Korea, 1973), the Chinese side very successfully conducted psychological warfare, not least in prisoner-of-war (PoW) camps. While PoWs' insignia and badges were removed by order of the Chinese Command, Turkish PoWs still acted as if their chain of command was intact. When Chinese intelligence officers isolated the highest-ranking Turkish officer, a captain, from other Turkish PoWs, nothing changed as the second senior officer took command immediately.

In the Turkish armed forces, orders are carried out in full when given by the most senior officer. In addition, orders are only executed once the highest-ranking officer himself issues the order to do so (“*even if people are waiting to eat or want to smoke a cigarette*”). In that regard, the Turkish army is probably close to the US army, although the central leadership in Turkish organizations has more paternalistic traits than is the case in the United States (Caniglia, 2001 : pp.73-81).

The brainwashing tactics used by the Chinese were effective in the Korean War. But some sources indicate that Turkish PoWs were little affected by it (Baltacioğlu, 2000). Turkish PoWs did not even want to talk to the enemy, and they upheld their military discipline and manners (Yazici, 1963: p.384). In that respect, the number of Turkish soldiers who died in PoW camps was much less than the average among allied forces. Wallace Brown, an American researcher, wrote that the reason for the low level of PoW losses was that they had stubbornly maintained their chain of command (Denizli, 1994).

The second reason behind this attitude was not to be found in organizational design and military behaviour only, but also in the high degree of ‘power distance’ typical of Turkish culture, affecting organizational designs indirectly. Even though soldiers did not wear their proper uniforms and rank insignia, military discipline and hierarchy were still there for everybody to see. During captivity, Turkish troops kept to a daily schedule; they woke up early, at the same appointed time every morning. The highest-ranking officer performed morning and evening inspections every day. Officers and NCOs would typically keep addressing the soldiers to provide psychological support and prevent them from feeling alone (Denizli, 1994).

Groups and group behaviour are important issues of organizational design in understanding OB. In a way that perfectly fits Turkish troops in Korea, ‘small group’ has been defined as a collection of interacting individuals who have common goals, similar values, and structured relationships. Such characteristics were in evidence when the UN

soldiers who were taken prisoner after the battle of Kunuri were forced to walk in a 'death march' in bitter cold conditions. Those who could not walk anymore were soon shot by Chinese soldiers. But among Turkish PoWs, when one of their friends fell by the wayside, two or three other Turkish soldiers would run to help and even carry him. The Chinese soldiers were angered, but amazed and interested at the same time.

In collectivist cultures like Turkey's, social status in the group and cohesiveness within it involve rewards for the deserving. The leadership function in this type of culture can be portrayed as creating an organizational climate which supports teamwork and integration (Schneider & Barsoux, 1998: p.79). In 1951, after the battle at Kumyangjangji, the US Supreme Command in Korea asked for a report on successful personnel in the 241st Turkish Regiment with a view to awarding War Medals. The Regimental Commander, Col. Celal Dora, gave that request short shrift, arguing in his response that “[t]his victory was the result of the self-sacrifice and effort of my troops as a whole. I cannot pick any of these heroes as the hero of this battle. If the Supreme Command does not have enough medals for all of my personnel, then they can award only one medal to our glorious regimental flag, thereby honouring all” (Dora, 1963 : p.208). Thus did the 'Turkish Armed Forces Distinguished Unit Medal' come to decorate the regiment's flag at the behest of American Supreme Commanders (Ozel, 1999: p.398).

Leadership

Leadership values and styles influence organizational behaviour through choices about organizational design and strategies. Recent leadership research has been directed more carefully towards the situational, or relative, view of leadership. Although this appears to many people a more productive approach, the case is far from simple. In Turkish military culture, loyalty to leader does not only refer to the mutual exchange of interests; rather, it is the outcome of an ethical process based on its acceptance by subordinates and the mediate effects of interactions among peers (Varoğlu, Siğri & Isin, 2005).

Leadership in the Turkish military is not something that is easily achieved, but if it is, subordinates are yours for every mission and for the rest of their lives. During the Korean War, before the battle at Wegas, Captain Tarcan, a company commander, was trying to raise morale among his company's soldiers. The enemy was planning to attack the next day. The company commander allowed a short break, and the soldiers were resting. Almost all of the soldiers were writing letters to their families or friends. Capt. Tarcan called one of his soldiers and asked him to whom he was writing his letter. The soldier gave him the letter addressed to his fiancée in the sombre mood of one who could be a martyr in the forthcoming battle. Then the captain wrote a note on small piece of paper which said “*Don't worry, your fiancé will be with you soon...*”, and put the note in the envelope (Oke, 1990: pp.169-170).

It can be said that people's ability to live with uncertainty and their leadership skills are closely and positively related (Zhengkang, 1999). That strong relationship gives leaders the mission of coping with uncertainty. “*In societies with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, people are eager to 'take refuge with the leaders' to decrease the uncertainty*”

(Sargut, 1994). In these types of society, severe uncertainty as in economic or political crises and wars induces people to trust in their leaders to the point of delegating all responsibilities to them (Sargut, 1994). Turkish military leaders' behaviour certainly reflects their subordinates' penchant for strong uncertainty avoidance. In 1951, during the battle of Kumyangjangni, 10th Company attacked a well-fortified enemy position, and was confronted by heavy machine gun fire. A platoon commander tried to attack the pillbox to stop the firing but was hit at the shoulder. To avoid demoralizing his soldiers and prevent uncertainty from taking hold, he acted as if he was not injured, stood up and was wounded a second time in the neck (Denizli, 1994).

It is worth taking a look at Turkish military leadership from the standpoint of the 'organizational commitment' of followers. Turkish soldiers who had been severely wounded in the Kunuri Battle and evacuated to American and Japanese hospitals wanted to go back to their units voluntarily instead of going back home. Regimental Commander Colonel Celal's war memoirs relate how, despite being slated by American doctors for a speedy return to Turkey, Captain Sacit, who was severely injured in the battle, insisted on staying, declared "*I can be useful for my regiment*", and returned to his unit. When he was called by the Regimental Commander, he stood up, leaning on a walking stick, and said "*I beg you to let me go back to my company again, Sir*" (Dora, 1963: p.210).

People

Without people who possess the ability to implement strategy and structural design, the organization cannot be effective. One of the important characteristics discussed as regards the nature of OB is normative behaviour in groups. An extremely complex relationship exists among such factors as group norms, conformity, cohesiveness, and group performance. In military culture, collectivistic behaviour is also important in adapting the social and organizational norms. Common goals, discipline, and compliance with regulations have indeed a great impact on adapting such norms.

In such a cultural climate, the group's interest is paramount. Reacting against group values is a seldom forgiven mistake. Cohesiveness and harmony are important factors in being a member of a group, and the group protects its members as long as loyalty is in evidence. Turkish collectivism stems from a way of life strongly influenced by Islamic culture. It positively affects identification with the troops and uniform in the military. As previously mentioned, in Chinese PoW camps during the Korean War, all of the prisoners of war were forced to wear prisoner attire instead of their own uniforms to demoralize them through indiscipline as a result of being rankless. The aim of this process was to force the prisoners to use brute force instead of rank power. The Chinese gave insufficient food to the prisoners, and food distribution was left to them. The expectation was that only the stronger prisoners would eat while the weaker could not. Yet, the Turkish prisoners still had their chain of command; they celebrated their religious days, and shared their food equally in an orderly manner (Pelser, 1983: 54).

An example of adapting organizational and group norms can be found in soldiers' willingness to take part in the Korean War. After the UN's call and Turkish government's

decision to deploy troops to Korea, thousands of voluntary applications were sent by conscripts to the General Staff from all around the country. The number of these volunteer conscripts was far more than was needed, so the soldiers were chosen by lottery. It was then mandatory for any selected enlistee to secure a medical certificate. Some soldiers who were not permitted to deploy because of a medical problem begged doctors to deliver a clean bill of health so that they could go to war (Denizli, 1994). In that context, one episode was reported in the memoirs of a company commander, Captain Turan Ergungor. He wrote that one day an old man who had lost an arm came to see the doctor with his grandson, and told him in a strong manner: *“You did not give my grandson permission to take part in the war because of his hernia. Hernia is something like circumcision. Treat it as soon as possible, do not prevent my grandson from going to war, and do not make me ashamed !”*. The old man's grandson subsequently deployed to Korea, completed his tour and came back home with the rank of sergeant (Ergungor, 1954).

Collectivism as a national cultural dimension serves to strengthen military leaders' hand in securing acceptance of their decisions by subordinates because parents teach 'obedience' at home. On February 13, 1951, the Supreme Commander of UN troops, General MacArthur, addressed Turkish soldiers in the following words: *“I am glad to see you. Everybody calls you Turks the ‘bravest of the bravest’. There is nothing impossible for Turks, who saved the Eighth Army in Kunuri and defeated the enemy in Kunyangjangji”*. In an article published in the daily newspaper of 1st US Corps about the fighting skills of Turkish troops, Lt. Colonel Blair, US Army, wrote: *“Communist Chinese soldiers were equipped very well. They had plenty of food and ammunition. There was only one Turkish soldier for every three Chinese soldiers. But Turkish soldiers were so predominant.”* (Turkish Veterans' Press, 2000).

Femininity as another cultural dimension is the extent to which the dominant values in society emphasize relationships among people, nurturance, concern for others and the overall quality of life (Hall & Hall, 1997). Korean writer Jeon mentioned in one of his articles that *“Turkish soldiers were collecting hungry, undressed, lost and lonely little children, feeding, dressing and taking care of them. Only Turkish soldiers were doing this. This was the sign of how merciful and soft these great soldiers were”* (Baltacıoğlu, 1995).

'Uncertainty avoidance' does not have the same meaning as 'risk avoidance' in Turkish armed forces. The concepts of 'fear' and 'risk' are well differentiated. Fear is generated by an object, while risk applies to an action. Col. Celal Dora issued a famous order: *“You will never surrender to the enemy. You would rather die than be taken prisoner. If I surrender, one who is near to me can kill me with his gun. If he does not have a gun, it will be right for him to kill me barehanded. It will be right for him”*. So he took a 'relation-oriented' approach to the affirmation of strong values and losing one's life for one's country (Dora, 1963: 200). In light of this, in the battles of 1951, the Turkish brigade was ordered to defend the lines it was holding while the UN Army under the command of General Van Fleet was retreating. In the defence area, First Lieutenant Mehmet Gonenc, an artillery forward observer, was surrounded by the enemy together with his unit. He gave the coordinates of his own location in order to destroy the entire enemy around him. Though the

idea was initially resisted by gunners, as he insisted, the place was wiped out by artillery fire (Sayilan, 1989: pp.51-53).

Turkish soldiers' acceptance of death during combat played important role in the Korean War. It is thought that this attitude stemmed from the cultural characteristics of the nation. There are many sayings in Turkish culture about 'death', referred to as 'going back to the old country', 'fate', and 'reaching eternity'. Some examples of these sayings are : "*The sun must set, so that it can rise*"; "*Life implies death*"; "*Your dying day is a wedding day*" (Mevlana); "*Death is the flying of a life bird out of its cage*" (Mevlana); "*Your funeral day is the day with no lie*"; "*When you were born, everybody around you laughed but you were crying ; live a life such that when you die, everybody around you will cry but you'll be laughing*"; "*Death gives meaning to life, and makes it more valuable*"; "*Don't worry about the hard life you have on earth, it is temporary ! Do not be happy with the material goods you have on earth, they are of transient value*".

As mentioned above, the Islamic view of life sees it as the sum of 'life on earth' and 'life beyond death'. So earthly life is a 'temporary stopover place', death is an 'intermediate station', and according to Islamic belief, one should spend one's life preparing for it. 'Believing in the other world' makes the believers accept death more easily, and accept the death of their relatives instead of rebelling against fate. The holy Kur'an includes verses such as: "*Please God make my death a tribute to my friends' freedom and taste of time*" and "*Every living being will taste death*". These cultural considerations steered the organizational behaviour of the Turkish military in the direction of volunteering for risk.

A final word is in order with respect to intercultural relations and mutual influences. Military culture is not only influenced by the national cultural characteristics, but it also interacts with its international environment, notably with organizations like NATO and the UN, with significant internal impact. Generally, armed forces cooperating as part of international missions have a relation of 'mutual dependence' (Soeters *et al.*, 2004). The latter concept has two dimensions: 'dependence of goals' and 'dependence of sources'. Research suggests that the highest level of success is secured when both types of dependence occur simultaneously, and the lowest level when there is no dependence of goals but dependence of sources is present (*ibid.*). It would appear that in fact this general theoretical statement was not totally exemplified by relations between the Turkish and Korean militaries: cooperation and harmony between the two organizations was a result of the cultural similarities which affected organizational performance on both sides.

Conclusion

In this article, the specifics of the complex linkage between environmental externalities, culture, organizational design and organizational behaviour have been traced in light of Turkish military experience in the Korean War. Methodologically, an important limitation is that the study is based on anecdotal data of mostly Turkish origin. It is hoped that the assertions it contains will be examined in future from multiple perspectives and in light of possible counterfactual data.

Militaries as socio-technical systems are good examples of social relationships in work groups as well as of the effect of environmental factors on organizational structures, and consequently on OB. In that respect, OB appears to be a product of the interaction of several forces such as environment, organizational design, leadership and people whose mutual adaptation governs the evolution of the organization over time.

Values like loyalty to the nation, obedience, determination and endurance, courage and bravery, self-sacrifice, getting along with peers, ethical behaviour, honesty, altruism, professionalism, accountability, and competence are written into Turkish military culture. These values have been socially constructed through long years, indeed centuries, of experience that can be traced back to 209 B.C., when Turkish Hun Emperor Khan established an army for his empire. The main source of this military cultural code is the wider national culture, closely related to the values of the organizational culture because of conscription and the strong ‘Army-Nation’ linkage characteristic of Turkish culture.

If anything then, this article speaks to the driving role of cultural factors in OB dynamics. While this was traditionally approached in terms of exchanges between national and organizational cultures within countries, the picture has recently been enlarged. The last century's final decades increased the importance of multicultural external influences due to globalizing trends in civilian life and the internationalization of military life. Such processes obviously affect those armed forces that take part in multinational operations, and the complexity of OB dynamics has increased with the expansion of NATO and UN peace support efforts. The Korean War, the Turkish military's first ‘peace’ operation, was also its earliest experience in a multicultural setting. Since that defining moment, its experience has broadened as Turkish troops subsequently deployed to Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Lebanon and other multicultural environments.

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