

Chapter 5

Shifting toward a Human-centric Management Paradigm in Shaping Soldier Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction in the Polish Armed Forces



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5.1. Introduction

Employee work engagement and job satisfaction are perhaps the most frequently mentioned issues in this monograph. They are referenced in practically every chapter. However, we discussed them most extensively in Chapters 1 and 2 in the context of labor market shortages and efforts focused on retaining employees in the organization in response to their specific needs and expectations. We will also address this topic in subsequent chapters, such as Chapter 6 in relation to knowledge worker turnover, and in Chapters 7 and 8 focusing on Generation Z. But it will also be a component of the discussions undertaken in Chapters 8 and 9 on HRM and new information technologies. This proves that employee work engagement and job satisfaction are very important issues since they are discussed from so many perspectives. However, what particularly distinguishes the problem addressed in this chapter is the subject of interest, which is soldiers.

Strengthening employee engagement and satisfaction plays an increasingly important role in the implementation of human resources management (HRM) policies in various types

of modern organizations (Juchnowicz, 2012), both in Poland (Sypniewska et al., 2023) and around the world (Baruah et al., 2023). It's worth noting that almost 40 years ago, quality of work management models such as the TQM model, for example, emphasized employee engagement and satisfaction, alongside issues like employee commitment and involvement, as a key factor influencing the quality of products and services offered by the organization (Walton, 1985).

And regarding the strategic approach to human capital management, employee engagement was recognized as a key element of an organization's HR policy over 50 years ago (Porter et al., 1974). This is supported by research showing that engaged and satisfied employees are more likely to expend extra effort at work, which not only improves organizational performance (Moczyłowska, 2013) but also positively affects the organization's final performance results (Stor, 2024). Engaged employees are less likely to experience absenteeism, change jobs and make mistakes, which translates into savings for the organization (Czarnowsky, 2008; Wagner et al., 2006). Thus, from an economic perspective, investing in shaping employee engagement and job satisfaction can benefit the organization in terms of increased efficiency, productivity and profitability (Singh and Gupta, 2015).

Consciously exerting a positive influence on employee engagement and job satisfaction leads to the formulation of various concepts, strategies or models of structured organizational activities within this scope (Chandani et al., 2016). Defining such frameworks individually for each organization is important, as organizations have their own culture, values and standards that affect the way employees respond to different incentives and stimuli. Thus, the concept and developments for shaping employee engagement and satisfaction should be tailored to the characteristic traits of an organization and should take into account the objectives for the implementation of the HRM policy (Marchington et al., 2012). This means that the type of organization can be a significant context that underlines the fact that not only empirical studies but also practiced solutions can be highly specific and, therefore, significantly extend beyond the frameworks considered typical. Consequently, scientists are using increasingly sophisticated methods embedded in a specific context, which allow confirming the existence of causal relationships between HRM practices, like those oriented toward employee engagement and satisfaction, and organizational performance (Garengo et al., 2022). This is consistent with the long-standing calls in the literature to pay special attention to the context (Shuck et al., 2021), because in many cases it determines how the research data is interpreted (Boccoli et al., 2023; Stor, 2022).

A particular type of organization is the armed forces, which, compared to civilian organizations, represent a very specific context for shaping the engagement and satisfaction of soldiers with the conditions of their assigned tasks, understood as working conditions (Iddagoda et al., 2022). The armed forces operate under unique conditions that often involve high stakes and intense pressure, which necessitates tailored engagement strategies to maintain soldier morale and effectiveness. Unlike civilian sectors, military organizations require a deep alignment between the soldiers' personal motivations and the mission objectives, highlighting the importance of engagement in achieving operational success (Oskarsson et al., 2020).

Additionally, the extreme and often volatile environments in which soldiers operate demand a specialized approach to job satisfaction and support, distinct from conventional workplace settings.

Even in times of peace, the armed forces remain a distinct type of organization in terms of soldier engagement and job satisfaction. This specificity arises because military duties, even in non-combat roles, involve a high degree of discipline, readiness (Peng et al., 2020), and the need to adhere to a strict chain of command (Fors Brandebo et al., 2019) which significantly impacts the nature of work and the psychological engagement of personnel (Owens, 1969; Österberg and Rydstedt, 2018). Furthermore, the ethical and moral dimensions of military service, along with the potential for sudden shifts to combat readiness, create a unique set of expectations and stresses that influence job satisfaction. These aspects require tailored HRM practices and supportive measures to ensure that soldiers remain committed (Kanapeckaitė and Bagdžiūnienė, 2024), engaged, and satisfied with their roles (Pastor Álvarez et al., 2019), highlighting the enduring uniqueness of military organizations (Prentice, 2022) in maintaining workforce engagement, regardless of the operational context.

Against this backdrop, the Polish Armed Forces have recently faced quite unique circumstances. Although they have not engaged in any military actions on their own territory since the end of World War II, two significant contextual events have recently occurred in peacetime. On one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out at the beginning of 2020, and on the other, two years later in 2022, Russia launched a military attack on Ukraine. The unfolding pandemic in Poland (Kocik, 2022) and the escalating barbaric assault on the country to the east of Poland's border have created completely different operating conditions for the Polish army (Kozerawski, 2023). Specifically, in the second context of pandemic and near-border wartime, the army had to not only manage the direct health risks of the pandemic among its personnel (Mazurkiewicz, 2022) but also prepare for potential military threats (Skrabacz, 2023). This dual pressure required rapid adjustments in operational protocols (Kuś, 2023) and heightened readiness, contrasting sharply with the more stable conditions of the pre-pandemic and near-border pre-war period. Such challenging times also demand that the organization take special actions to shape soldier engagement and satisfaction in a specific manner, responding to emerging conditions, military strategies, and enabling required soldier performance that ultimately determines the performance of the entire Armed Forces.

Hence, **the main goal of this chapter** is to identify, analyze, and evaluate the activities that contribute to shaping soldier work engagement and job satisfaction (SSWE&JS) within a military organization such as the Polish Armed Forces during peacetime, although in two combined specific contexts: pre-pandemic and near-border pre-war, as well as pandemic and near-border wartime. Additionally, the chapter aims to interpret the identified phenomena from the perspective of the human-centric management paradigm and also to formulate practical recommendations for the military organization under study.

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5.2. The Theoretical Framework for the Variables under Study

As organizations globally navigate the evolving paradigms of employee engagement and satisfaction, the necessity to integrate human-centered approaches within all sectors becomes undeniable. In particular, this chapter builds upon the foundation laid in the introduction, extending the discourse to the distinctive context of military organizations. Unlike typical corporate environments, military settings demand a unique blend of stringent discipline and heightened emotional support to effectively manage both routine operations and critical wartime activities. Here, we delve deeper into the theoretical frameworks guiding our understanding of the variables under study, specifically within the Polish Armed Forces. This approach not only resonates with the human-centric management paradigm discussed throughout this monograph but also highlights the specialized strategies that underpin effective HRM in military contexts, reflecting a complex blend of traditional rigor and evolving humanistic values.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the object of research is the Polish Armed Forces (SZRP), undergoing a continuous transformation of its HRM model since 2008 – from the model of mass compulsory military service, through the transitional period of professionalization of the military, to the current stage of professionalization of the army (Piotrkowski, 2012). The latest Act of 11 March 2022 on the defense of the Homeland assumes that by the end of 2032 the army is to be a formation ready in every aspect to perform tasks during two organizational states, i.e. peace (denoted by the letter ‘P’) and war time (by the letter ‘W’). By implementing the assumptions of the personnel doctrine, the army in peacetime prepares its human potential for a possible time of war, which emphasizes the importance of commitment to service in peacetime for the army’s potential in times of conflict.

This evolving strategic framework highlights the critical need for a robust model of shaping soldier work engagement and job satisfaction (SSWE&JS) that not only prepares soldiers for the dual demands of peace and potential combat but also bridges the gap between existing HRM practices and the dynamic requirements of modern military operations. The urgency for such a model grows as geopolitical tensions around Poland’s borders increase, necessitating a force that is not only technically prepared but also highly motivated and engaged under all conditions. The preparation and implementation of the SSWE&JS model in the Polish Armed Forces is important for a number of reasons, key among them are:

- The engagement, satisfaction, commitment and motivation of military personnel are crucial to the effectiveness of military tasks and missions. The model would help to understand what actions are needed to maintain high levels of engagement and job satisfaction, resulting in better military performance.
- Collaboration and trust within a team are important in the Polish Armed Forces. The model should include elements that support the building of bonds between team members, which in turn can contribute to better cooperation and performance in difficult situations.
- Serving as a soldier requires courage, dedication and personal sacrifice. The model should include elements that help build and maintain high morale among personnel, which can positively influence readiness to perform in any situation.

- Working in the military can be challenging and stressful, which can lead to burnout. The model would include strategies and support for personnel to cope with stress and maintain work-life balance, which can counteract professional burnout.
- The Polish Armed Forces need highly skilled and motivated staff. Developing this engagement model can help attract new recruits and retain existing staff by demonstrating that the organization cares about their engagement, satisfaction, development and well-being.

In **developing the SSWE&JS model**, the author of this monograph chapter adopted several fundamental terminological assumptions and conceptual solutions. Regarding the terms and definitions used, proposals by M. Stor were utilized. **Specifically, it was assumed that:**

- **Employee work engagement** means a specific attitude of an employee and the resulting behavior characterized by identification with organizational goals and values, taking actions consistent with the organization's interests, willingness to belong to the organization, readiness to act giving high rank to the company's interests, undertaking activities that go beyond the standards, with simultaneous readiness for responsibility in the conditions of independent action (Stor, 2023).
- **Job satisfaction** is understood as an emotional state resulting from the employee's perception of his or her own work as giving pleasure and providing what an employee considers important (Stor, 2023).
- **Shaping employee work engagement and job satisfaction (SEWE&JS)** involves activities that are intended to stimulate employee engagement and job satisfaction in such a way as to achieve the organization's goals and ensure its success by creating friendly working conditions (Stor, 2024, p. 98).
- In the armed forces, the concept of a **friendly working environment** specifically addresses the unique challenges faced by military personnel, such as high-stress conditions, long deployments, and the need for readiness. It focuses on creating conditions that ensure soldiers are not only physically prepared but also mentally supported through structured peer relationships, leadership that promotes trust and respect, and resources tailored to the specific stressors of military life. This environment aims to maintain morale and effectiveness, crucial for soldiers who operate in much more unpredictable and hazardous conditions than typical workplace settings.
- Because the model is intended for soldiers, the **term 'employee' has been replaced with 'soldier'**. Consequently, the model has been named **the model of Shaping Soldier Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction in Military's Peacetime** and is abbreviated as **SSWE&JS**.

Furthermore, as for the conceptual framework, the author followed the guidelines of the regulations for the Polish Armed Forces personnel policy. Additionally, as a basis, Rummel and Brache's (2020) method of improving organizational effectiveness at three levels has been adopted. The levels are the employee, the organization and the personnel process. At the organizational level, reference should be made to the perspective of the organization's core competencies in the area of the HR function, affecting the achievement of the organization's

strategic and operational goals. At the individual level the perspective of the benefits of participation in the organization’s activities and its behavior towards the employee from the HR policy level is noteworthy. The final perspective for describing the SSWE&JS model is the personnel process, which should be given objectives from an organizational and individual perspective for the pertinent activities (Jabłońska-Wołoszyn, 2023). Analyzing the areas of the military’s influence on soldiers’ engagement and satisfaction through the image of the organization is arranged in Figure 4.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL	EMPLOYEE LEVEL	HR PROCESS LEVEL
↓	↓	↓
Area of influence of the military on the soldier	Indicator of reinforcement of commitment	Objective for the HRM process
Employer image	Belonging to an elite professional group	Pride in service and respect and confidence in soldiers as a professional group
	Strategic potential of the army	Soldiers' confidence in the impact of the Armed Forces on the internal and international environment in terms of objectives and strategic plans
	Organization and management in the army	Satisfaction with the process of planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating tasks carried out in the military unit
	Job security	Tangible benefits of serving in the unit both from the perspective of the soldier and his/her family

Figure 4. The model of Shaping Soldier Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction (SSWE&JS) in Military’s Peacetime

Source: own elaboration.

One area that plays a key role in shaping employee work engagement and satisfaction, both in the civilian sector and for institutions such as the military, is the image of an organization (Prentice, 2022). A strong positive image of the Armed Forces as an employer can contribute to an increased sense of pride and belonging among soldiers. Identification with an institution that is perceived as prestigious, professional and respected can influence employee commitment and loyalty (Lievens, 2007). A good image of the military based on values such as professionalism, fairness and concern for the welfare of soldiers and their families builds trust

and respect towards the Polish Armed Forces. Engaged and committed soldiers can encourage others to join the military, which contributes to building a strong and capable workforce (Kurek, 2022). In the case of the Polish Armed Forces, employer image is not only a component of building soldiers' engagement, but also a key factor that influences their morale, satisfaction, combat readiness and mission capability.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Polish Armed Forces have recently experienced specific turbulences related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war beyond Poland's organizational activities applied in shaping soldier work engagement and job satisfaction through this organization's image as an employer in the context of these phenomena are important for several reasons. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected social, economic and political life around the world, including the armed forces. In many countries, soldiers have been involved in relief activities such as medical aid, transporting medical supplies or maintaining public order during lockdowns (Kocik, 2022). This may have affected their sense of mission and the importance of their social role. Secondly, the conflict in Ukraine may affect soldiers' morale and commitment by increasing geopolitical tension, concerns about the country's security and possible preparations for military intervention (Skrabacz, 2023). Under such conditions, soldiers may be more inclined to engage in service, reinforcing their sense of duty to the state and community.

In view of the above, the research focused on capturing changes in soldiers' perceptions of the Polish Armed Forces compared to other employers in the labor market as one of the areas that reinforce their willingness to take risks and make sacrifices for the good of society. This would provide relevant information for policy makers and military commanders regarding necessary actions to manage military personnel, strengthen morale and maintain a high level of commitment to service in an employer image perspective.

To conclude this section on the theoretical framework for the variables under study, it is imperative to emphasize the relevance of examining the Polish Armed Forces during distinct contextual periods – namely, the pre-pandemic and near-border pre-war conditions as well as the current realities of a pandemic and near-border wartime. The juxtaposition of these contexts provides a unique lens through which to understand how shifts in external conditions influence the internal dynamics of military personnel management, particularly under a human-centric management paradigm.

The study of these periods is crucial not only for its relevance to command and operational readiness but also because it aligns with the broader theme of this monograph: placing the human element at the forefront of organizational strategy. In the military context, this approach is not just about enhancing the effectiveness of responses or strategic outputs; it's fundamentally about understanding the human factors that drive these responses. Soldiers, like employees in any sector, respond to their environment in ways that profoundly affect their engagement, satisfaction, and overall well-being.

5.3. The Methodics of the Conducted Empirical Research

The empirical research results presented in this chapter are part of the research material obtained in the course of scientific research projects carried out by the author as part of the statutory activities of the War Studies University in Warsaw. One project was named *Shaping Soldier Involvement in the Armed Forces – an Organizational Perspective* (2020), and another was called *Changes in the Personnel Policy of the Armed Forces versus Soldier Involvement in Service* (2023).

Before proceeding with the questionnaire-based empirical research discussed later in this section, the author of this chapter, a staff member at the Faculty of Management and Command at the War Studies University in Warsaw, Poland, initially sought to gather some contextual information for the study. The acquired information indicates that during the pandemic, military organizations primarily focused on ensuring safety, adequate personal protective equipment, access to COVID-19 testing and providing medical assistance to soldiers and civilians, especially in pandemic-affected areas. It adjusted service schedules and organization of activities to mitigate the risk of infection and protect the health of personnel. They also introduced remote working arrangements where possible. The war in Ukraine involved the Polish Armed Forces in operational activities on the eastern border by providing logistical, medical and combat support to soldiers taking part in operations. The military has been involved in humanitarian operations for Ukrainian refugees, providing medical assistance, access to shelter and logistical support. Currently, the Polish Armed Forces are on standby on the eastern border to prevent infiltration and to protect Polish territory from a possible threat posed by the conflict in Ukraine.

The main goal of the empirical research to which this chapter refers was to juxtapose soldiers' perceptions of the activities undertaken by the Polish Armed Forces in shaping soldier work engagement and job satisfaction through this organization's image as an employer in the two specific combined contexts: pre-pandemic and near-border pre-war, as well as pandemic and near-border wartime. The survey, in the form of a questionnaire, was conducted twice in 2019/2020 and in 2023.

According to the adopted model of SSWE&JS in Military's Peacetime (Figure 1), survey respondents were asked to evaluate 12 statements related to the components of this model. These statements, treated as selected variables of the model, are presented in Table 2 in the next section. In making their evaluations, respondents used a ranking scale, rating each variable by assigning it an appropriate rank, where 1 represented the most competitive and 12 the least competitive when compared to other employers in the job market.

The respondents included soldiers who were students or participants of courses within the educational activities of the War Studies University in Warsaw. The selection of the group was purposive and it was assumed that the students surveyed had leadership or specialist experience in the Polish Armed Forces. A total of 158 respondents participated in the 2019 survey, and in 2023, the number of respondents was 159. Table 9 provides the socio-demographic characteristics of the research sample.

Table 9. Sociodemographic characteristics of the 2019 and 2023 research sample

Characteristics of respondents		Year of research			
		2019		2023	
Gender	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
	Total	158	100	156	100
	Females	23	14.6	22	13.4
	Males	135	85.4	134	84.8
	No data	0	0	3	1.8
Length of military service	-	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
	-	16.91	9.49	13.31	9.81
Holding a command position	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
	No	64	40.5	49	29.9
	Yes	92	58.2	109	66.5
	No data	0	0	6	3.7
Personnel Corps	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
	Officers	122	77.2	119	72.6
	Non-commissioned officer	29	18.4	41	25.0
	Professional Private	6	3.8	0	0
	No data available	0	0	4	2.4

Source: own empirical research.

The data extracted in 2019 shows that the vast majority of the surveyed soldiers were male (85.4%) and in leadership roles (58.2%). The length of service in the military averaged around 17 years, with the shortest length of service being less than a year and the longest 40 years. When analyzing the data for 2023, also the vast majority of the soldiers surveyed were men (84.8%) and those in leadership roles (66.5%). The length of seniority in the army was on average about 13 years, with the shortest seniority being less than a year and the longest 36 years.

5.4. The Empirical Research Findings

The first source of analysis was a ranking of the variables that distinguish the military organization as an employer relative to other employers. The respondents ranked the variables from 1 – most competitive to 12 – least competitive and a mean was calculated based on the assigned scores. According to the method adopted, the lower the mean, the more competitive the factor was relative to other employers.

As can be seen in Table 10, rankings based on data from 2019 and 2023 differ. The variable *mission and values of the military* remained unchanged and invariably remained at the top.

Also unchanged was the variable related to *training and gaining qualifications* (6th place), the *opportunity to work in a prestigious team of soldiers* (11th place) and *access to modern knowledge and modern working tools* (12th place).

A significant drop was recorded for four variables: the *perception of the Army as an attractive employer in the labor market* (from place 5 to place 7), the *attractiveness of the tasks a soldier performs in the Army* (from place 4 to place 9), *interesting and challenging working conditions* (from place 2 to place 5) and *being a Commander in a prestigious professional group such as a soldier* (from place 7 to place 10). Of greater importance in the opinion of respondents in 2023 were *great opportunities to develop the Army as an organization* (from 10th place to 3rd) and *career opportunities* (from 8th to 4th). *Attractive financial and non-financial fringe benefits* and basic pay were rated similarly.

Table 10. Ranking of variables distinguishing the military organization as an employer relative to other employers

Factors	2019		2023	
	Mean	Ranking	Mean	Ranking
The military's mission and values	5.01	1	5.34	1
Interesting and challenging working conditions	5.77	2	6.17	5
Attractive additional financial and non-financial benefits (e.g. basic salary supplements, military pension scheme)	5.80	3	5.89	2
Attractive tasks that a soldier performs in the army	5.97	4	6.45	9
Perception of the military as an attractive employer in the labor market	6.05	5	6.38	7
Training and qualifications guaranteed by the army	6.58	6	6.24	6
Being a commander in a prestigious professional group such as the military	6.71	7	6.62	10
Career opportunities: attaining successive military ranks and positions	6.90	8	6.04	4
Attractive basic pay commensurate with military rank	6.92	9	6.41	8
Great opportunities for the development of the military as an organization	6.97	10	6.01	3
The opportunity to work in a prestigious team of soldiers	6.99	11	7.08	11
Access to modern knowledge and working tools	8.37	12	8.42	12

Source: own empirical research.

An analysis of correlation with Spearman's rho coefficient was carried out to determine the relationships between the variables that distinguish the military organization as an employer and the evaluation of employer image consciousness in the model of SSWE&JS in Military's Peacetime. In 2019, observations of soldiers who incorrectly completed this part of the questionnaire were excluded from the analyses ($n = 21$). For the correlation analysis, the variables distinguishing the military as an employer were recoded from a ranked manner, and now 1 meant the lowest rate and 12 the highest. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. The results of a correlation test for the selected variables from the model of SSWE&JS in Military’s Peacetime collected in 2019

Variables	Belonging to an elite of professional group		Strategic potential of the army		Organization and management in the army		Job security	
	r_s	p	r_s	p	r_s	p	r_s	p
Mission and values of the army	-0.13	0.130	0.23	0.007	-0.15	0.08	-0.13	0.135
Great opportunities to develop the military as an organization	-0.06	0.482	0.17	0.047	-0.16	0.059	-0.12	0.153
Being a commander in a prestigious professional group such as the army	0.01	0.872	0.14	0.096	7	0.043	0.09	0.310
The opportunity to work as part of a prestigious team of soldiers	-0.08	0.343	-0.10	0.242	-0.11	0.212	0.17	0.049

Note:
 r_s – Spearman correlation coefficient; p – test probability; **■** – values statistically significant are marked in bold and on a green background, the threshold is set at a p -value of 0.05.

Source: own empirical research.

The analysis showed positive and weak correlations between the strategic outlook rating and the military’s mission and values, as well as the military’s strong capacity to grow as an organization. This result means that the higher the strategic capability was rated, the higher these two factors were ranked. The organization and management perspective was weakly and negatively correlated with being a commander in an elite professional group such as the army. This result indicates that the higher the perspective was rated, the lower the factor of being a commander was ranked. Positive and weak correlations were recorded between the evaluation of the perspective of the position and the opportunity to work in a prestigious team of soldiers – the higher the perspective of job security was evaluated, the higher was the opportunity to work in a prestigious team of soldiers in the ranking. For the other factors, there was no correlation with the rating of the military as an employer in the SSWE&JS model.

In 2023, observations of soldiers who incorrectly completed this part of the questionnaire ($n = 24$) were excluded from the analyses. Twenty individuals (12.2%) did not complete this part of the questionnaire. For the correlation analysis, the variables that distinguish the military as an employer were recoded similarly to the conversion done for the data collected in 2019. So, again, now 1 means the lowest rate and 12 the highest. The results of the analyses are shown in Table 12.

The analysis showed positive and weak correlations between the rating of belonging to an elite professional group, strategic perspective, organizational and management perspective and job security perspective and the mission and values of the army. Such a result means that the higher the mentioned aspects of the army’s assessment were rated, the higher the mission and values assessment was ranked. Membership of an elite professional group correlated negatively and weakly with the attractiveness of financial and non-financial fringe benefits –

this means that the higher the membership of an elite professional group is rated, the lower the attractive benefits are ranked. For the other factors, there was no correlation with the rating of the army as an employer.

Table 12. The results of a correlation test for the selected variables from the model of SSWE&JS in Military’s Peacetime collected in 2023

Variables	Belonging to an elite of professional group		Strategic potential of the army		Organization and management in the army		Job security	
	r_s	p	r_s	p	r_s	p	r_s	p
The army’s mission and values	0.23	0.012	0.22	0.017	0.19	0.033	0.21	0.024
Attractive financial and non-financial fringe benefits (e.g. basic salary supplements, military pension scheme)	-0.22	0.017	0.16	0.074	0.17	0.067	0.12	0.206
Note: r_s – Spearman correlation coefficient; p – test probability; ■ – values statistically significant are marked in bold and on a green background, the threshold is set at a p -value of 0.05.								

Source: own empirical research.

Generally, it can be said that the results of the survey show that the mission and values of the army make it stand out among other employers in both periods. The time of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have definitely influenced soldiers’ appreciation of the additional financial and non-financial benefits that the military has introduced during this time, an interesting and challenging workplace and career opportunities: gaining more military ranks and positions. According to the author, this is the result of the changes in the SZRP introduced after 2015, related to the almost complete replacement of managerial staff and the introduction of a number of new incentive benefits. In addition, the Homeland Defense Act, signed in March 2022, introduced a development perspective for the ranks corps and a declaration of modernization and development of the SZRP. What has definitely changed negatively is being a commander in a prestigious professional group such as the army and the possibility of working in a prestigious team of soldiers. Thus, the prestige of the soldier’s profession and its value on the labor market in the face of challenges have definitely decreased.

5.5. Summary and Final Conclusions

The main goal of this chapter was to identify, analyze, and evaluate the activities that contribute to shaping soldier work engagement and job satisfaction (SSWE&JS) within a military organization such as the Polish Armed Forces during peacetime, although in two combined specific contexts: pre-pandemic and near-border pre-war, as well as pandemic and near-border wartime. Additionally, the chapter aimed to interpret the identified phenomena from the

perspective of the human-centric management paradigm and also to formulate practical recommendations for the military organization under study. Regarding the activities contributing to SSWE&JS in two contexts, it can be considered that the goal in this respect has been achieved. As for their interpretation and guidelines for organizational practice, they will be provided here.

The research findings from the chapter reflect a significant shift towards human-centric practices within the Polish Armed Forces, suggesting a transformative approach in how military organizations address the needs and well-being of their personnel. The emphasis on adjusting human resources policies to better suit the conditions faced by soldiers during both peace and wartime highlights the organization's commitment to integrating a human-centric paradigm into its core operations. This is particularly noteworthy given the traditionally rigid and hierarchical structure of military organizations.

The dual context of the pre-pandemic and wartime scenarios provided a unique lens to evaluate how well the Polish Armed Forces adapt their strategies to safeguard and enhance soldier engagement and satisfaction. The positive adjustments made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict at the border show a proactive stance in ensuring that the soldiers' needs for safety, mental health support, and operational readiness are met effectively. This indicates a move towards a more adaptive and soldier-focused HRM strategy, which is a hallmark of human-centric organizations.

Moreover, the ongoing professionalization of the army, as indicated by the shift from compulsory to professional service, underlines a strategic effort to align more closely with human-centric principles. This transition not only aims to improve operational efficiency but also to enhance the personal and professional development of the soldiers. Such changes are crucial in creating an environment where soldiers feel valued and supported, thereby increasing their loyalty and commitment to the organization.

The efforts to maintain high morale and job satisfaction among the soldiers through various HRM initiatives reflect a nuanced understanding of the psychological impact of military duties. By focusing on creating a supportive and engaging work environment, the Polish Armed Forces demonstrate their recognition of the importance of human elements in sustaining military efficacy. This approach not only boosts the operational capability but also ensures that the military can serve as a robust, resilient, and human-focused organization.

Despite the identified positives in the Polish Armed Forces' adoption of human-centric practices, the research also uncovers certain weaknesses in the current implementations. These shortcomings reflect areas where the military organization may still be struggling to fully align its operations with the principles of a human-centric paradigm.

One noticeable weakness is the inconsistency in the application of these human-centric practices across different units and commands within the Armed Forces. While some units exhibit a strong commitment to enhancing soldier welfare and engagement, others may lag behind due to varying leadership styles and the entrenched traditional military culture that resists change. This inconsistency can lead to uneven experiences among soldiers, where some

may feel highly supported and valued, while others do not perceive the same level of concern for their personal and professional well-being.

Furthermore, although there are efforts to improve the engagement and satisfaction of soldiers, the high-stress nature of military duties, especially in operational contexts, often overshadows these efforts. The pressure to maintain high readiness and operational effectiveness can sometimes lead to the deprioritization of initiatives aimed at improving work-life balance and reducing job stress. This creates a paradox where, despite knowing the importance of soldier well-being, the exigencies of military operations frequently take precedence, thereby undermining the long-term effectiveness of human-centric strategies.

Another area of concern is the feedback and communication channels between soldiers and higher command. While there are mechanisms in place for soldiers to express their concerns and feedback, there often exists a gap in how this feedback is utilized to make tangible changes. The hierarchical nature of military organizations can hinder the flow of honest feedback from lower ranks to the top echelons, which can stifle improvements and slow the pace at which human-centric practices are adopted and refined.

Additionally, the pace at which new HRM policies and initiatives are rolled out and the training provided to ensure their effective implementation can sometimes be inadequate. Rapid changes without sufficient training and adaptation periods can lead to confusion and a lack of proper adherence to new policies, reducing their potential impact on soldier engagement and satisfaction. This gap between policy introduction and effective implementation highlights a crucial weakness in ensuring that the intended benefits of human-centric practices are fully realized.

In the context of the research findings and challenges identified above, the following recommendations can be formulated to both address existing shortcomings and reinforce successful practices within the Polish Armed Forces. These recommendations are intended to enhance the current human-centric practices, while also ensuring that successful strategies are sustained and even expanded, based on shaping soldier work engagement and job satisfaction. The recommendations are as follows:

- Promote the values of ethics and professionalism by implementing training and education programs that emphasize the importance of ethics, honor and professionalism in military service. Encouraging behavior consistent with ethical military standards, which fosters pride in service and enhances respect for soldiers as a professional group.
- Increase transparency of operations by defining clear strategic objectives and action plans to be promoted both within military units and internationally. Regularly informing soldiers of progress towards these objectives will increase their confidence in the Armed Forces' impact on the environment.
- Improve management processes by introducing effective procedures for planning, organizing, executing and evaluating tasks in military units. Providing adequate logistical, training and psychological support to soldiers, which will contribute to satisfaction with service processes.

- Provide comprehensive care for soldiers and their families by ensuring that soldiers and their families have access to medical, social, housing and educational support. Establish support programs to enable soldiers and their families to enjoy a variety of benefits, which will result in tangible benefits from serving in the unit.
- Develop specialized training programs for all leadership levels to ensure uniform application of human-centric practices across various units. This approach aims to address the current inconsistencies and deepen leaders' commitment to enhancing soldier welfare and engagement.
- Establish robust and transparent feedback systems that enable honest and constructive communication from the lower ranks to higher command. This will help close the gap in feedback utilization and enhance the responsiveness of military management to on-the-ground realities.
- Implement regular monitoring and evaluation of HRM policies and initiatives, adapting them based on real-time feedback to ensure that they meet the evolving needs of soldiers effectively.
- Continue to provide and expand comprehensive support for soldiers and their families, covering additional welfare areas such as mental health and career development, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and readiness.
- Maintain the emphasis on ethics and professionalism within the military, reinforcing this through continuous training and the celebration of exemplary behavior, to strengthen the moral foundation of the armed forces.
- Keep a transparent communication about strategic objectives and operational progress, both internally within the military units and externally, to foster trust and ensure a clear understanding of mission goals among all stakeholders.
- Identify and share best practices in soldier engagement and satisfaction across different units, leveraging successful strategies to achieve a more cohesive and effective approach to human-centric management in the military.

In conclusion, the research highlights the Polish Armed Forces' significant strides towards adopting a more human-centric organizational model, emphasizing the well-being and professional growth of its personnel. This evolution positions the military not only as a defense entity but also as a progressive and adaptive organization, illustrating the feasibility and necessity of such an approach in the modern military context. However, the findings also identify critical areas needing improvement, particularly the need for consistent application of human-centric practices across all units and the enhancement of feedback mechanisms to better capture and address the concerns of soldiers. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the Armed Forces to fully realize the benefits of a human-centric approach, offering a strong foundation for other military organizations aiming to incorporate similar strategies in their operations.

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