

# THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS IN THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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*Given the fact that for more than 50% of the total human resource (military and civilian) and more than 90% of the military personnel, not only the continuous (after employment) training, but also the initial one (before employment) is provided inside the military education and training system, it becomes a matter of utmost importance for the Romanian Ministry of National Defence to make the best possible use of its resources in order to get the right person, with the right qualification and skills, in the right position, at the right time.*

*The first step in the attempt to accomplish this ambitious objective has already been made by establishing the classification of the military occupations within the Romanian Armed Forces. The next step should be that of performing an occupational analysis in order to have each military occupation described by occupational standards. These standards will make possible a better match of the qualifications and skills get by the graduates of the initial training programmes to the requirements of their first job assignment. This will be possible trough a revision and, wherever it may be necessary, a curriculum correction, in accordance with the identified occupational standards, so that the real training demands can be effectively met and the full potential of the human resources can be exploited.*

**Key words:** competence, skill, qualification, curriculum, occupational standards, occupational analysis.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Any organization has its specific work processes and activities. Each of these activities, in turn, can be divided into tasks and sub-tasks with different contribution to the final result, which can be a product or a service. The quality of the final product or service is a measure of the degree to which the organization was able to manage the available resources in order to produce the desired outcomes.

At individual level, it can be stated that the results generated by the activity of an employee is

a direct measure of his/her level of competence. In the knowledge society, any working person is labelled as 'competent' if he/she is able to perform different tasks in a certain context, in such a manner that the results of his/her performance are acknowledged as adequate and valid. It has also become obvious the fact that people's success on the labour market and in their career depends primarily on the dimensions of their set of professional competences. Therefore, it is essential for the education and training providers to understand the importance of adjusting their services to the real

needs of competences on the labour market.

Taking all these into account, the aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of establishing a clear and effective mechanism of cooperation between education and training providers, on the one hand, and the employers – which, in the Romanian military are referred to as “beneficiaries” or “beneficiary structures” – on the other hand, in order to implement a competence-based military education and training in accordance with national approved competence standards which are, in fact, the main elements that represents the structure of occupational standards and qualifications.

## 2. CONCEPTS

In most contexts, the terms competence and competency are used interchangeably, with approximately the same meaning that can be found in dictionaries: the ability, coming from knowledge, practice, aptitude, etc., to do something well. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary, for example, competency is the less frequently used synonym for competence with the meaning of “*the ability to do something well*” and that of “*a skill that you need in a particular job or for a particular task*”. [1]

However, there are some researchers who have argued that although they have something in common, in the sense that they reflect human behaviour characteristics driven towards a certain performance environment, as concepts, competence and competency differ in their definition and area of focus.

### 2.1. Competency

Competency remains one of the most debated terms in the management development sector and occupational literature. Nevertheless, the most agreed approach in human resource management is that initiated by Richard Boyatzis, according to whom competency should be seen as “*an underlying characteristic (a motive, a trait, a skill, aspect of self- image, social role, or a body of knowledge) which an employee uses and that can result in effective or superior performance*”. [2] This definition shows competency as a mix of elements such as motivation, personal traits, skills, knowledge etc., and evidence of these elements can be found in the way the person behaves. Boyatzis considers that a person's knowledge and skills are traditional competencies that individuals either bring with them to their jobs or acquire them while on the job, but they are only part of an individual's compendium of job competencies and there is a range of factors that differentiate successful from less successful performance.

David Dubois, a leading expert in the applied competency field, defines competency in the same terms as Boyatzis, highlighting the fact that knowledge and skills are “*the more obvious competencies that employees use to achieve many of their outputs or results expected of them*”. [3]

Another approach that supports the purpose of this paper is the iceberg model of competency, developed by Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer, shown in **Figure 1** [4]. It is known that only 1/9th of an iceberg is visible above the water and the

rest is hidden deeply beneath the surface. Similarly, competency has some components that are visible and these are knowledge and skills, while other components related to individual behaviour are not visible, but still add up to a person's success or failure in a job, and these are: attitude, personal traits (self-control, flexibility, inspiring, building trust, good listener etc.) self-image, organizational fit and others.



**Fig. no. 1.** The competency iceberg model

As it can be inferred from this model, competencies refer mainly to individual characteristics and abilities that are key-factors to success and effectiveness in work due to the fact that they can lead to superior performance. Competencies are not fixed; they can be developed with effort and support. Some examples of competencies looked for by employers are: adaptability, motivation, commitment, creativity, analytical reasoning, foresight, leadership, emotional stability, communication skills. Every job, at every level in the organization has a threshold competency, which is the bare minimum required to perform the job.

Question is if there is any relation between the competencies which are above the surface – knowledge and skills - and those lying beneath? In the book *Competence at Work Models for Superior Performance*,

the authors Lyle M. Spencer, Jr. and Signe M. Spencer state that “*The aspects of competencies which lie below the surface like attitude, traits, thinking styles etc directly influence the usage of knowledge and skills to complete a job effectively.*” [5]

The authors also state that in more complex jobs, these behavioural aspects, motives and traits become more important than the skills and knowledge required to do the job. An example in this respect may be the following: a soldier on the war front who knows very well how to use the weapon he is holding, but refuses to fire because he considers that the war is unjust. This means that, in order to accomplish the established missions and objectives it is essential to establish the alignment between the organizational and individual motivation and aspirations.

Developing the two main types of competencies supposes different routes. Unlike the visible competencies - knowledge and skills – which are usually easy to develop through training and skill building repeated exercises, the behavioural competencies are somewhat difficult to assess or develop. It takes more time and effort intensive methods, such as coaching and mentoring, counselling, psychotherapy, developmental experiences, etc.

Traditionally, when hiring people most organizations used to check only the visible components of competencies. However, with major shifts in the field of human resource management, the hiring process has also undergone a change in the sense that a lot of emphasis is being put on the hidden behavioural aspects. Hence, a complete image regarding

the competence of an individual consists of both visible and hidden aspects and it becomes necessary to understand both in order to identify the best person for a job.

The term competency understood from these perspectives are used in the competency-based human resource management, to inform and improve human resource management processes, especially those concerned with recruitment and selection, learning and development, performance and reward management.

## 2.2. Competence

The concept of competence is defined by Dubois as *"the employee's capacity to meet (or exceed) a job's requirements by producing the job outputs at an expected level of quality within the constraints of the organization's internal and external environments."* [6]

Hence, competence is related to the condition or state to be competent, which, in turn, can be defined as *"having the necessary ability, knowledge, or skill to do something successfully' or, in other words, being qualified to perform to certain standards the activities, tasks, processes etc. of a job"*. [7]

A comparison between these definitions of competence and competency reveals from the very beginning a major distinction: competence is related directly to certain outcomes ('what results' are evidence of competence seen as capacity to perform adequately), while competency is more related to certain inputs ('what factors' can contribute to successful performance).

Charles Woodroffe raises a similar issue, distinguishing between competence and competency and proposing that competence is a performance criterion while competencies are the behaviours driving the competence. [8]

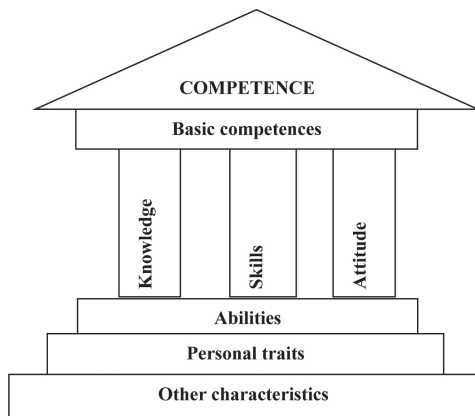
According to Roe, competence is *"the acquired ability to adequately perform a task, mission or role"* and *"the notion of competence is closely linked to the activities that individuals, groups or other entities in organisations are expected to undertake in order to fulfil the organisation's missions"*.

He also states that *"competences are conceptually close to performance. They can be seen as immediate antecedents of performance that will express them in the way the person fulfils his/her duties, given a sufficient level of motivation and situational resources"*. In 2002, he described a model for assessing psychologists' competence during training that could be applied to any occupation.

As shown in **Figure 2**, he depicts competence as capping a Greek temple building that has at foundation some layers of abilities, personality traits, and other personal attributes. The pillars are the so-called 'KSAs' (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) which are created by means of learning processes that have taken place partly at school, partly at work and partly in daily life. Intellectual aptitudes, personality traits and other features determine what, how much and how well is learnt and can contribute to successful performance. [9]

The question that may arise here is how different researchers define





**Fig. no. 2.** Roe's architectural model of competence

the 'A' from KSAs? The first who used the concept was Bela Banathy, in 1968, with reference to the term 'attitudes', stating that: *"We can say that the purpose of education is to impart specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes-in other words, the purpose around which the system is to grow is instruction. On the other hand, we can propose that the purpose of education is to ensure the attainment of specified knowledge, skills, and attitudes-thus, learning, is the purpose around which the system is to grow"*. [10]

Mention should be made of the fact that the acronym KSAs is mainly used in the American educational and occupational literature, but there is no unique understanding of what the 'A' from KSA stands for. While some researchers such as Banathy speak about 'A' from 'attitude', others like Miguel Quinones and Addie Ehrenstein use the 'A' from KSA as coming from 'ability.' Nevertheless, they make a distinction that could explain why the acronym has two different meanings. They distinguish between instructional objectives and

learning outcomes. [11] Instructional objectives act as a link between the design of training and assessment needs, therefore they focus on describing the performance required from the learners. Taken this into account, ability, rather than attitude, makes more sense. On the other hand, learning outcomes act as a link between the design of training and the selection of instructional strategies, and when formulating instructional or learning strategies, one normally has to refer to taxonomies such as Bloom's taxonomy or Krathwohl's and Harrow's Cognitive, Psychomotor, and Affective domains. Thus, attitude starts to make more sense when used in this context.

In the European Union educational area, the term 'competence' is also used with reference to the concept of learning outcomes. According to the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) issued by the European Parliament and Council, learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do upon completion of a learning process. These are defined by EQF in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence. [12]

The document defines knowledge as *"the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning"* and as *"the body of facts, principles, theories, and practices that is related to a field of work or study"*. In the same context, skill is understood as *the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems*, and competence means *"the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal,*

*social, and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations and in professional and personal development*". Knowledge is divided into theoretical and/or factual, and skills into cognitive (involving the use of logic, intuition and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments). The competence level is graded 1-8, based on different degrees of responsibility and autonomy.

We can infer from here that competence can be acquired through learning, training and exposures to tasks. That may be one reason why in the educational and training area the term 'competence' is more used than that of 'competency' which seems to be preferred in the human resource management field. However, there is also some uncertainty regarding the correct term to be used in the educational field as well. For example, a number of articles that contain the term 'competence' in the title – such as *Competence Based Education and Training: Background and Origins, Competence and Standards, Can Competence and Knowledge Mix?* – are gathered in a volume with the title *Competency-based Education and Training*. [13] In fact, a simple search on Google for 'competence-based education and training' will generate a list of results in which 'competency-based education and training' also appears with absolutely the same meaning.

Taking all these into consideration, as well as the fact that other languages than English do not have two different terms that translate competence and competency, there will be no substantial difference

considered in this paper either. However, since the paper is focused on occupational standards and qualifications and taking also into consideration the aspects that are going to be presented in **Section 2.3**, the term competence is preferred.

### **2.3. Qualifications and occupational standards**

In the attempt to distinguish competence from competency, it may be useful to refer to the classification of competencies, developed in UK that is mentioned in The Armstrong's handbook of Human Resource Management Practice: behavioural competencies, technical competencies and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). [14]

According to Armstrong, behavioural competencies define behavioural expectations, i.e. the type of behaviour required to deliver results under such headings as team working, communication, leadership and decision-making while technical competencies define what people have to know and be able to do (in terms of knowledge and skills) to carry out their roles effectively, and are sometimes referred to as 'hard skills'. The term 'technical competencies' is closely related to that of 'competences', and the latter has a particular and more limited meaning when applied to NVQs.

NVQs are work-related, competence-based qualifications. They reflect the skills and knowledge needed to do a job effectively by specifying the minimum standards for the achievement of set tasks and activities expressed in ways that can be observed and assessed with a view to certification.

In UK, NVQs are based on national occupational standards. These standards are statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are expected to be able to do. They cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future requirements and the knowledge and understanding that underpin competent performance.

In Romania, the definition of the occupational standard used by the National Authority for Qualifications is *“the document that describes the professional activities specific to the occupations from an occupational area and the qualitative standards of performance for the respective activities, in accordance with the labour market requirements”*.

Another definition accepted by the National Authority for Qualifications is that used in UK for their National Occupational Standards (NOS): *“statements of the standards of performance individuals must achieve when carrying out functions in the workplace, together with specifications of the underpinning knowledge and understanding”*. [15]

As it can be easily noted, the key-term of these definitions is ‘standard’. Due to this fact, occupational standards can be looked upon as a benchmark of competence required in a specific occupational area and form the key component of qualifications.

In the context of EQF, the term ‘qualification’ is defined as *“a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given*

*standards”*. [16] Qualifications are detailed in standard documents which describe the learning outcomes in accordance with the labour market’s demands, specified in the occupational standard. In essence, qualification represents a set of competence standards derived from the occupational standards.

Therefore, it can be said that occupational standards are the basis for describing qualifications. First, the occupational standards are developed based on occupational analyses. The purpose of the occupational analysis is to gather information about an occupational area and translate it into a format that can be used to develop occupational standards. At the end of the occupational analysis the following elements regarding an occupation are identified and described: major functions, specific activities, qualitative standards, knowledge, skills, attitudes and level of responsibility. As a rule, a major function identified through the occupational analysis is translated into a unit of competence in the occupational standard, which, in turn, becomes a unit of competence in the description of a qualification. This means, basically, performing a functional analysis which is going to be detailed in **Section 2.4.**, as one of the main procedures used to develop a competence-based curriculum.

## 2.4. Competence-based education and training

Developing a curriculum is one of the essential functions within an education or training system, providing guidelines to trainers and educators for planning, conducting and assessing learning.

Unlike traditional education and training, which would focus mainly on theory and acquisition of knowledge in the detriment of applied performance, competence-based education and training is an approach to education and training, especially in the vocational domain, in which the focus is on providing and facilitate the acquiring and development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that can contribute to the achievement of the established competence standards.

The design of competence-based educational programs requires careful planning and continuous monitoring throughout the development phases. The organisation and management of such programs has to be efficient and able to assure the quality of outcomes and learning processes.

The first step is to define competence standards by translating work-based requirements into nationally authorized occupational standards. This requires experts in relevant occupational fields who are able to describe essential work activities, tasks and functions with respect to a specific job profile. The two most commonly used methods for competence-based curriculum development are DACUM (acronym for "develop a curriculum") and functional analysis.

Functional analysis is widely used in the UK [17] and starts with defining the central task of an occupation and deriving its complex functions. Next, basic sub-functions and simple tasks are derived from these complex functions. Therefore, functional analysis may be characterised as a process of disaggregating complex functions into smaller components.

Functional analysis leads to small units and elements of competence which compose the design of a competence standard. Thus, competence standards become the core feature of a competence-based curriculum, as well as an important instrument for identifying training needs, specifying career paths and recruiting personnel.

The typical format of a competence standard consists of: units of competence, elements of competence and performance criteria. Units of competence (like, for example „maintaining workplace safety”) consist of a coherent group of elements of competence (which are, practically, the workplace activities that make up the broader function expressed by the unit of competence; for the above mentioned unit of competence, some examples of elements of competence could be: carrying out regular safety checks, maintaining workplace equipment and tools, applying established procedures for emergency situations, watching employees/subordinates while working to spot unsafe work practices etc.) and associated performance criteria (a description of the level or standard for competent performance of a task, function or activity indicating what and how well needs to be achieved). Finally, range variables are added in order to set the range of application, in terms of context and circumstances, for an element of competence. They outline the range of the activity in material or personal terms.

Units function as modules or sub-areas of competence profiles defining a vocational qualification and are supposed to have an independent



value on the labour market. Thus, even if a national qualification is not entirely achieved, the awarded units of competence already qualify an individual seeking employment.

### **3. OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS IN EU POLICIES**

#### **3.1. EU policies on skill and qualification mismatch**

Affecting both workers and employers, qualification mismatch occurs when the qualification of a worker does not match to the job or when theoretically it should match but the level of qualification or the level of some competences characteristic to that qualification is higher or lower than that required by the job. A Survey of Adult Skills performed in 2013 by OECD confirmed that both overqualification and overskilling are associated with a significant underuse and waste of human capital and skills, including numeracy, literacy, ICT and problem solving at work. The survey revealed the fact that, on a five-point scale, ranging from no use to daily use, overskilled workers tend to underperform in terms of skills use compared to individuals in matched jobs. In addition, unused skills will atrophy, resulting in a partial loss of the initial investment in them. [18]

Some cases of underqualification might occur when workers have lower skills than expected at their level, due to either poor performance in their education or to depreciation of their skills over time. Another situation is that of workers who might have the skills required at work, due to the fact that they developed those

skills by learning in non-formal or informal contexts, but they do not have the qualifications to show for them, meaning they did not get an official valid qualification document - certificate or diploma. In either case, qualification mismatches reflect a misalignment between people's formal educational background and labour market demands.

Although the match between what people can actually do and the content of their jobs may improve over time, qualification mismatch can be long lasting and may affect the individual's career. Even when adjustments can be done, it may be costly and it sometimes prevents the implementation of new equipments and technologies.

In the European Union, such discrepancies have already triggered policy interventions designed to reinforce communication between education and training, on the one hand, and the labour market on the other hand, because it has been understood that reducing skills mismatch with lasting effect and helping economies make the most of their workforce skills require collaborative effort from all stakeholders.

First, measures are required in order to diminish the gap between the knowledge generated in the educational system and the skills and qualifications demanded by employers. Second, continuing intervention is necessary during the employment life cycle, aiming at continuous skill development and improvement.

Improving educational-system receptiveness to labour market needs and ensuring that students are developed the skills needed to find a job and be successful in career, require

collaboration between employers, education and training providers as well as public authorities.

Therefore, bringing education, the working world and public authorities closer together may be the key for success in the attempt to find solutions to the above mentioned issue. In order to effectively reduce qualification mismatch and constantly build up and improve the use of skills it is necessary to develop comprehensive long-term strategies, involving public private partnerships among governments, education and training providers, employers and workers unions.

In 2010, the European Commission launched the New Skills for New Jobs initiative, a pilot initiative as part of the EU's overall strategy – Europe 2020. This initiative proposes a set of concrete actions that will help: stepping up reforms to improve flexibility and security in the labour market („flexicurity”), equipping people with the right skills for the jobs of today and tomorrow, improving the quality of jobs and ensuring better working conditions. [19]

Within the New Skills for New Jobs initiative, in order to help bridge the gap between education and training on one side and the labour market on the other, the European Commission has been developing the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO). ESCO is available for use in an open IT format and can be accessed through an online portal, free of charge, by everyone. By introducing a standard terminology for occupations, skills, competences and qualifications, ESCO can help

education and training systems and the labour market to better identify and manage the availability of required skills, competences and qualifications. In addition, taking into account the fact that education provides people with qualifications that differ between Member States the multilingual character of ESCO facilitates increased international transparency and cooperation in the area of skills, qualifications and occupations. [20]

The European Qualification Framework represents another useful instrument developed by EU with the purpose to provide a common reference for the national qualification systems of the member states. Most EU member states, including Romania, have developed National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) in accordance with EQF. The main outcome is that it facilitates transfer of qualifications, mobility of learners and workers between the member states, bringing benefits to the education and training systems, the labour market and citizens as well.

### **3.2. Romanian policies on skill and qualification mismatch**

Romania has generally followed the line drawn by the EU policies in this area. As it has already been mentioned before, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) was developed in accordance with EQF and was implemented through a Government decision issued in 2013 and modified in 2015. [20] NQF establishes the type of certification documents and the type of education or training providers which can issue them for each level of qualification.

There is a national authority, belonging to the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research - the National Authority for Qualifications - which is the expert body and leader in the qualifications and lifelong learning areas.

There is also a comprehensive and coherent legal framework that regulates almost all the aspects related to the legal ways of getting a qualification, not only through formal learning within the national education and training system, but also through learning in non-formal and informal contexts.

In addition, in order to address the most important issues raised by the Europe 2020 initiative, several national strategies have been recently developed with focus on professional qualifications and lifelong learning.

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2015-2020 highlights the necessity to increase the efficiency of education and training in order to provide the students and trainees with the knowledge and skills they need so that they can be successful in their future jobs and careers. There is also highlighted the fact that in order for the aforementioned objective to be fulfilled it is essential to have, first of all, a realistic evaluation of the competences demands existing on the labour market.

The Strategy of Professional Development in Romania 2014-2020 emphasizes the necessity to update the instruments used for defining occupations as a prerequisite to develop qualifications in strict accordance with the knowledge and skills demanded on the labour market. The idea is also developed by the Strategy of the National Authority for

Qualifications 2015-2020, according to which the occupational standards must be used as the main instrument for a standardized description of occupations.

#### **4. OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1. Use of occupational standards**

As public documents that specify the standards of performance that people are expected to achieve in their work as well as the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively, occupational standards are of great importance, value and help for education and training providers, employers and individuals.

For both individuals and organisations, occupational standards are a valuable resource that can be used to improve their capacity and capability, to better define jobs, measure staff performance and identify and develop routes for progression and professional development.

Some examples of how both individuals and organisations can use occupational standards are shown in **Table 1.** [22]

Occupational standards are also of utmost importance for education and training providers. As it has been previously shown, competence-based education and training offers the advantage of better matching the learning outcomes of the future employees with the competences they will need to successfully perform the tasks specific to their future jobs.

As Lindsay Mitchell states: *"Instead of education and training*

*being the driving force behind qualifications and consequently determining the nature of competence that was to be trained for and accredited, it was suggested that the whole process should start from the other end. That is 'standards' of*

*competence should be set for each occupational area and these would drive in the future the vocational qualifications and the learning routes which help individuals achieve that competence."* [23]

**Table 1.** Use of occupational standards

(source: <http://www.skillsactive.com/standards-quals/national-occupational-standards>)

<b>Individuals can use occupational standards to:</b>	<b>Organisations can use occupational standards to:</b>
Develop their self confidence and enhance their personal effectiveness	Identify and plan personnel requirements
Provide a means for determining gaps in knowledge, experience and skills	Design and implement recruitment and selection processes
Offer an objective process for identifying training needs	Develop job descriptions and person specifications for staff and volunteers
Ensure best practice	Design, deliver and evaluate training
Support their professional development	Use common standards of performance and quality in partnerships with other organisations and agencies
Open up a wider range of career opportunities	Demonstrate the competence of the organisation when applying for funding or tendering for projects
Help to transfer their competence to other work situations.	Plan appropriate development and training

Therefore, if accurately established and then transposed into educational and training programmes, occupational standards can significantly contribute to reducing the gap between the qualifications and the underlying competences students and trainees get through their learning experience, on the one hand, and the competences they have to prove in order to get a job and be considered competent in the workplace, on the other hand.

#### **4.2. Role of occupational standards in the Romanian Armed Forces human resource management**

The Romanian military organization has a very specific system of recruitment, selection, education and training. First of all, mention should be made of the fact that in the Romanian Armed Forces, for more than 50% of the total human resource (military and civilian) and more than 90% of the military personnel, not only the continuous

(after employment) training, but also the initial one (before employment) is provided inside the military education and training system.

This system has had a very long tradition and the military education institutions have gained recognition of their value and prestige within the national education system. When assessed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in the Pre-academic Education in 2011, the military colleges and the military schools for warrant officers and NCOs were ranked among the best education institutions in the country. The National Defence University 'Carol I' and the military academies were also awarded the title of 'Education Institution with High-Degree of Trust' by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

However, there has been evidence that some improvements are necessary from two perspectives: 1) the degree to which the requirements and expectations of the military structures where the graduates are first assigned (the so-called "beneficiaries" or "beneficiary structures") are met and 2) the efficiency of the training viewed in terms of outcomes (how well are the graduates trained to accomplish the requirements of their first job assignment) compared to the time and other resources invested in training.

The main areas that need improvement are the initial education and training of officers and NCOs belonging to combat arms and military specialties (such as: infantry, mountain troops, military police, tanks, paratroopers etc.) which do not really match the qualification they get at the end of the post-secondary or tertiary (bachelor level) studies. For

example, the qualification obtained at the end of the initial training programme by the future officers in the above mentioned arms and military specialties is 'organisation management' and for the NCOs is currently 'driving instructor' (after being 'mechanical technician technologist' for a couple of years).

What is more, even for arms and specialties which better match the qualification – as it is the case with the engineer officers trained at the Military Technical Academy and The Naval Academy or with the warrant officers – it is still room for improvement regarding the military training and the development of the competences specific to the military occupations.

In order to compensate for the shortfalls of the initial military training provided by the military academies and schools, the graduates have to attend other courses that have the objective to develop the competences required to perform the duties specific to their first assignment. This means other months of training that add to the period spent in school or academy as well as other expenses for training. In the end, despite all these efforts, the beneficiary structures still complain about the professional performance and the military skills of the new employees.

One might argue that it would be enough just to change the qualifications which mismatch the military specialties and train the above mentioned categories of future military personnel to the standards of the 'graduate profile' – the document which, according to the Romanian Armed Forces training doctrine, is developed by the beneficiary military structures and it constitutes the



reference set of competences starting from which the military education institutions design the curricula.

The main problem with changing the qualifications is that it can be done only through special legal procedures which all have the same starting point: a corresponding occupation in the Classification of Occupations from Romania (COR) for each new qualification to be introduced in the approved national registries of qualifications.

Another problem is that the graduate profile can be considered a reliable and acceptable set of required competences established by the beneficiary structures on condition that it is developed through established and valid methods such as functional analysis or DACUM. What is more, since one of the principles of the military education and training is that of compatibility with the national education and training system, it is necessary to align the type and format of documents used in this domain to those established at national level, which, in turn, are aligned to the EU policies and good practice.

To conclude with, given the new threats and challenges that have to be faced under the circumstances of an increasingly unstable economic, financial and security environment, and taken into account the fact that as a NATO member Romania has to ensure the interoperability of its armed forces with those of the Alliance, it is of utmost importance for the Romanian Ministry of Defence to make the best possible use of its resources in order to have the right person, with the right qualification and competences, in the right place, at the right time.

The first step in the attempt to accomplish this ambitious objective has already been made by establishing the classification of the military occupations within the Romanian Armed Forces. The next step will be that of performing an occupational analysis in order to have each military occupation described by occupational standards.

Finally, once the requested standard competences for each military occupation will be established through the nationally accepted procedure, with the involvement of the beneficiary structures, a correction of the curricula and qualifications should be performed, in accordance with the identified occupational standards.

However, an important aspect that should not be neglected is that it is unrealistic expectation assuming the fact that an employee new to the workplace will have all the required job skills. Employers/beneficiary structures need to have stronger involvement in establishing the real demand for qualifications and skills. Moreover, employers/beneficiary structures must offer on-the-job learning opportunities for the new comers, in order to help them develop and adjust their previously acquired competences to the real working conditions.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Competence seems to have gained a central position and a crucial role in all the processes related to the employment and development of the human resources; it represents a sort of currency used by different actors and services involved in these

processes: education and training, counselling and guidance, mediation between the supply and demand for labour, etc.

There is growing recognition of the fact that to succeed in an increasingly competitive world any organisation needs a competent and adaptable workforce and any employee needs to have an appropriate and comprehensive set of professional competences. In addition, it should be advantageous for individuals to possess and be able to develop a set of valuable competencies/abilities/attitudes like adaptability, motivation, commitment, creativity, analytical reasoning, foresight, leadership, emotional stability etc. In the same time, it is in the interest of the organisation to have very clearly established both the set of technical or professional competences and the set of competencies/abilities/attitudes it requires from its employees for each job and position. In other words, it is necessary for the organisation to have very clear recruitment, selection, promotion criteria and job descriptions, and for the individuals to be very well trained and fit for the desired job or position.

As it has been previously shown, the occupational standards are a very good starting point in getting closer to the above mentioned desirable end states, even if they cannot guarantee a total and rapid accomplishment of these objectives, since it has been highlighted the fact that apart from knowledge and skills which are the most visible and measurable elements contributing to building competence and possible to provide and develop by education and training, all the other elements represented by

abilities, attitudes and other personal characteristics are difficult to develop and assess. However, the occupational standards provide a sort of minimum acceptable competence requirements which guarantee that the basic major functions of a job can be performed. All the other elements add up and help differentiate more from less successful learners and employees.

Last, but not least, mention should be made of the fact that occupational standards are meant to put in place a clear and effective mechanism of cooperation between education and training providers, on the one hand, and the employers/beneficiary structures on the other hand.

Applying this mechanism in the Romanian Armed Forces will increase the chances for any qualification or skill mismatch to be identified and resolved, for the real training needs to be effectively met and for the full potential of the human resources to be exploited.

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