Exploring the Relevance of the Systems Psychodynamic Approach to Military Organizations

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The psychological demands of the military profession have been a focal point of reflection and theorizing in the realm of military studies for a long time (Shephard, 2001). The extreme conditions in which military organizations operate can expose soldiers to violent behaviour and may require them to use violent force. Furthermore, they may encounter human suffering of various kinds and may even witness abuses of power. Such experiences may lead to moral conflicts in soldiers (Lifton, 1973; Molendijk, 2021), to the experience of losing one's existential foundation (Bica, 1999) and to psychological trauma (Grossman, 2009; Shay, 1994). While this subject has attracted the attention of (clinical) psychologists and, to a lesser extent, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and historians, it has rarely been approached from the perspective of organizational science. Considerable attention has indeed been paid to how culture and leadership influence individual ways of coping with the psychological demands of the military profession (Bica, 1999; Shay, 1994). However, the relationship between structural features of military organizations and the means available to operators for dealing with the psychological demands intrinsic to their profession has remained an underdeveloped area.

This theme is the focus of the systems psychodynamic perspective, which is a tradition in organizational science that relates the structural features of organizations to the psychodynamic aspects of the functioning of groups and individuals,

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E.-H. Kramer and T. Molendijk (eds.), *Violence in Extreme Conditions*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16119-3_4

pointing at an interaction between the two (Gould, 2001; Gould et al., 2001; Krantz, 2010; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020; Miller & Rice, 1967). The phrase 'structural features' is used here in a broad sense to refer to organization design, task design, work schedules and standard operating procedures; that is, to formal features of work systems that are designed to achieve a functional purpose. The core idea of the system psychodynamic perspective is that an organization is not just a formal work system but also a psychological environment (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020), and characteristics from both realms mutually influence each other. According to the systems psychodynamic perspective, effective work systems should provide protection against the psychological demands that are intrinsic to a profession. However, the relationship between the two can become counterproductive, not just from the perspective of the psychological health of individuals but also from the perspective of the organization as an effective work system.

While this may seem straightforward, there are two main distinctions between the systems psychodynamic approach and more conventional approaches to work stress. First, the systems psychodynamic approach developed out of the psychodynamic approach in psychology and focuses on the problem of anxiety. Second, the emphasis is on the mutual relations between structural features and psychological demands. This means that the focus is on the ways in which structural features influence the means available for coping with psychological demands and vice versa. A main insight of the systems psychodynamic approach is that certain strategies for dealing with anxiety can become institutionalized in structural features—engraved in stone, as it were. In such cases, counterproductive defences against anxiety can become systemic and a foundation of professional socialization.

This chapter explores the relevance of the central insights of the systems psychodynamic perspective for the military organization. Because of the potential encounters with violence, the military organization is a prototypical example of an organization in which the core of the profession itself potentially generates anxiety. The problem of dealing with anxiety may therefore leave its traces in particular features of different military organizations. The exploration in this chapter focuses on two main issues. We discuss historical examples to reflect on the differences between armed forces that sustained both a form of social psychological integration and operational effectiveness and those that did not. Subsequently, we focus on contemporary missions and take a look at how their characteristic structural configurations influence the ability of operators to deal with the psychological demands of such missions. We start, however, by discussing the core of the systems psychodynamic perspective.

The Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

The systems psychodynamic perspective originated from the Tavistock Institute in London in the 1950s and 1960s. Initial work on the perspective developed from Bion's work on group dynamics, which applied psychoanalytical concepts to organizational contexts (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). Ultimately, this culminated in the book

Systems of Organization (Miller & Rice, 1967). Gould (2001, pp. 2–3) points out that the essence of this perspective is expressed in the conjunction of the terms 'systems' and 'psychodynamic'. On the one hand, concepts from open systems theory are used for understanding the structural aspects of organizations (design, divisions of labour, hierarchical relations, etc.) and the challenges organizations face in complex environments. On the other hand, psychoanalytic concepts are used (such as the unconscious, resistance, denial and regression). The conjunction of the two domains results in the study of the interaction between collective structures, practices, norms, and motivations and emotions in organizations. The starting point for the development of this approach was the idea that certain professions may, because of external threats or internal conflicts, intrinsically ignite anxiety that can manifest itself in disturbing affects and emotions.

Menzies Lyth (1988, p. 78) proposed the hypothesis that 'the success and viability of a social institution are intimately connected with the techniques it uses to contain anxiety'. Her paradigmatic study is that of nurses in a training hospital. Intrinsically, the nursing profession generates a complex array of anxieties, as a result of which nurses are at risk of becoming flooded by intense and unmanageable feelings (1988, p. 50):

> Nurses are confronted with the threat and reality of suffering and death as few lay people are. The work situation involves carrying out tasks which, by ordinary standards, are distasteful, disgusting, and frightening. […] The work situation arouses very strong feelings in the nurses: pity, compassion, and love; guilt and anxiety; hatred and resentment of the patients who have aroused these strong feelings; envy of the care given to patients. (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p. 48)

Since these feelings intrinsically originate from the profession itself, they are referred to by Menzies Lyth as *primary anxieties*. Menzies Lyth's main and innovative point was that protections against such anxieties can become institutionalized in 'social defences against anxiety'. These are collective arrangements that protect members of an organization from disturbing affects (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). What makes this viewpoint innovative is that structural arrangements in organizations are not only viewed from a functional perspective in which psychological effects are an accidental by-product. Instead, psychological demands of the work are seen as a potentially important force that can explain the way that the structural arrangement of organizations are shaped. One example in Menzies Lyth's hospital is that of splitting up the nurse-patient relationship by means of the roster. The latter was constructed in such a way that it restricted the contact between individual nurses and patients, which prevented those nurses from being excessively confronted with situations that provoke primary anxiety (1988, pp. 51–53).

While protection against primary anxiety is important, the concept of 'social defences against anxiety' carries a negative connotation. It refers to mechanisms that help to solve primary anxieties in a primitive, ineffective and perhaps even counter-productive way. Their essence is that they eliminate the experience of anxiety, guilt, doubt and uncertainty (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p. 63) without helping individual nurses to handle such emotions constructively. They prevent professionals from experiencing 'the satisfaction and lessening of anxiety that come from knowing they have

the ability to carry out their work realistically and effectively' (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p. 65). Other examples of social defence mechanisms were avoidance of change and an obscurity in the formal distribution of responsibility. Social defences against anxiety might even become embedded in certain traditional professional values and symbols, such as uniforms, which connote nurses as interchangeable agglomerations of nursing skills without individuality (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p. 52). Ineffective defence mechanisms might create other problems. The highly prescriptive and rigidly defined tasks in Menzies Lyth's hospital caused operational inflexibility, which in turn triggered the *secondary anxiety* in nurses of not being able to cope with everyday problems. The characteristics of the working environment resembled that of the prototypical rigid bureaucracy: minutely prescriptive rules and working practices and few opportunities for mutually supportive team relationships. In other words, the training hospital was a professional environment that structurally induced ineffective ways of dealing with primary anxieties, which subsequently created secondary anxieties that led to stresses and dissatisfaction (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p. 65).

Given that in certain organizations anxieties are intrinsic to the work itself, the question is how to protect professionals in a constructive way. Of importance in this regard is the development of a social context that reduces disturbing affects and facilitates sensemaking (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020, p. 426). One way to create such an environment is by organizing social support for professionals. The concept of *sentient system* is used to refer to the combined arrangements within organizations that are meant to satisfy the emotional needs of members (Miller & Rice, 1967). The core idea is that task systems and sentient systems should overlap in such a way that psychological support matches the demands of a task, but as Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2020, p. 422) point out, 'Perfect overlap, however, is rare. Conflicts often arise between task and sentient systems, especially in times of change'. When task and sentient systems overlap, an organization has a developed structural arrangement that both supports effective problem solving and provides adequate support for professionals facing intrinsic anxieties.

Historical Dimension

Historically, armies have differed in the degrees to which their task systems and sentient systems overlapped. A comparison between the German and the US Armies of World War II seems most instructive in this regard (Dupuy, 1985; Hart, 2001; Van Creveld, 1983; Visser, 2010). It has been generally acknowledged that the organizational effectiveness and integrity of the Wehrmacht, at least on the Western Front, lasted well into the final months of 1944, even in the face of strategic defeat and staggering losses of men and materiel (Madej, 1978; Rush, 1999). When US Army psychologists Shils and Janowitz went to interview and poll German POWs captured on the Western Front between 1943–1945, they discovered that the prime factor responsible for this effectiveness and integrity was the 'steady satisfaction of certain *primary* personality demands afforded by the social organization of the

army' (Shils & Janowitz, 1948, p. 281), suggesting a significant overlap between task systems and sentient systems. Although Nazi ideology and the presence of Nazi enthusiasts and party officials did play a role here (Bartov, 1991; Neitzel & Welzer, 2012), the prime factors were unit cohesion and leadership.

Regarding cohesion, what kept the ordinary German soldier fighting was 'the decisive fact that he was a member of a squad or section which maintained its structural integrity and which coincided roughly with the *social* unit which satisfied some of his major primary needs' (Shils & Janowitz, 1948, p. 284). Important here was a communality of experience, fostered by the maintenance of units to the greatest degree possible and by the replacement system, in which the 'entire personnel of a division would be withdrawn from the front simultaneously and refitted as a unit with replacements […] [who] thereby were given the opportunity to assimilate themselves into the group; then the group as a whole was sent forward' (Shils & Janowitz, 1948, pp. 287–288; Van Creveld, 1983). This system was maintained until the very end, even to the point that regiments were allowed to become depleted in manpower by 50–75%, which depletion offset the cohesion gains (Fritz, 1996; Madej, 1978). When units were hastily formed and not properly trained at the very end of the war, group cohesion began to deteriorate (Rush, 1999).

Regarding leadership, in the German Army, to an increasing extent as the war proceeded and officer vacancies had to be filled more quickly, officers and NCOs were primarily selected on the basis of character, will power and active frontline service rather than seniority, *Stand* or General Staff experience (Knox, 2000; Van Creveld, 1983). Officers were expected to show responsibility, independent action and quick decision-making while remaining within the framework of the mission of their senior commanders. They were to lead from the front, issuing their own mission orders on the basis of first-hand knowledge of the situation. Unlike most other armies, officers were expected to live with their men and were allowed to fraternize with them when off duty. At the same time, they had to enforce strict discipline, thus combining attitudes of sternness and benevolence (Antal, 1993; Van Creveld, 1983). As one captured army officer explained:

> whether the men would follow him depended upon the personality of the officer. The leader must be a man who possesses military skill: then his men will know that he is protecting them. He must be a model to his men; he must be an all-powerful, and still benevolent, authority. He must look after his men's needs, and be able to do all the men's duties better than they themselves in training and under combat conditions. The men must also be sure that their officer is duly considerate of their lives: they must know that he does not squander his human resources, that the losses of life which occur under his command will be minimal and justified. (Shils & Janowitz, 1948, p. 297)

Probably as a result, junior officers 'were regarded by the German soldier throughout the whole Western campaign as brave, efficient and considerate', while 'senior officers, although generally esteemed, were not directly relevant in the psychological structure of the military primary group' (Shils & Janowitz, 1948, pp. 298, 299–300).

Equally important for the ordinary German soldier were the senior NCOs, 'everywhere appreciated as the most solid asset of the Wehrmacht […] neither very interested in politics nor very aggressive, but […] thoroughly trained, solid men' with a

strong 'esprit de corps' among them (Shils & Janowitz, 1948, p. 299). The cohesion of German units was adversely affected towards the end of the war when the number of junior officers and NCOs declined and an inadequate number of replacements of lesser quality, who had fewer opportunities to connect with their men, took their place (Rush, 1999; Van Creveld, 1983).

In contrast to the German Army in World War II, the US Army had to be largely rebuilt at a quick pace when it entered the same conflict in 1941. To this end, the Americans turned to the examples of large-scale organization that they knew best, namely large corporations and the 'scientific management' that prevailed in such corporations. Traditionally assured of a strong material and technological superiority as the US was, this focus led to an army organization with a 'view of war […] considerably more managerial than the German one, putting far heavier emphasis on doctrine, planning and control' in order to ensure the most efficient deployment of human and material resources (Van Creveld, 1983, p. 33; Schoenbaum, 1983). However, while understandable from a historical perspective, it appears that this view of war led to a much smaller overlap between task systems and sentient systems than in the German Army, as becomes clear from looking at unit cohesion and leadership in the US Army.

Regarding cohesion, the US Army employed a fixed number of 91 divisions and used replacements in men and officers to keep these divisions continuously up to strength. These replacements had to travel individually to replacement depots, then to overseas theatre depots, and from there to their divisions, a journey that took four to five months (Visser, 2010). Men and officers were then simply randomly sent to whatever vacancies existed in combat units. While administratively efficient and flexible, the steady influx of 'green' newcomers had a negative impact on unit cohesion and morale, the more so because the new men were expected to receive their advanced training from veterans. Furthermore, this whole system made the rotation of divisions in and out of the front line unnecessary and impossible, depriving veterans of the prospect of rest and recovery until they were wounded, deserted or turned into 'nervous wrecks. Perhaps more than any other factor, it was this system that was responsible for the weaknesses displayed by the US Army during World War II' (Hart, 2001; Van Creveld, 1983, p. 79).

Regarding leadership, in the US Army officers were primarily selected on the basis of intelligence rather than character, and their training was geared towards efficient management under pressure. Active front-line service did not play a role in officer selection and training, and only after 1943 was there a sufficiently large pool of commissioned officers to make it possible to rotate incompetent officers from front-line units to the rear (Visser, 2010). Officers were expected to be knowledgeable managers and loyal to their superiors, while less emphasis was put on independent action and leading from the front. Officers were not allowed to fraternize with their men, although they were expected to show them just treatment rather than enforce strict discipline. Probably as a result, '70–80 percent of all US enlisted men thought that officers put their own interests above that of their men' (Van Creveld, 1983, p. 132).

Unlike German NCOs, in the US Army NCOs were selected on the basis of seniority or ability and trained in technical skills but not in leadership skills, which were to be attained in practice. Furthermore, it was not difficult to become a NCO: in 1945 no less than 50% of all listed men were NCOs, which, together with the replacement system, created friction among the troops. With such open avenues, no 'esprit de corps' developed among NCOs (Van Creveld, 1983). It is noteworthy that after World War II, the US Army intensified its search for optimum internal efficiency in line with the principles of scientific management, which reached its culmination in the Vietnam War. During that war, the army's battlefield performance was seriously impaired by its preoccupation with administrative efficiency and quantification rather than combat effectiveness, by its officers impeccably performing administrative and procurement duties rather than leading front-line units, by its impersonal rotation system of officers, NCOs and soldiers that, as in World War II, adversely affected unit cohesion and morale, and by the resulting divide between soldiers and officers that led to mutiny and officers being killed by their own men ('fragging'). If anything, the Vietnam War represented a pointed contradiction between task systems and sentient systems that caused the total breakdown of the US Army's mental and physical integrity, as cogently pictured in movies such as *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon* (Chwastiak, 2006; Gabriel & Savage, 1978).

The Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

The previous historical analysis can be retrospectively interpreted from a systems psychodynamic perspective. While the German Army in WWII displayed the ability to function as an integrated organization under high stress in a strategically defeated position, the US Army in Vietnam disintegrated in conditions of relatively low combat stress, with symptoms of disintegration such as desertion, fragging, mutiny and drug abuse (Gabriel & Savage, 1978). Given Menzies Lyth's hypothesis that 'the success and viability of a social institution are intimately connected with the techniques it uses to contain anxiety', the clues from the historical sources seem to indicate that the German Army was organized around the requirements of the sentient system, while these requirements were disregarded by the US Army.

This indicates that taking care of the sentient system is not just important from the perspective of the psychological wellbeing of individual soldiers. It was also a key factor in the organizations' ability to retain functional integration. The basis for the sentient system in one of the cases considered was cohesion at the operational level, which is the level most immediately confronted with the hardships of battle. Such cohesion was enabled by setting up supportive conditions such as leadership, but also by a design strategy that allowed for a certain stability in the soldiers' primary groups. While this seemed to be a main design principle behind the German Army, the US Army in Vietnam predominantly focused on task systems by designing its units along the lines of a scientific management philosophy. If a sentient system is not functioning properly, or is not even in place, organizations might develop defences

against anxiety to escape from primary anxiety. According to the analysis of Gabriel and Savage (1978), it seems that this was predominantly the case for officers. They suggest that the policy of individual rotation and the fact that soldiers remained longer than officers was not an accidental by-product of an honest attempt to optimize the task system. In fact, the underlying purpose of such policies may have been to shield officers from the hazards of battle (Gabriel & Savage, 1978, p. 360). Their strongest conclusion is perhaps that the ethical and professional standards of the officer corps had decayed: leading from behind while enforcing the outward symbols of military discipline.

Quite cynically, in the US Army in Vietnam, such defences against anxiety were not available to regular soldiers. What these examples show is that while social defences may carry a negative connotation, they are not the same as a full-blown disintegration of units and organizations. If few sources to defend against anxiety are available, people might escape into strategies of psychological withdrawal. Two of the main indicators of the disintegration of the US Army in Vietnam as brought forward by Gabriel and Savage (1978)—desertion, fragging, mutiny and drug abuse—might be seen as indicative of this. Desertion quite literally amounts to fleeing from the scene and drug abuse is a prototypical example of a psychological escape. The two other indicators—fragging and mutiny—point to manifested disintegration of the army. They point to a severe hostility between groups and their leaders, and the establishment within the organization. Shils and Janowitz as well as Gabriel and Savage refer to the importance of primary group cohesion for psychological well-being and organizational effectiveness. However, not every kind of cohesion might be desirable. After all, it probably takes a cohesive group to organize a 'fragging'. Building cohesion around a shared desperation might be the ultimate perverse effect of a system that optimizes a task system from a managerial perspective.

Military Task Forces as Synthetic Organizations and Consequences for Sentient Systems

While providing insight into the various factors influencing the interplay between task systems and sentient systems, the historical examples discussed above concern standing armies engaged in full-scale combat. However, the last three decades have seen an increase in peacekeeping missions and counter-insurgency warfare. The expeditionary task forces that are formed for such missions encounter specific problems regarding the relationship between task and sentient systems. Modern military operations, sometimes referred to as military operations other than war (MOOTW; Taw & Peters, 1995), typically involve the formation of temporary expeditionary task forces that consist of many different units from standing military organizations. Some examples are recent missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and the former Yugoslavia. Military task forces involved in such missions have typically been confronted with violence, have used force themselves, have witnessed human suffering and have

experienced injuries and fatalities. It is therefore also a task environment that can generate stress and anxiety, as well as, for example, moral conflicts. This indicates that a systems psychodynamic perspective might be relevant. Furthermore, temporary task forces have specific organizational characteristics that may pose significant challenges to both task and sentient systems and the interplay between the two.

According to Snook (2000), 'Task Forces are designed by taking basic unit building blocks and assembling them along hierarchical lines consistent with the demands of the mission and time-honoured military traditions of command and control' (p. 33). Other authors have related this design strategy to problems of operational flexibility (Kramer, 2007) and safety during military missions (Moorkamp, 2019). According to these studies, carried out at the Netherlands Defence Academy over a period of almost 25 years (Kramer et al., 2021; Vogelaar et al., 1996), a key characteristic of temporary task forces is the lack of a permanent organizational design. Because the military units that form the building blocks of such task forces originate from four 'parent' organizations at home (Army, Navy, Air Force and Military Police), they experience an absence of initial organizational integration and coherence. An assembly of many different units—the Dutch Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) in Afghanistan counted up to 49—has to develop an integrated and coherent task force while operating in a dynamic and dangerous mission context. A parallel can be drawn in this respect with what Thompson (1967) characterizes as the 'synthetic organization'. Based on field studies into disaster relief organizations, Thompson defines the synthetic organization as organizations that 'simultaneously have to establish structure and carry on operations' (p. 53). The choice for a 'synthetic' organization is the result of a strong demand for flexibility, which can lead to transformations in the direction of network forms of organizing.

Some studies show that innovative organizational forms emerge when task force structures are established (Moorkamp et al., 2020). Kramer et al. (2012) describe what is referred to as the smallest unit of action (SUA) in which different functional task force elements, such as infantry, intelligence and engineers, are recombined into multifunctional platoons. Moorkamp (2019) finds similar multifunctional organizational forms in combinations of flying units and ground units at the operational level. SUAs and the integration of units in the air and units on the ground showed that military personnel were trying to fundamentally shape and reshape their organization. The bottom-up design process that spawns such multifunctional organizational entities seems to provide soldiers at the operational level with more control regarding central operational processes. For example, within TFU, the combination and recombination of activities of the infantry (battle group), reconstruction teams, engineers and the cavalry within SUAs resulted in an improved ability to deal with the constantly changing demands for reconstruction in combination with the detection of improvised explosive devices and the force protection of units in the field. Similarly, combining and recombining field units with unmanned aerial vehicles and fire support in the form of Apaches, F-16s and artillery resulted in improved abilities to operate in the Uruzgan mission area. Such processes therefore seem to provide a pragmatic solution for the missing integration experienced between military units in the task force. However, our studies also show that systemic characteristics,

such as the functional nature of the task force, top-down hierarchical control and the organizational complexity originating from many different units, complicated the synthesizing process. Eventually, conflicts between bottom-up design processes and obstructive systemic characteristics resulted in safety incidents between friendly units in the air and between units on the ground and those providing fire support (Moorkamp, 2019).

The Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

Our findings indicate a challenging relationship between task and sentient systems in expeditionary task forces. What emerges from the case studies is that the very flexibility that is characteristic of the synthetic organization—they require an extremely malleable task system—complicates the establishment of primary group cohesion, while this was a significant part of the sentient system in traditional armies. The case studies furthermore indicated a variation on the secondary anxieties mentioned by Menzies Lyth. During our interviews, soldiers emphasized feelings of frustration, disappointment and apathy with the military organization for its inability to provide 'solid' or 'good' ways of organizing in expeditionary mission contexts (Kramer et al., 2021). At the same time, working on pragmatic problem solving in trying to synthesize the organization was a particular source to connect task and sentient systems. As such, bottom-up self-design may create a way to deal with the inherently challenging psychological circumstances of the mission area. We see it as an important task for military management in a more general sense to facilitate such processes in the mission area.

It seems that an organization that needs to be able to continuously combine and recombine building blocks might be able to avoid social defences that are engraved in stone. This issue has not been the focus of our project, but a few interesting observations can be made. For example, Kramer (2007) argued that Dutchbat II in the 1990s—as the defenders of the Srebrenica safe area—dealt with a mission impossible by effectively ceasing to act as a crisis organization. They were essentially the hostages of surrounding Serbian forces that significantly outnumbered them. Any attempt at taking their mission seriously was met with severe intimidation, against which they were defenceless. Without reference to a systems psychodynamic perspective, Kramer observed that front-line troops appeared to turn 'inward' by, for example, obsessing about the details of planning or by taking patrol routes that would minimize the chances of encountering situations that would require intervention. A further intriguing analysis of organizing practices in MOOTW has been made by Kalkman (2019), who focused on the deployment of Border Security Teams to Chios, Greece, during the European migration crisis (2016–2017). He suggests that 'managerial actions' (p. 99) socialized front-line workers into a security frame of mind (p. 115) in which the threat to security that migrants were believed to constitute was central. He points out that the compartmentalization of activities made it increasingly complicated for front-line workers to develop an integrated understanding of

local conditions for migrants (p. 115). Such managerial actions seem to shield front-line workers from difficult moral and political dilemmas. However, both examples are observations made in relation to other research questions that not systematically studied defences against anxiety. Nevertheless, they do lead to the possible hypothesis that the previously mentioned emergent process of developing innovative structures might also be influenced by psychodynamic characteristics as well as functional ones. As such, they indicate the relevance of the systems psychodynamic perspective for further research.

Conclusion

Without the benefit of specific research into the topic, this chapter cautiously explored the question as to whether the systems psychodynamic perspective might be relevant to military organizations. Given its emphasis on the importance of anxieties intrinsic to professions, one might consider its relevance to be obvious. Yet, other than the provocative reflections of historian Richard Holmes (1985, p. 236), we have found no other systems psychodynamic ideas that were applied to the military organization. Holmes suggests that military drills, and even internal bureaucracy, might not primarily have a functional purpose but, rather, a psychological one. He suggests that, given the chaos of battle, they might offer soldiers the confidence that they actually are members of a well-organized system. This might be helpful in face of anxiety, although he also suggests that they might trigger forms of escapism in the face of adverse circumstances.

The psychodynamic perspective is valuable because it directs attention to the interrelations between the psychological demands of professions and structural features of organizations. If these interrelations are ignored, organizations may be designed with a disregard for such anxieties, with potentially devastating effects, both in terms of psychological impact and the effectiveness of an organization as a task system. The exploration in this chapter leads to the conclusion that there is indeed great relevance in this perspective for the military organization. Historical examples point to the importance of establishing a healthy connection between the sentient system and the task system. Particularly in successful armies, group cohesion seems to have functioned as an important protection against the hardships of battle. Contemporary ultra-flexible 'synthetic' task forces appear to be challenged in developing such group cohesion. However, bottom-up strategies that enable the self-designing of such networks may provide the opportunity to establish a functional sentient system.

What an exploration of military cases can add to the systems psychodynamic perspective is that making the distinction between 'defence against anxiety' and 'supportive sentient system' is, at least to a degree, a moral question. Shaping military practice is an ethically relevant issue that materializes in preparing, facilitating and performing military missions (Verweij, 2009). Within that practice, people are 'moral agents' and the values they pursue are essential to the choices they make (Verweij, 2020, p. 18). The example of Border Security Teams is a case in point. At what

point does protecting members of those teams against an overwhelming confrontation with human suffering become a structural arrangement that enables them to deny human suffering? Both extremes can be the cause of psychological trauma and determining where exactly this line should be drawn, whether by conscious choice or unconscious denial, is a normative question. Molendijk's (2021) study of moral injury in Dutchbat soldiers indicates the devastating psychological effects that such 'institutional betrayal' can have: if institutional realms do not face up to their own moral dilemmas, they effectively leave front-line workers to their own devices.

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