MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATING THE YOUTH IN NATIONAL DEFENCE: A SYSTEM-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract: In a discussion during the meeting of the Human Resource Management Working Group of the V4 Countries held in Hungary in spring last year, apart from introducing the Human and Family Support System, educating the youth in national defence was also on the agenda. Members of the delegations praised the Hungarian initiative aimed at broadening the information of young people on national defence, and regarded the just launched KatonaSuli (MilitarySchool) program as an example to follow. As of now the program consists only of two courses such as Katonai alapismeretek (Basic Military Knowledge) and Honvedelmi alapismeretek (National Defence Knowledge). A successful expansion of the program demands marketing mentality and a system-based approach. However, before starting the expansion, resources such as personnel, finance, technics, etc. must be provided. These resources must properly be positioned, processes be made transparent, regulations be elaborated, and last but not least, completed training of the personnel involved. As a system the program requires continuous monitoring and oversight control. This must involve adequate data coming from an information architecture that captures, registers, observes, researches information in order to support the decision-making process. Finally, marketing mentality includes market segmentation and definition, and a proper communication of the extended program.

Keywords: Military, school, education, national defence, youth, marketing, research.

1 THE MILITARYSCHOOL PROGRAM

Educating the youth in national defence was on the agenda in a discussion during the meeting of the Human Resource Management Working Group of the V4 countries held in Hungary in spring 2010. Members of the delegations praised the Hungarian initiative and regarded the recently launched KatonaSuli (MilitarySchool) program as an example worth to follow.[1]

Experts of the Slovakian General Staff visited the 5th Bocskai István Infantry Brigade anew in November the same year. During their visit they also had the opportunity to take part in a lecture on Katonai alapismeretek (Basic Military Knowledge) and gain experience directly in education within the framework of the MilitarySchool program.[2]

In order to better understand the program, it is important to introduce its genesis in Hungary. To get a better grip on typical Hungarian peculiarities, it is also important to deliver first an overview on events characterising the period from the end of the 1990s until now. Apart from the obvious structural changes of the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF), the transformation of the security environment, the change in the political system of Hungary, her accession to NATO and the European Union, and the suspension of compulsory military service in peace time resulted that the traditional role of the armed forces within the society has changed significantly.[3]

At the same time when the voluntary-based military force was introduced, novel aspects concerning human policy and links between the society and the military, came also to the fore such as:
- being one of the biggest employer of the country the HDF need trained employees who are commited to national defence;
- discontinuation of the period in which the younger generation can acquire knowledge on national defence in the framework of compulsory military service;
- the significant reduction of intensity of contacts with the population, especially the youth.[4]

Given the fact that preparing the population of Hungary for national defence is a societal interest also declared by the Constitution, the State must guarantee that citizens may gain the appropriate knowledge of national defense. Parallel to that volunteer recruiters must provide the required numbers for the HDF. It is important that the youth gets information on the peculiarities of military life and the tasks of the armed forces in a considerably young age.

The ability to pass on knowledge on patriotism and national defence resurfaces time and again within the Ministry of Defence (MoD). In the last couple of years there were many promising initiatives to address the youth, but these were done not in a synchronised and systematic way. As a result, none of them could realise the original intent.[5]

Apart from the constantly changing political intents of the parties, the most probable cause was the general or partial lack in utilizing marketing mentality and a system-based approach; popular and an enduring feature of the public sector. There is therefore the risk that the current program to educate the youth in national defence in mid- and higher education insitutions, as introduced during the V4
meeting, can succumb to the same outcome. In order to prevent this, an integrated and systematic approach must be established in which direct military recruitment and indirect military augmentation merge. These two different activities should not intermix, but enforce each other in a meaningful way and leveraged by various marketing tools.[6]

The MilitarySchool program for educating the youth in patriotism and national defence provides an ideal departure for that. However, as of now it contains only two courses. Basic Military Knowledge, which is taught in highschools, and Honvédelmi alapismeretek (National Defence Knowledge) taught in colleges and universities.[7]

These are the two pillars of the program that must be extended in order to better attract the attention of the youth towards the HDF. For this, marketing mentality and a system-based approach is needed.

2 RESULTS OF A SURVEY

Research in January 2011 conducted between the teenagers - teachers and students - lecturers brought to light data on the actual state of the program and supports the statement above.

In more specific terms the research wanted to find out the motivation factors that made students decide to take up the course on National Defence Knowledge, and their level of readiness to apply either for professional or contracted military service. The research also aimed at finding out the reason why schools introduced Basic Military Knowledge, how teachers see the conditions to teach the course, and how they see its content. The selection criteria for the educational institutions was based on their geographic situation and the date of course introduction.

The research was based on basic questionnaires. The results, statements and suggestions of the research come from the questionnaires and information based on document analysis, quantitative data mining and the experienced knowledge of the authors.

However, limitations in terms of size and scope of this article only allow an introduction to the main aspects of the research together with some selected areas. As stated above, marketing mentality and a system-based approach can be displayed or their lack thereof be shown.

2.1 Motivation factors

After analysing nearly 500 questionnaires it became clear that students choose the course on National Defence Knowledge because of its 3 credit-value (50 %), the chance to get information on the HDF (49 %), and the possibility of e-Learning (44 %). In contrast, Basic Military Knowledge as a course was chosen due to the general interest in military topics (69 %) that can also be interpreted as a sort of curiosity. Gaining information on the HDF was not regarded as primary reason (21 %). Further motivation factors were realising future plans (48 %), and a non-negligible option was to improve physical fitness (31 %). High Schools opted for introducing Basic Military Knowledge because they wanted to support education on national defence and satisfy the curiosity of the children for military topics. Important aspects were to help them to promote their future career (67 %), to educate them in comradery (55 %), and to improve their physical fitness (44 %).

2.2 Knowledge of the HDF

It became clear that prior to the course two-thirds (62 %) of the students had only minimum information on the HDF, and one third (32 %) of them had no information at all. The bulk of information came from the Internet (53 %), and from family members and friends (53 %). A similar proportion was found among the teenagers. Before taking up the course on Basic Military Knowledge, only a small group had information on the HDF (9 %). Information came mostly from the Internet (63 %), but also family members and friends played an important role (52 %).

Given the data above, it is of utmost importance that information activities should adjust to the primary information sources of the youth. It is detrimental to have a homepage – yet to be introduced – that addresses and satisfies the need of this younger age group. This way it could provide for interactivity and the chance for community building.

Among those who successfully passed the examinations in National Defence Knowledge, the proportion of students who see the HDF in a positive way is significant (39 %). Given the fact, that those who were surveyed had already completed their course, this lasting positive attitude can be seen as an important achievement. Unfortunately, the defence sector (HDF and MoD) does not show much interest for these young people. It is assessed that as of now, they are not important for the sake of national defence.

Half of those (54 %) who attended the course on Basic Military Knowledge announced that during the course their opinion on the HDF changed significantly, and in a positive way. Stabilising this positive image among the teenagers appears to be an
easier task since the timeframe to influence their attitude lasts between 2-4 years.

2.3 Choosing military career

The research made it also clear that one third of the students (for the entire term 155) tempered with the idea to join the HDF as contracted officer after their studies. Unfortunately, also this case shows the lack of a marketing mentality. By not approaching them, the HDF runs the risk to lose these 155 possible candidates, who all successfully completed the course on National Defence Knowledge. Regarding the future the authors just can hope that the students’ opinion on the HDF stays unchanged and sooner or later they appear as employees in the defence sector.

2.4 Evaluation of content

The research proved that with the National Defence Knowledge course roughly two third (64%) of the students gained a comprehensive picture on the HDF. One third (31%) thought that their knowledge on security policy issues were broadened and gained a knowledge that can be used in everyday life.

Teenagers had similar opinion on the course on Basic Military Knowledge. They gained a comprehensive picture on the way the HDF works (61%), they also gained knowledge that can be used in everyday life (56%), and a bit more than one third (35%) thought that they became more disciplined as a result of attending the course. It is important to mention that nearly one third (30%) became interested in joining the HDF.

Teachers of Basic Military Knowledge are on the same opinion with the teenagers. They think that the content of the course is suitable to introduce the HDF. One third (33%) of them think that also the teenagers’ physical fitness improved, and some might have achieved even better grades in other courses.

2.5 Teaching conditions

Regarding the conditions of lecturing National Defence Knowledge it can be said that the upkeep of e-learning as a system is guaranteed only in the short term. Due to limitations in current capacity, additional resources must be involved in near future (i. e. because of increasing number of students, start of voluntary reserve training, etc.).

The theoretical part of teaching Basic Military Knowledge is guaranteed, but in the field of practical training there are shortfalls in some High Schools. In order to amend the situation they constantly seek co-operation with the MoD and military units. According to one third (32%) of the teachers the role of the MoD is not yet clarified. They think that the effectiveness of teaching the course could be improved in many ways such as better military logistic support, better equipment, increasing the practical part, exchanging experience with other schools, helping in A-levels examinations, etc.

3 REFLECTING THE RESULTS

Based on the research the authors briefly outline the basic foundation upon which the program, if designed and extended in a proper and systematic way, would both help educate the youth in national defence and provide perspective personnel for the HDF.

However, when speaking about education on national defence one has to take into account that patriotism is a personal thing and not a political category. No one would doubt that it is worth trying to form attitudes along basic societal values such as commitment to fatherland and accepting service for the home country. Due to the fact that it is a long process, in theory one should try to start this education at the earliest age possible. This of course is a task that demands the involvement of many players such as the family, educational institutes, the HDF, and various civilian organisations. The MilitarySchool program as a basis for an enduring solution to educating the youth in national defence can be seen as an added value that binds all this together into a system.[8]

To exploit and extend the possibilities the program provides for, it should be regarded as a long-term investment that demands consequent marketing and PR activities. The expansion of the MilitarySchool program would be based on the organisational strategy of the HDF, which is derived from the National Defence Strategy and the respective Government’s Program. This would define mission, the way-ahead, and outline basic principles and core values in a coherent way.

Unfortunately, due to the fact that long-term planning on educating the youth in national defence, and the transparency of related tasks are as of yet not granted, crafting and passing such strategy is more than vital. Results of the research introduced above amply show that a strategy addressing the youth cannot be part of a human or a recruitment strategy. It must be a strategy on its own.

Basic pillars as of now are the two courses introduced. However, to increase their efficiency (i. e. establishing a presence in elementary schools, organising events, providing sports and other programs, establishing co-operation on various levels) further programs need to be involved. Some of them should not be new, but could be the revitalisation of already or formerly existing ones.
4 CONCLUSION

The question how the expansion of the MilitarySchool program as a system would eventually look like, arises naturally. In order to deliver an answer to that question the authors emphasise an important thing: the MilitarySchool program does not stand for recruitment, and education in national defence does not mean military training. Although some might prefer to see the program as a source only for providing personnel in enough numbers to the HDF, it is simply not true.[9]

The extended MilitarySchool program could be seen as a system of those long-term investment projects, including the strategy for the youth to be in concert with other relevant strategies. These can include a human resource management strategy or recruitment strategy addressing various aspects of national defence. In this system the MilitarySchool program as it stands now, is nothing more than a novel and on-line backed educational opportunity. However, when offered and integrated with various extended youth programs into a system the program could not only provide for the theoretical part of teaching Basic Military Knowledge at High Schools, and National Defence Knowledge at colleges and universities, but:

- enable the theoretical education of people outside highschools, colleges and universities (i.e. certain public sector employees, and voluntary reserve personnel),
- make possible that regardless of the age group everybody gets access to information on national defence,
- make possible to support the recruiting activity of the HDF in order to bring in professional, contracted and reserve personnel.

As of now only Basic Military Knowledge and National Defence Knowledge exist. A successful expansion of the program demands a marketing mentality and a system-based approach. However, before starting any sort of such activity related to the expansion of the existing MilitarySchool program, resources such as personnel, finance, technics, etc. must be provided. These resources must properly be positioned, processes be made transparent, regulations elaborated, and last but not least, thorough training of the personnel involved. After establishing the background, proper management of the extended program including annual plans (milestones with indicators) and the means for their continuous monitor and control is essential.[10]

Successful marketing must involve adequate data coming from an information architecture that captures, registers, observes, researches information in order to support the decision-making process.[11] Given the fact that the MoD only partially posseses such an architecture, it would be helpful to establish it as soon as possible. Market segmentation and definition, and proper communication of the extended program is necessary, too.

References


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