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Discrepancy in Internalized Values of Workers in Extreme situations:  
Consequences for Soldiers and Risk for the Organization

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## **Abstract**

### Introduction

In the present paper, we address the double-edged role of values among Army personnel and how they can be used in information warfare. We suggest that value discrepancy may impact the agent's trust and consequently, affect behaviour and ultimately destabilize the organization.

### Objectives

Based on cognitive dissonance theory and the meaning maintenance model, we hypothesized that exposing trained soldiers to information which confronts their core values and involves both their peers and their institution could promote an overwhelming reaction that could finally alter their trust in the organization.

### Method

To examine the proposed model, interviews were conducted with 38 active-duty soldiers that permits to stress the importance of values for their personal life. To complete the interviews, a staged observation was led with the second set of participants ( $n = 21$ ). Its goal was to evaluate the soldiers' reaction to a message aiming at their values.

### Results

Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Interviews confirmed both the importance of the said values and stressed the ambivalence toward their institution. The results of the staged observation suggested that a low credibility source of information aiming at their central values could lead to a direct emotional reaction, that could potentially lead to a decrease in institutional trust, and therefore ultimately in the organisation performance.

### Conclusion

The discussion focuses on the consequences of this mechanism, the fundamental necessity for the organization of taking this process into account. Finally, we suggest ways to cope with this risk which can alter strategy deployment and goal achievement.

keywords: extreme situation, military personnel, values, cognitive dissonance, trust, inconsistency, national security, information warfare

## Résumé

### Introduction

Cet article aborde le rôle à double tranchant des valeurs partagés par l'ensemble des militaires et la manière dont ces dernières sont susceptibles d'être utilisés dans le cadre de guerre informationnelle. Nous proposons qu'un écart au sein de ces valeurs peut éroder la confiance des agents et, de manière subséquente, affecter les comportements, voire déstabiliser l'organisation.

### Objectif

Sur la base de la théorie de la dissonance cognitive et du *meaning maintenance model*, nous avons émis l'hypothèse qu'exposer des soldats entraînés à des informations qui confrontent leurs valeurs fondamentales impliquant à la fois leurs pairs et leur institution pourrait favoriser une réaction suffisamment forte pour altérer leur confiance dans l'organisation.

### Méthode

Afin d'évaluer notre modèle, des entretiens ont été menés avec 38 militaires en service actif permettant de confirmer l'importance des valeurs professionnelles dans leur vie personnelle. Pour compléter les entretiens, une observation dirigée a été mise en place avec le second ensemble de participants ( $n = 21$ ). Cette mise en situation avait pour objectif d'évaluer la réaction des soldats soumis à un message ciblant leurs valeurs.

### Résultats

Les analyses qualitatives et quantitatives des entretiens ont permis de confirmer l'importance des valeurs ainsi que l'ambivalence à l'égard de l'institution. Les résultats de l'observation dirigée ont montré qu'une information peu crédible ciblant les valeurs centrales des soldats a entraîné une réaction émotionnelle suffisamment forte pour provoquer ce qui semble être une diminution de la confiance institutionnelle et donc, potentiellement à termes, une diminution de la performance de l'organisation.

### Conclusion

La discussion de cet article porte sur les conséquences de ce mécanisme et sur la nécessité fondamentale pour l'organisation de tenir compte de ce processus. Enfin, des suggestions sont proposées pour pallier l'émergence de ces risques pouvant porter atteinte au déploiement de la stratégie de l'organisation et l'atteinte de ses objectifs.

Mots-clés : situation extrême, personnel militaire, valeurs, dissonance cognitive, confiance, inconsistance, sécurité nationale, guerre informationnelle

## **Discrepancy in Internalized Values of Workers in Extreme situations: Consequences for Soldiers and Risk for the Organization**

Some people have to work in extreme situations, defined by Rivolier (1998) as situations that differ from everyday life and are risky, volatile and unpredictable. Unpredictability is here defined as radical as in Knight's (1921) vision where the probability of occurrence of an event is not measurable (Orléan, 1986). People facing these situations try to cope with them by relying on their personal values. For these reasons, military personnel are both physically and psychologically trained to enter combat situations. This training includes the adoption of strong and central values such as *patriotism, bravery, loyalty, respect for authority, cohesion, courage, justice, and honesty*. These shared values contribute to group cohesion and the development of trust (Evans & Dion, 1991). In addition, many have shown that cohesion and trust are directly linked with performance in military teams (see Mullen & Copper, 1994; Oliver et al., 1999). More broadly, Fuller, Mayer, and Pike (2008) posit trust as a critical enabler of team success. Thus, in the military field, organizational performance is largely associated with mission success and linked to team success. However, because these values are fundamental for efficient work, their alteration could strongly impact the execution of orders, risking mission success and, thus, ultimately the organization's strategy and efficiency. An influence operation targeting these specific values could then perturb their trust in the military institution, with dire consequences.

As an organization operating regularly in extreme and risky situations, the Army needs to rely on values. These values are inculcated in soldiers' minds through their military training. Considering these values' importance, military personnel can theoretically be particularly sensitive to influence operations mobilizing these values. They are central and relevant for their ingroup, and consequently any threat to them could be perceived as a direct attack to soldiers self. We thus argue that specific information threatening these values is likely to produce strong reactions that could interfere with the superordinate goal of accomplishing their mission.

In this paper the value system of the military was examined through general models of social psychology. Using interviews, with both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the link between values and trust was examined and specific hypotheses concerning the consequences of discrepancy between participants' core values and the way their institution deals with them were developed. Finally, a staged observation was conducted to illustrate with empirical data the founding principles of this mechanism.

## **Values and military profession**

From the beginning of its initial training of new recruits, the Army highlights the importance of values. For instance, official communications usually stress specific values such as *trust, team spirit, self-help, respect, courage, will, perseverance, merit* and *patriotism*. These values are supposed to be shared by all soldiers and enrich them throughout their lives. In armies, cohesion is described as essential and is reinforced by the necessary confidence and the daily sharing of the demands and risks of the job. This idea is corroborated by Dasgupta (1988), who argues that without risk there is no need of trust. Because military teams are usually at risk, they require strong confidence in the organization. This trust is not only dedicated to their peers, but also to their superiors giving orders and supplying materials, even if these hierarchy members are not close to the battle field. The distance between soldiers and their hierarchy makes trust particularly relevant, as trust can be substituted for control in relationships (Aulakh et al., 1996). Trust is essential because their everyday life as soldiers involves risk, and following orders may sometimes increase that risk.

## **Training and Values**

For these reasons, the Army as an institution recognized long ago the benefits of inculcating desired values in soldiers' minds (Huntington, 1957). Perpetuation of values is justified by their necessity for the effectiveness of the military institution. Similarly, according to Schweisguth (1978), organizations try to establish control over their members by imposing norms whose

justification implies reference to a symbolic system. In the Army's case, due to its very function, this is particularly effective since the mission may require soldiers to sacrifice themselves for the general interest. Furthermore, values shared by team members guarantee that they will do their best to assure security for individuals and for the group (Cvetkovich & Löfstedt, 1999). As pointed out by Siegrist, Cvetkovich, and Roth (2000, p. 360): "a strategy reducing this risk is to rely on those individuals who we sense will follow what we consider to be appropriate guidelines and general principles for setting goals and procedures –those with similar salient values." Concerning the institution, these values limit the reassessment and questioning of orders by reinforcing trust. In this sense, the military's symbolic system is built on chosen values which are a fundamental element of the trust in and functioning of the institution. In sum, values serve the Army as building blocks for the integration of norms supporting an active ideology. They are crucial elements to motivate the soldiers, to give meaning to their military activities and thus to help the organization deploy its strategy.

### **From Instruction to Internalization**

After months of training, the strengthening and internalization of Army values gets solidified when the newly enlisted soldiers are deployed to their units on the field, specifically through External Operations (EO). During these EOs, personnel share with their group a daily life and a common confrontation of risks. There, because what they learnt turns to be applied every day, the values are strengthened and cohesion is reinforced. Deployment in EOs also confronts them with the risk of death and injury while performing their missions. This participation in military operations and this confrontation with risk reinforces cohesion and trust in peers (Adams & Webb, 2003). Moreover, that trust helps to secure collective meaning maintenance that may contribute to seeing a crisis through to its resolution (Karsenty, 2015). Logically, other values are equally reinforced through field deployment as well as everyday life, but trust in peers is essential and particularly strong during risky EOs, as it serves an adaptive purpose. Groups and the associated trust in peers thus become central. Barrois (1993) maintains that the group becomes a true

homeland to kill or die for. In the same vein, De Richoufftz (1999) postulates that soldiers are not giving their lives for nation or institutions, but for their brothers in arms. In line with this suggestion, Godé (2011) showed that debriefings reinforce common values and culture in military teams. Altogether, trust in peers turns out to be a foundational component of the values soldiers are most attached to.

Finally, even if the institution promotes a package of values, the ones soldiers favour could be different from the ones expected by the hierarchy. While trust in the hierarchy and respect for orders are essential for efficient functioning of the military institution, one could postulate that the most deeply rooted trust ultimately lies in the group. This is because the factual establishment of values takes place in units, close to other soldiers and far from the institution's commanding officers. More specifically, soldiers' experience may lead them to prioritize trust in their peers over trust in their institution. Indeed, once soldiers have developed their own scale of values enriched by empirical experiences in EO and socialization in their units, they can legitimately think they are the ones who know best what these values really mean and the ones who really applied them correctly. Thus, they can judge the way the military hierarchy deals with the same values. This could be particularly relevant because soldiers' values learnt during training and then tested on the ground often become part of their personality (Francke & Heinecken, 2001). As a result, these values are central, and confronting peers and the institution may have important consequences for the general organization and specifically with regard to respect for authority.

### **Consequences of Discrepancy in Values**

Different psychological models suggest that the discrepancy in values between members of an organization and the organization as an institution has disruptive consequences on behaviours, perceptions and reactions. Soldiers are not exceptions. More specifically, we assume that cognitive dissonance theory (CDT; Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones, 2019; Vaidis, 2014), attitude ambivalence theory (Newby-Clark et al., 2002), terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1986),



and finally, the meaning maintenance model (MMM; Heine et al., 2006; Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012) provide relevant understanding of soldier behaviour perturbation based on values discrepancies that could affect the expected course of the institution.

## **Cognitive dissonance**

When we consider that confronting values can be hazardous in soldiers' case, we refer to CDT and more specifically to the self-consistency revision (Aronson, 1968, 1992, 2019; Stone & Cooper, 2001). According to Festinger (1957), when there is inconsistency between two cognitions, the individual experiences a state of cognitive dissonance, a motivational discomfort, and tries to reduce it. The main strategy for doing so that has been studied has been attitude change to reduce discrepancy with an attitude-inconsistent behaviour. Smith (1961) showed how soldiers rationalized an attitude-discrepant behaviour (i.e., eating grasshoppers) with a positive change in attitude when they had no justification for doing it, but not when they had several justifications. Unfortunately, the means used to cope with unwanted information or a behaviour perceived as discrepant with values are not necessarily rational. Dissonance-reducing efforts could lead to reinforcement of the said values, to their weakening, or to disengagement, depending on several parameters (see McGrath, 2017; Vaidis & Bran, 2018).

For the current purpose, it appears relevant to focus on Self-Standard Models of dissonance (SSM), as developed by Aronson (1968, 1992) and then further by Stone and Cooper (2001). According to these models, dissonance specifically arises from contradictions between individuals' behaviour and their self-perception. In the case of soldiers, this self-perception is closely linked to the aforementioned values. According to the SSM, the more people's self-image is positive, the more they feel cognitive dissonance when they feel they have not lived up to their personal standards. Soldiers' self is strongly linked to the military values which motivated them to fight for the greater good. Soldiers' values initially learnt during training are validated and strengthened by everyday life experience in extreme situations. Consequently, because these values are strong and

linked to their self-concept, behaviours that are discrepant with their standards will be considered as a direct threat, thus generating strong dissonance.

### **Ambivalence, Terror Management Theory and the Meaning Maintenance Model**

Grounded in CDT, other models elaborate upon discrepant cognitions' consequences. Ambivalence is a specific state of mind resulting from the simultaneous accessibility of two discrepant cognitions towards the same object, resulting in both positive and negative feelings (McGregor et al., 2019). This situation is hypothesized to make individuals feel torn apart and conflicted. Many objects are subject to ambivalence, but this is problematic only when the discrepant attitudes are accessible at the same time. Thus, the most self-relevant attitudes, because they are more available and accessible, are more likely to evoke ambivalence. As for CDT, strategies occur to avoid the aversive feeling resulting from ambivalence. This could be through derogation of the object's importance (Simon et al., 1995), alcohol consumption (Gray & McNaughton, 2000), or affirmation of important individual convictions about values, opinions, goals, self-worth and groups (McGregor, 2003). This affirmation of values is said worldview defence.

Terror Management Theory (TMT; Pyszczynski et al., 2015) relies on the existential idea that awareness of death is threatening. Mortality salience is hypothesized to cause terrifying anxiety, affecting psychological well-being. To cope with this situation, people exploit psychological structures that buffer the aversive effects of death awareness. The theory proposes that this buffer relies on beliefs in life's worth and significance. Consequently, these mechanisms promote an increase in worldview defence. Depending on what is relevant for individuals or groups, worldview defence could involve bolstering several values such as religious faith, political ideologies or even ingroup values.

Finally, the Meaning Maintenance Model (MMM; Heine et al., 2006; Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012) incorporates CDT, ambivalence and mortality in a unique model. The idea is that people are

looking for meaning. When individuals' meanings are threatened, events can no longer be perceived through the prism of a coherent mental representation of the world and of human relations.

Expectancy violations, mortality salience and values discrepancy are all threats to meaning. They all activate neurocognitive and psychophysiological systems that trigger mechanisms (see Jonas et al., 2014), motivating similar compensatory behaviours (Randles et al., 2015). Indeed, any violation of expectancy evokes a regulation of information to reorganize understanding of the world, or a "palliative" response to stress. A palliative response to stress is quite common and, in a large array of situations, concerns other meaning frameworks that are still intact (McGregor et al., 2001; Steele, 1988). When the individual is not capable of regulating the source of the discrepancy—such as, in the case of mortality salience, feelings of uncertainty or self-esteem threat—the most probable palliative response consists of affirming values, worldviews or self-esteem. Hence, a source of such threats that cannot be directly addressed often promotes an affirmation of meaning in general: a worldview defence.

Collectively, CDT, ambivalence theory, and TMT all suggest a similar process following exposure to inconsistency (Proulx et al., 2012). By aggregating previous models, MMM offers an extensive model to explain why, when and how individuals' experience of psychological threat is likely to provoke defence of values.

### **Perception of Discrepancy in Values Provokes their Defence**

The specific setting of organizational agents evolving in extreme situations is a fertile ground for the observation of cognitive dissonance and more generally of meaning threat. This is obviously the case for military personnel. Soldiers are confronted with death and professionally stand alongside it. Additionally, being prepared to cause death falls within their job description: while killing of other humans is generally forbidden by law, religion and, broadly speaking, morality, they are the official executioners of nations. Because their profession exposes them to moral dilemmas and mortality, soldiers, sponsored by the military institution, develop efficient

coping based on professionalism and bolstering and strengthening of central values of their job. This fits with the general strategic pattern of the institution's expectancies, and it justifies the reinforcement of chosen values in soldiers' minds. Indeed, this bolstering of values is a standard regulation for informational dissonance (see Burris et al., 1997; Festinger et al., 1956; Vaidis & Gosling, 2011). Consequently, mortality salience bolsters central values, but it also probably leads soldiers to engage in more general worldview defences. Many of these worldviews could be associated with their profession (i.e. promoting a secure world and protection). This general context supposes soldiers have strongly internalized values that are central to their self-concept. In accordance with CDT and MMM, these values should be very sensitive to inconsistency. Thus, we assume that perception of discrepancy between their values and their professional environment should provoke a disturbed state that requires regulation.

### **Regulation of Discrepancies in Values Involving the Institution**

Inconsistency amongst central values is supposed to readily trigger regulation processes (Kruglanski et al., 2018). In addition, important values are also resistant to change and thereby cannot be directly targeted by the regulation (Eisenstadt & Leippe, 2005; Simon et al., 1995; Vaidis & Bran, 2018). As "believers" cannot accept changing core beliefs (e.g., Batson, 1975; Burris et al., 1997), individuals with strong grounded values are more likely to reinforce these values (Festinger et al., 1956), by rejecting the external information (Batson, 1975; Bochner & Insko, 1966), to reorganize their knowledge (e.g., Leippe & Eisenstadt, 1994), or to denigrate another group (e.g., Cooper & Mackie, 1983). In soldiers' case, values are strong and can serve as resources to buffer threat. Amongst these values, the ones related to trust in peers are likely to be the strongest ones. One could thus assume this prevalence of trust in peers is a double-edged sword when the soldiers are confronted to a discrepancy between the military institution and these values.

As discussed previously, soldiers should be highly sensitive to inconsistency aiming their personal values. Thus, if there is a salient discrepancy in two clusters of cognitions, one involving

confronting professional values, soldiers should not endanger their perception of their self but rather should derogate the other cognitions. As derogating the other cognitions protects not only their perception of themselves, but also their worldview coherency, it is more likely in this situation. But what if the discrepancy involves trust in peers and trust in the institution? Because the group is central, individuals are likely to derogate the weaker source of trust, namely the military institution. Consequently, one could hypothesize that when the inconsistency is related to trust in peers and trust in the military institution, the more likely outcome is a reduction of confidence in the institution.

One could argue that other means can be employed to regulate this conflict. For instance, the individual could be inclined to reject the source of information generating discomfort instead of modifying core values. Several authors have argued that people are inclined to reject the source of information when it does not fit with their expectancies (Batson, 1975; Bochner & Insko, 1966; Vaidis & Gosling, 2011). Indeed, information suggesting high discrepancy in expectations is likely to be rejected (i.e., discredited). According to Bochner and Insko, information coming from a non-expert source will not modify the recipient's attitude but will be discredited. Similarly, for Batson, most believers will not consider disconfirmatory information to be true. This idea also fits with the general process of confirmation bias and selective exposure (e.g., Hart et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, these forms of regulation are unlikely in soldiers' case for two reasons. First, the discrepancy involves self-relevant values, reinforced by their training and experience. Confronting these values is similar to a direct threat and soldiers should react as if they were personally attacked, or as if their close relatives were threatened. In such a situation, the individuals could be inclined to react without fully processing the arguments of the message, as strong emotions are likely to alter information processing (e.g., Bodenhausen et al., 1994; Moons & Mackie, 2007; Rydell, et al., 2008). Second, some evidence could suggest that soldiers hold both positive and negative attitudes toward the military. In this case, Army hierarchical structure and soldiers' field experience should favour ambivalent attitudes toward the institution, which in turn

would facilitate its derogation. Finally, as previously hypothesized, even if formed through the prism of the institution, foundational aspects of their values should rely on trust in peers, not in the institution per se. Altogether, without other means offered by the situation, soldiers should be more likely to derogate their trust in the institution when it conflicts with their trust in their peers. This derogation is a source of decreased performance by the institution, as it could interfere with obedience to orders, and thus present a risk for the organization's strategy. Moreover, in regard to information warfare, this situation presents a potential breach likely to be used by opponents.

### **Discrepancy with the Institution: from inner conflicts to information warfare**

In the previous paragraphs, we explained how a salient discrepancy between values can disturb the value system of military personnel. Information stressing the discrepancy between core values concerning the institution, hierarchy members and soldiers could be involved in undermining trust. In the present section, we stress what could be the sources of discrepancies involving peers and the institution, and their implications for the organization. In the final part of this section, we discuss new strategies of information warfare that are now considered to be part of modern conflicts.

The institution is a moral entity that is primarily incarnated in the hierarchy. Members of the hierarchy are the frontline of the institution. A strong situation of discrepancy occurs when soldiers perceive a gap between their expectations of the hierarchy and its actual behaviour. For instance, soldiers can perceive that officers are distant from soldiers, not conscious of field reality, and even careless about soldiers' lives. Military personnel can believe that officers are focused on using soldiers' skills and lives to advance their career instead of serving superior values. Moreover, if considered to be very different and far from soldiers' reality, officers can be thought of as not as competent as they ought to be. More concretely, if soldiers face a situation where they judge an officer to be dishonest, they will experience expectancy violation. Because honesty is a central value, this will lead to derogation of the officer, undermining trust in the military institution. This

decreased trust can in turn lead to a decline in performance and, in the worst case, disobeying orders.

This situation is what we call here a *hierarchical split*, a circumstance in which the discrepancy involves the relationship between the management of the institution (i.e., officers), on one side, and enlisted personnel on the other side. A hierarchical split is a critical situation, because contrary to other situations, in this circumstance it is more difficult for soldiers to conjure up cognitive filters to ignore the discrepancy. When exposed to hierarchical split, people cannot ignore the information because, first, the information is relevant for them and required for adapted reactions in their environment. Second, when official, they cannot avoid or minimize the exposure to such information. The personnel are thus forced to face the gap between the professed values of the hierarchy and their actions, and could hardly avoid processing this source of discrepancy. Two main vectors of discrepancy with the institution are field experience and communication exposure through media.

## **Field Experience**

The experience of real situations in EO can be a strong generator of doubt. For instance, remembering the information they were given during training or conferences and realizing that it is intentionally not representative of what empirical experience reveals can be a strong cognitive dissonance trigger. Confrontation with death is obviously also a trigger of expectancy violation and a factor in intensification of reactions (Greenberg & Arndt, 2012; Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012).

When analysing the effects of an observed gap between training or briefings and reality, one symptom of doubt could be a search for information from peers regarding what was said in official briefings. People are inclined toward selective exposure to information, and when exposed to circumstances that do not fit with their conceptions of reality, they search for consistent information to bolster their initial commitment (D'Alessio & Allen, 2006; Fischer et al., 2011; Jonas et al., 2001). In soldiers' case, the result of this kind of search could simultaneously involve both a loss of

trust in hierarchy because they doubt previously provided information and an increase in trust in peers because they rely on them to found support.

The field experience can also be vicarious: the confrontation does not come from the individual's experience but from a peer's. It could even come from soldiers or people the individual does not know personally but perceived as reliable: social media for instance provide access to people sharing common values and similar professional backgrounds even if they are not physically known, nor verified profiles. So-called soldiers met on the Internet may thus irrationally be considered as relevant for official briefing checking.

## **Media and Information Warfare**

Information channels provide access to content from different parts of the world, and thus from different theatres of operation. Therefore, media, including social media, provide many opportunities to make salient a gap between everyday experience and what soldiers initially committed for. Smartphones and the Internet access makes available a large array of media anytime, anywhere. Moreover, media contents initially perceived as unreliable could be regarded more positively if recommended by a brother in arms or an appreciated contact (i.e. an evaluative conditioning; see De Houwer et al., 2001). For instance, social networks promote opinions and individuals through posts, comments, links, or activities with "likes," thumbs up, and sharing. Because algorithms rely on profiling, individuals are more likely to be exposed to information shared by individuals who are presumed to be similar to them.

Obviously, field experience and media exposure may work together. For instance, individuals could be exposed to discrepancies on social networks via reported peer experiences of hierarchical violations of central values. In this case, the experience is reported by a third party via social media. There is the rub: some media content could be designed for a specific goal, including to serve geopolitical strategies from other organizations or countries. These tactics are forms of information warfare.



Overall, information warfare relies on the use of information and communication technologies to take advantage of the opponents in a conflict. These tactics may seem old-fashioned in modern conflicts, but advances in computational science and Internet technologies suggest the likelihood of new developments and broader uses. In recent times, due to the blowup of new technologies, these operations have been included in some military strategies such as *New-Generation War* (NGW). This strategy has been developed by three Russian officers, Gareev (2016), Chekinov and Bogdanov (2011, 2013), and characterizes information as a main component of the current strategy for 21st century conflicts. In NGW, information-based subversive operations can be created to provoke different kinds of disturbances, including weakened state resilience and organizational processes. This kind of process has already been applied in several places, including the Ukrainian war since the blowup of the Donbass conflict and Crimea annexation in 2014. This kind of attack has been the objective of the *Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence* (Giles, 2015).

In light of NGW, the use of social media to disturb agents' efficiency and thus indirectly affect the efficiency of military institutions is very likely. Here lies a major development in modern influence techniques: unlike previous uses of information that could be perceived as influence attempts, the use of social media could be subtler because it gives the social media user the perception of control and freedom regarding exposure to information. Indeed, even if militaries are trained to be vigilant towards Internet, social media holds specific features that, associated with individual involvement, could reduce this vigilance. Indeed, individuals are likely to feel agency in their search for information when they use the Internet, and thus feel responsible for the information they are exposed to. When not perceived as an advertisement, information shared on the Internet will not be perceived as an influence attempt. In addition, as discussed previously, because the individual could feel a threat to the self, such information could be sufficient to trigger reactive behaviour that undermines trust in the military institution. In regard to the psychological models we

developed previously, it could be argued that these strategies could use soldiers' core values in order to modify their behaviour in the field and how they execute orders.

## **Overview of the Study**

We presented theoretical background pertaining to what could lead to military personnel disengagement. We discussed the potential critical consequences such as decreased trust and a global undermining of efficiency.

More specifically, in light of previous sections, we postulate that if soldiers' values are nested in a message, this content could reinforce these values and make them salient. When the message stresses discrepant information concerning peers and the Institution, this is likely to generate strong reactions because it violates the inner attitudes and expectancies of the individuals (Kruglanski et al., 2018; Vaidis & Gosling, 2011). Because the information is based on central values and stresses a pre-existing ambivalence toward the institution, it should be consistent with some existing priors and favour a confirmation bias. The soldiers could then be inclined to process the message, the arguments and the source less deeply. This failure to think critically about the message leaves them more vulnerable to an influence attempt. Thus, regardless of whether individuals have been trained to be cautious about the information source, the presence of such values overwhelms the usual caution and vigilance. Finally, because the values acquired through interaction with peers are highly resistant to change, they should guide regulation attempts (McGrath, 2017; Vaidis & Bran, 2018) and lead to reinforcement of values linked to the group and undermine trust in the institution. Consequently, endangerment or flouting of core values could push soldiers to bolster their trust in peers, even if that implies derogation and ultimately destabilization of the organization.

To evaluate the suggested processes, we discussed in the first part, we relied on qualitative and quantitative data obtained from individual interviews. These interviews were completed by a staged observation for a second set of participants. The interviews' purpose was to collect

confirmatory information concerning the soldiers' core values, to evaluate their trust in peers and the institution, and their relationship with media. A qualitative approach was chosen because of the specificity of the topic and because accessing honest responses requires developing a trusting relationship. Quantitative analyses were also performed to test some variables and hypotheses, especially concerning trust perception and values ranking. The staged observation, which was developed based on the outcome of the first wave of interviews, was designed to evaluate an important hypothesis in our model concerning soldiers' strong emotional reaction to discrepancy with their core values. This permitted us to assess the soldiers in an ecologically valid situation and to examine their processing of a message threatening their values.

## **Method**

### **Population and Sample**

Thirty-eight interviews with active duty male soldiers<sup>1</sup> were conducted. With permission from their commanding officers, interviewees volunteered and were assured complete anonymity. They all belonged to the same type of units of highly experienced soldiers regularly exposed to extreme situations and sensitive operations. This sample was surveyed on two occasions, with 17 interviewees in the first interview and 21 in the second one. All the participants in the second interview participated in the staged observation. The interviews were audio recorded with participants' full agreement, and they were assured that the recordings would be destroyed, and the data would be only used for scientific purposes. The interviews were conducted by a female investigator, one of the authors. They took place in different military bases over several consecutive days. The investigator had time to gain the trust of the units; moreover, she was trained and experienced in EO, which allowed her to engage in ice-breaking. The interviews lasted between about 45 minutes and two hours. Although introduced to them by their commanding officer, the interviewer had no legitimate power over the participants. The quite long length of the interviews indicates the level of comfort and rapport the interviewer developed with the participants.

Most of the interviewees had been deployed in a war zone (from 4 to 96 months; median of 18.5 months); only three men were not and were excluded from analyses related to EO experience. Participants were between 23 and 45 years old (median age of 30 years old).

### **Content of interviews and identified variables**

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted so as to grasp the essence of the interviewees' thinking and experiences without influencing the answers. The discussions also contained a series of recurring topics focused on the variables studied such as trust in peers, the military institution, and the media. On these items, participants were invited to assess their trust on a scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 5 (absolute trust). Subsequently, they were asked to explain the nature of this trust, eventually giving examples to refine their declarations.

The interviews also assessed the participants' values, commitment, past behaviours and their professional project. Participants were asked to discuss which values they perceived as the most important both in their job and personal lives. Concerning their enlistment, they were questioned regarding their initial motivations and whether they had ever considered leaving the Army. If they had, they were encouraged to explain the reasons why they considered leaving the military and why they did not act on it. Finally, they were asked whether they had had doubts—or not—about orders they had been given, and whether they had ever thought about disobeying them or had actually done so.

### **Staged observation part**

A key hypothesis of the model is that highly trained military personnel could be inclined to overreact to information threatening their values. More specifically, it was hypothesized that mobilizing central values through the media should provoke a negative reaction and mistrust in soldiers' hierarchy, even if the "information" was not reliable. Because one could consider this hypothesis bold and because it could have crucial implications for the military institution,

confrontation was made through a staged observation. During the interviews, after asking about their trust or mistrust in media and social networks and the reasons for it, and after discussing the training by the institution regarding the importance of regarding information shared on social networks with healthy scepticism, a screenshot of a fake Facebook page was presented to the participants in the second set of interviews. We relied on the initial interviews to create the informational content. The sample consisted of all 21 participants in the second interview.

The material was created to stress some core values and confront participants with an institutional reaction discrepant from the one they expected. More specifically, it emphasized *Professionalism* (i.e., proper equipment is a necessity to achieve mission) and made available in memory past experiences (i.e., most soldiers dealt at some point with improper equipment). The second part of the message highlights the alleged institutional reaction that sanctioned a soldier for telling the truth (*Justice* and *Honesty* values).

This fake message was an alleged publication from a group of “friends” of a unit containing a reshare of recruiting advertisement for the Army showing bright new materials. The sharing was adjunct with a cynical comment: “*Nice advertising; too bad that the ‘whistle blower’ about the current state of equipment in EO is now facing sanctions from his commanding officers.*” If the picture used was an excerpt from recruitment material, it clearly gave the appearance that it had been reshared by a self-declared group of friends. These kinds of groups are unofficial, and the message was clearly not official in either its tone or meaning. Moreover, in the current case, saying that material in the field is not roadworthy is quite common and happens every day without implying sanctions, which makes the statement unrealistic. The goal was to see if they doubted the truthfulness of the comment and the source, and if this piece of information provoked a reaction towards the institution even if the content was not realistic.

## Interview Results

Qualitative data were analysed with *Nvivo 12.3.0*. Comments concerning trust in peers and in the institution were submitted to 5 independent judges blind to the situations. Judges, who did not know participants' reported ratings of trust, scored participants' comments regarding trust toward peers and institution (each on the same scale from 0 to 5). These evaluations presented good reliability (Standardized Cronbach's  $\alpha_{\text{peer}} = .85$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{institution}} = .87$ ) and were averaged to compose two indexes.

## Values and Self Perception

Participants were asked to describe the most important values in their job and personal life. Most of them (80%,  $n = 30$ ) said they were unable to dissociate their personal and professional values: they declared these values were all part of their personality. The most reported values were largely consistent amongst the sample. *Cohesion* took the first place (73%) followed by *Justice/Honesty* in second (58%). *Merit/Professionalism* came in at third place (37%), then *patriotism and sense of sacrifice* were next (26%). Other values such as *love of effort, loyalty, humility, bravery* were far from this top rating with less than a quarter citing them.

Comparing the ranking of values based on soldiers' declarations, and according to the number of sentences referring to these same values, it appears that the declared ranking is not exactly identical with the amount of time spent talking about them; it seems that if they made a ranking, some are more important to them, at least important enough to talk more about them. Nevertheless, no matter the ranking methodology (ratings or numbers of quotes), *Cohesion* is always the top-ranked value, followed by *Justice/honesty*. These results support the assumption that professional and personal values are merged. This outcome fits with the idea that professional values are relevant to the self and involve the individual's self-definition.

## Trusts toward peers and Institution

During the interviews, soldiers were asked about trust. They were asked to assess their trust in several actors in their organization, mainly their group and the military the military institution. Then, they were asked to discuss the nature of this trust. Judges evaluated the transcriptions of soldiers' declarations of this part.

In accordance with the literature, participants expressed more confidence in their peers ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = .67$ ; 95% CI [4.14; 4.57]) than in the institution ( $2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ; 95% CI [2.44; 3.12]). This difference is statistically significant (paired t-test:  $t(37) = 8.12$ ,  $ps < .01$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.67$ ). Trust in peers was very high, with a 1<sup>st</sup> quartile at 4 (on 5). The mode was 5 (42%,  $n = 16$ ). Results for the judges' evaluation were similar to those for the self-reports ( $M_{peers} = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ; 95% CI [3.89, 4.35];  $M_{institution} = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ; 95% CI [2.06, 2.60]). Judges' evaluation of participants' trust toward their group was significantly higher than for the institution (paired t-test:  $t(37) = 11.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = 3.72$ ). The correlation between the judges' evaluations and the self-reported scores was high (respectively,  $r_{peers} = .50$ ;  $r_{institution} = .69$ ; all  $ps < .01$ ). Comparisons of the self-report and judge evaluations were performed and revealed a significant trend for self-report scores to be higher for peers ( $M = +0.24$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.46];  $t(37) = 2.13$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $d = .70$ ) and institution ( $M = +0.44$ , 95% CI [0.19, 0.69];  $t(37) = 3.5$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = 1.15$ ).

Regarding the distribution of scores, compared to trust in peers, trust in institution is low both for the self-reports ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ) and according to judges ( $Mdn = 2.35$ ). In conclusion, the reported evaluations seem rather honest considering the likely social desirability of the answers. The upward trend concerning institution could be considered as fitting with respect due to hierarchy learnt in training. The examination of the quotes suggests an ambivalence toward the institution: all interviewees made some statement reflecting a lack of confidence, as expressed in follow-up quotes.

## **Ambivalence and Reason of Mistrust**

Complementary analyses were performed to further examine the nature of and the reason for the mistrust. For participants reporting scores below the midpoint of the scale (less than 3.00,  $n = 14$ ), the explanations were linked with the declared most important values. Common reasons for mistrust were lack of sincerity of the hierarchy and the fact it was perceived as distant (e.g., *“Even if they try to understand us, they can’t because they are too different from us”*). Similarly, leaders are perceived as not aware of EO reality and soldiers’ life. A participant explained: *“They are cut off from reality.”* Another declared he doubted the information chain and even the interest of leaders, saying that *“I sometimes wonder if all the reports of our experience are really considered when I see what we are asked to do. And sometimes we wonder if they take into account the information they get from EO. Even sometimes I have the impression, I wonder ... do they read them?”*. Another one explained: *“it is not because they are badly informed that they are disconnected... I think they.... [Silence]. Yes that's it, they think at their level and not for us... I'm not in their heads but that's what I feel. They give orders like that and don't think about the impact for us.”*

Other reasons mentioned for mistrust are lack of professionalism, bravery and honesty. One declared that *“they became fearful chickens.”* Another stated: *“Our leaders are afraid to get involved, to take responsibility.”* Others explained that they have doubts concerning the intellectual honesty of some institutional hierarchy members, or doubts about the relevance of their choices: *“They try but... [Silence]. It is just for the show. They try because they are forced to”*. Always on *honesty*, some deplored the institution’s official communication they have to be part of, and explained *“this spread an image that is a little... [hesitation] ...which is false [silence] which is artificial. And I hate that. We should never be forced to lie [pause] particularly on our jobs”*. One recurrent reported reason for mistrust was that the institution does not really care about them, because the hierarchy is more interested in operational success. Participants reported not being highly regarded, declaring *“for them, we are just a number in an Excel page”*. They also suggested



that officers are more interested in their own career, saying “*leaders are more career-minded than able to be brave and take risks to help us.*”

On these bases, mistrust appeared to be a vicious circle. Soldiers felt they are not trusted (and considered) by their leaders and as a mirror effect, they lose their trust in their institution, as explained by one interviewee “*The problem is that our leaders do not trust us any more, they have less confidence in subordinates, and not only the big bosses.*” Consequently, some said that they question orders. Basically, the major reasons for the mistrust are directly linked with the core values discussed previously, namely *Cohesion, Honesty/Justice, and Merit/Professionalism.*

To investigate the origin of trust and mistrust, quantitative exploratory analyses were performed. The different trust indexes were regressed on soldiers’ age, years of engagement and time past on EO. In accordance with the previous paragraphs, only the time in EO is negatively correlated with trust in institution ( $r = -.43, p < .01$ ), while in the same time, it tends to be positively correlated with trust in peers ( $r = .28, p = .08$ ) (see Figure 1). These two trust indexes were not correlated ( $r = .06, ns$ ).

In light of these elements, it appears that most participants do not doubt the military values they reported at the beginning of the interview. But these same values are also the root of their decreased trust in the institution. For the enlisted, it appears unacceptable to observe the non-application of these values and to catch their institution red-handed. We assume values importance increases with EO experience, that can give a beginning of explanation to the above chart. Their experience in extreme situations makes them the most suitable persons to judge the good application of these values, values that are the core of military identity.

Finally, in this part of the interview, they were asked about doubts they felt concerning orders. Participants with EO experience ( $n = 35$ ) were asked if they ever had doubts about the reason why they were deployed, and secondly, if they had doubts about the manner in which they were asked to act. They reported having no doubt on the *Why*. In sum, they approve and accept the general idea of being the “good guys” fighting the “bad guys.” But they were more dubious

considering the reasons motivating their deployment, explaining that “*sometimes we know that we are not sent into a combat zone just to protect people and save lives but because there are other, less respectable interests.*” When addressing the subject of agreement with the *How*, reactions were clear: 80% of this sample confessed that they already experienced doubts. These doubts were important enough that they reported they had already “adapted” an order in accordance with what they thought was really right for the situation. Under cover of anonymity, some said that they had already disobeyed a direct order (e.g., “missing” a shot). This kind of disobedience could have a deleterious impact on operation success and thus presents a risk for the institution’s strategy. For instance, the refusal to shoot a target could have deadly consequences if the target is part of a terrorist headquarters planning a terror attack aimed at civilians. Finally, doubts concerning the institution could have secondary serious consequences, as it is likely to promote disengagement, which is particularly costly for the organization. In the present sample, 83% had already considered a career change.

## **Use of and Confidence in Media**

We hypothesized that external information such as media and social media could influence trust in institution or peers. Participants were asked about their use of and confidence in media. They were also asked if they had been warned about Internet risks, and information manipulation, such as giving information inadvertently to adversaries through social network publications (i.e., localization of units). Considering the average age of the subjects, given that young people are known for their hyperconnectivity (Deloitte, 2017), special attention was paid to Internet use.

Concerning soldiers with EO experience, they mostly used mainstream TV—including web TV—blogs and broadcast platforms such as *YouTube*, to get information, no matter the topic. They mainly (84%) reported having a *Facebook* profile but said they were not using it to inform themselves, explaining that they doubt the data’s reliability. Concerning *YouTube*, they all declared that they were regular users, except two who said they did not use *YouTube*.

When asked about the confidence they accord to the different media, as expected considering the training made by their institution, they gave the lowest score for social networks. On a scale from 0 to 5, the highest scores for reported trust are for alternative media (e.g., blogs) ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ), broadcast platforms (e.g., *YouTube*) ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), then mainstream media (e.g., major TV channels and daily newspapers) ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) and finally, social networks (e.g., *Facebook*) ( $M = 1.84$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). Social network was the only one to be statistically differentiated from the others (paired  $t$ -test:  $t_s > 3.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $d > 1.15$ ). Results are globally low; the best rating was accorded to alternative media. Paradoxically, even if they said they did not trust social media, 84% referred to it in the interview as an argument to convince, using sentences such as “*that’s true, just have a look on Facebook if you don’t believe me!*”

Time spent on the Internet is not statistically linked to any other variable (all  $r_s < |.30|$ ), but tended to be correlated with trust in peers ( $r = -.30$ ,  $p = .08$ ). Finally, whatever the source, 79% said they were more confident in information coming from peers than from the institution, and 89% reported clicking on pop-ups and cyberbait when web surfing.

To assess their reactivity to topics, participants were asked to report the last information watched or read in the media that provoked a reaction, from laughter to anger, no matter the subject, with a preference for information not linked with their profession. The huge majority of reported information provoking negative reactions was linked to information inconsistent with their core values. *Individualism* (i.e., an antagonist to *cohesion*) caused reaction like “*they do not care about the others, like WE do in our jobs*”. Other reactions were linked to unfair criticism of the military from media and/or civilians. For instance, talking about a case of child murder, a participant said that journalists like to stress that a suspect was military personnel: “*This guy [the child murderer], journalists want to show that HE IS a soldier because he is a serial killer, even though he was fired from the Army. It is very negative and unfair for us who are fighting to protect people.*” Thus, here the lack of *honesty* and *justice* are triggers. The organization’s lack of courage was also mentioned,

as well as the lack of patriotism and lack of merit of some people in charge. On that topic, one explained: *“I don’t understand why our officers accept playing a part in that sick game, this cowardly game.”*

A large majority of participants (85%) reported questioning official information - particularly using alternative media and broadcast platforms- sometimes bypassing their hierarchy. Personal networks composed of other soldiers they personally knew were used as well as networks of people they know only through acquaintances. They argued that people expressing themselves on broadcast platforms had nothing to gain; the apparent altruism of the action was thought of as a reliability guarantee. In their search for information, it appears they are both looking for elements “consistent” with their cognitions and for confirmatory elements.

### **Awareness Training and Perception of Being a Target**

Soldiers are supposed to receive specific training when deployed on EO about the use of Internet and social network in particular; 95% of the participants reported having performed such training. Near the end of the interview, they were asked if they thought that they could be a target for Internet information operations intended to influence their behaviour. The interviewer had to re-explain the question regularly because participants generally understood that the aim would be to obtain information from them. Once this point was made clear, only 5% say that they could be a target of influence; 24% said that they could probably be a target but it would not be efficient because they believed they would resist the influence attempt. Finally, the majority (71%) said that they could not be a target and that if this occurred it would not work on them. When they were asked the reasons for their certainty, some did not believe that these operations were achievable, while others said that they would obviously see the attempt at influence. Another reason evoked was they are too sure of themselves and of their values to be subject to influence by these kinds of operations.

## **Staged observation on Core Values targeting**

In order to test the strength of the model whereby the entrenchment of the values allows triggering of an expectancy violation, we presented participants with a contrived information situation. This took place at the end of the interview, after all the previous topics were discussed.

Participants were invited to give their opinion of a screenshot of a fake Facebook page. As explained in the Method section, this screenshot was specifically created to target *Professionalism* and *Honesty/justice* values. Additionally, the interviewer explained that she did not check the source or reliability of this comment. She also explained that she just wanted to get their perceptions and feelings concerning this page.

### **Reactions to the provoked situation**

On the 21 participants, only one reserved his judgment concerning the screenshot. All the others (95%) directly reacted to it, sometimes with strong emotional reactions. The majority (57%) expressed *disgust* or *deception*. One stated: “*they don’t realize, and when something is beyond them like that, that’s their way to react... anyway they don’t care about us at all...*” One declared: “*it is maybe the only way we have to make them change, because they are more interested in their face-saving face and image than in the real problems. They are more preoccupied by the form than by the content.*” About 33% of the sample who declared they do not trust hierarchy also expressed a reaction close to *anger*, such as one explaining this was a shame that this situation still happens but that this was particularly indicative of the way the Institution treats them daily. Another explicitly said: “*I am really angry at them!*”

None expressed clear doubt about the validity of the source, although two (10%) declared that it was exactly the reason why they did not want to look at social networks, because this kind of information has an effect on their morale and on their faith in their institution. For them, it did not matter if it was true or not, because in their opinion, it *could* be true. The others declared that they were not surprised. One explained that “*he can only be right, that guy, frankly*”; and another said

that “*It is true obviously, and yes, things have to be said!*” Another concluded with: “*I am not surprised of that content [...] They don’t realize the consequences for us—and they don’t care—here we go! But they cannot fight against the freedom of expression of that guy who posted that.*”

When the interviewer specifically asked if they were not surprised that a man was sanctioned just for a statement, they were mostly not (90%). One explained: “*We know the system, you know what we say, ‘never surprised, always f\*\*\*\*\*’*”; another said: “*I could have been surprised in the past, but not any more given my experience.*” They globally did question the veracity of the information. In their argumentation, they referred to their own vision of what the military institution should be like—namely based on the values they care for—and on their own experience or peers’ experiences.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this research was to address the likely consequences of salient discrepancies between soldiers’ core values. The inconsistency models we rely on suggested consequences for the soldiers that could promote risks for the organization. Theoretically, we suggested that the soldiers’ embedded values presented a risk for the organization when they were exposed to information that highlights a conflict between their peers’ values and their institution’s values. We suggested that because institutional trust has already been undermined, the expected regulation should increase the likelihood of mistrust toward their Institution and disobedience, and thus potentially threaten the organisation’s performance.

In accordance with the literature, interviews confirmed participants’ strong attachment to internalized values based on *Cohesion, Justice/Honesty, and Merit/Professionalism*. We provided support for the idea that the development and deepening of soldiers’ values relies on the experience acquired through EO and that paradoxically, if the institution was the former promoter of the said values, it could be the object of mistrust. Indeed, we showed that trust toward peers was very strong, while trust for the institution is somewhat ambivalent. Lastly, the role of media was

examined, and we stressed their use and underestimation of the extent to which they are a possible source of information. Ultimately, we obtained support from the interviews for the notion that mistrust toward the institution is likely to present a risk for the organization, given that a large portion of the sample of well-trained soldiers already indirectly questioned orders and disobeyed.

### **Information Warfare and the Destabilization of the Organization**

Finally, in accordance with NGW, and most generally with the rise of information warfare in modern conflicts, a specific goal of this study was to examine if an influence-based operation through the internet could overwhelm the training received concerning Internet use and information manipulation, and provoke mistrust in the institution. In light of the results, we think we provided some evidence in support of this assumption.

More specifically, we presented participants with fake information that promoted a hierarchical split. It was designed to stress *professionalism* and *rigor* values and it made salient an inconsistency regarding *Justice* and *Honesty* values. We believe the situation was unfavourable for obtaining strong effects, as the previous interview specifically stresses the importance of media and of awareness training about countering influence attempts, and the interviewer explained that the information was not fact-checked. However, the results are unequivocal, with only one interviewee in our sample expressing suspicion, and strong emotional reactions from the overwhelming majority. The present observations showed strong reactions linked to mistrust. It thus appears that these kinds of operations are realistic and can obtain results in accordance with our models.

The literature underlines the essential role of trust in military teams (e.g., Etzioni, 1961; Mullen & Copper, 1994), and while the previous interviews already stressed an existing ambivalence toward the Institution, one could easily imagine that this sort of psyops operation would promote disobedience of orders, or at least decreased efficiency in order execution. The ultimate consequence is a destabilization of the organisation and decreased performance. For the Army, the potential consequences may potentially jeopardize strategic goals such as the efficiency of external operations and internal security.

## **Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

To our knowledge, the current study was the first to propose an explanation and conduct a controlled observation to test these assumptions. However, some limitations of the present research need to be discussed. We here consider methodological improvements in future research that could improve both internal and external validity.

First, while the interview sample size was respectable for this population, the correlational approach and the staged observation merits a larger sample. Additionally, while the current study has ecological validity, the evaluation of such an important hypothesis should be subject to an experimental design with a control group and extensive measures. Although this might result in reduced ecological validity, internal validity would be enhanced.

Second, one could question whether the current results are generalizable to all the corps and to all the countries. Our entire sample came from the Army. Is the structure of values the same in the Navy or Air Force? Moreover, while the participants had various sociological profiles with different experiences, ages and social backgrounds, they all held the same value structures and had a similar reaction to it being threatened. Thus, if they are constrained by the same elements (i.e., trust in peers, potential hierarchical split), they are likely to experience the same consequences. On the other hand, it is plausible that there could exist significant variability internationally and across cultures in the values that are held and their importance. Nonetheless, because we rely on a low-level psychological process and because in many cases, the organisation's efficiency is based on the universal adherence to values including trust in peers, we could expect that the process is fundamentally the same, with minor variations in its regulation.

Altogether, the current methodology could be refined. However, according to the literature and in the specific context of military personnel, the validity of this assumption is very likely. In addition, the sensitivity of this topic, which involves national security, suggests that these findings should be taken very seriously. The present study brings to light a possible way for exogenous influence attempts to destabilize an organization which is based on psychological processes. We



consider this to be a critical potential security breach, and we call for additional research that complements the present study. Considering the likelihood of the underlying process and the importance of the topic for national security strategies, we conclude the paper with some suggestions for limiting the risks for the organization and protecting it from influence operations.

## **Challenge for National Security**

In our study, we relied on some media contents that were used for a specific goal. Computer science is already working on software to model individual behaviour and factors that influence it. Current war strategies suggest using the internet to increase behavioural influence. One has to expect an increase of influence strategies by foreign powers attempting to destabilize national institutions in the coming years. From the present perspective, influence operations centred on attempts to influence central values could be implemented on a massive scale, with critical consequences for organizations. Consequently, developing general models to limit, control and prevent these risks is essential for national security.

A recent model coming from computer science deals with organizational destabilization. The *Predictability Susceptibility Awareness* model (PSA; Santos, 2017) suggests that three factors explain the behaviour of an insider, someone who may disrupt the organization due to an external influence. The psychological models we developed in this paper could contribute to understanding the underlying process and refine understanding of the link between the identified variables. More specifically, internalized professional values could reinforce Predictability and Susceptibility, and decrease Awareness. Both fields would benefit from collaboration to improve their models.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this paper, we stressed the importance of values in military personnel. From promoted values to internalized values, we showed that they are a central factor in soldiers' trust that plays a central role in their personal development as well as in their daily job. However, these

values are also the cause of possible security breaches which can be used by likely malevolent individuals or enemies. When a discrepancy is made salient between values promoted by the institution, the latter can suffer from mistrust which could have dramatic consequences for the obedience of agents. This is especially relevant with the rise of information war methods based on new technologies.

We believe that the aforementioned reduction in trust represents a real risk for the organization (i.e., to mission success and accomplishment and personnel security). We thus recommend that the institution address this important issue for national security. Finally, one has to admit that the values package including *Trust*, *Respect* and *Honesty* is a blessing and a curse for the Army. On the one hand, they are the motivation for soldiers to fulfil their duty, bolstering their morale on the field and their pride in being part of the family. In several weeks of training, individuals integrate values which are becoming central for them and hold the power to accompany them for their whole life. But, on the other hand, these values-based models require great responsibility, as the institution must be able to exemplify them every day. Therefore, if possible hypocrisy from the institution is pointed out, these same values become the breach through which adversaries can instil doubt which could shake the whole edifice.

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## Figure Caption

*Figure 1.* Trust in peers (in dark) and in military institution (in light) as function of months spent in External Operations. The dark dots and the light cross represent the associated observations. The dotted lines represent 95% CI.

## **Annexe 1- Interviews grid (English version)**

### ***Themes addressed during the interviews (interviews grid)***

#### Theme addressed:

- Participants position (age, rank, specialty, time spend in external operation [EO], time commitment, wounds, family background, professional background;
- Reason of commitment, perception of this reason;
- Nature of trust /distrust in their peers. Trust evolution in time, explanation of the causes of this evolution;
- Questions on values. Are professional values different from personal values? Utility? Reasons of their trust in these values;
- Nature of the trust/mistrust in the institution. Evolution of this trust over time, development of elements at the origin of this evolution, what it is built on, etc. Link with values;
- Nature of the trust/mistrust in the government. Evolution of this trust over time, development of elements at the origin of this evolution, what it is built on, etc. Links with values;
- Reasons of trust/mistrust in the different media d (mainstream, alternatives, social networks, broadcast) media. Evolution of this trust over time, development of elements at the origin of this evolution, what it is built on, etc. Link with values;
- Nature of the information search (what goals, what expectation, which research methods the subjects used);
- Simulation of influence through « information » or content;
- What do they think about recommitment? What do they think concerning their initial commitment choice (satisfaction regret), reason for these feelings. Which element may change their vision of a recommitment (good or bad influence);
- Last information or contents provoking a reaction (positive or negative) and why;
- Perception of being an informational target and reason for the answer.

#### Structured topics

- Can you rate your confidence in your group on a scale of 0 to 5? (0 corresponding to no confidence and 5 corresponding to absolute confidence);
- Can you rate your confidence in your institution, the Army, on a scale of 0 to 5? (0 corresponding to no confidence and 5 corresponding to absolute confidence);
- Can you rate your confidence in government on a scale of 0 to 5? (0 corresponding to no confidence and 5 corresponding to absolute confidence);
- Can you rate your confidence in mainstream media on a scale of 0 to 5? (0 corresponding to no confidence and 5 corresponding to absolute confidence);
- Can you rate your confidence in alternative media on a scale of 0 to 5? (0 corresponding to no confidence and 5 corresponding to absolute confidence);
- Can you rate your confidence in social networks on a scale of 0 to 5? (0 corresponding to no confidence and 5 corresponding to absolute confidence);
- Has your perception or your point of view on the institution been modified by elements that you would have read or heard? If yes, which ones (if you remember);
- How much time do you spend on the Internet per day?

## Annexe 1 bis (version française)

### *Axes abordés dans les entretiens (grille d'entretien)*

#### Axes abordés :

- Positionnement des sujets (âge, grade, spécialité, temps passé en opération extérieure [OPEX], temps d'engagement, blessures, situation familiale, background professionnel) ;
- Raison de l'engagement, perception de celui-ci ;
- Nature de la confiance/défiance dans le groupe. Évolution de la confiance dans le temps, développement de raisons à l'origine de cette évolution ;
- Question sur les valeurs. Valeurs professionnelles sont-elles différentes des valeurs personnelles ? Utilité ? Raison de la foi en ces valeurs ;
- Nature de la confiance/défiance dans l'institution. Évolution de la confiance dans le temps, développement de raisons à l'origine de cette évolution, sur quoi repose-t-elle, etc. Lien avec les valeurs.
- Nature de la confiance/défiance dans le gouvernement. Évolution de la confiance dans le temps, développement de raisons à l'origine de cette évolution, lien avec les valeurs ;
- Raison de la confiance/défiance dans les différents médias (mainstream, alternatifs, réseaux sociaux, broadcast) médias. Évolution de la confiance dans le temps, développement de raisons à l'origine de cette évolution, lien avec les valeurs ;
- Nature de la recherche dans les informations (quels objectifs, quelles attentes, quelles méthodes de recherche mobilisées par les sujets) ;
- Mise en situation d'influence par l'intermédiaire d'« informations » ou de contenus ;
- Position face à un réengagement. Position face au choix initial de carrière (satisfaction regret), raison de ce sentiment. Quels éléments pourraient modifier cette perception (en bien ou en mal) ;
- Dernières informations ou contenus ayant provoqué une réaction (positive et négatives) et pourquoi ;
- Perception d'être une cible, et raisons de la réponse.

#### Questions dirigées

- Comment noteriez-vous votre confiance dans votre groupe sur une échelle de 0 à 5 ? (0 correspondant à aucune confiance et 5 à une confiance absolue) ;
- Comment noteriez-vous votre confiance dans votre institution, l'Armée, sur une échelle de 0 à 5 ? (0 correspondant à aucune confiance et 5 à une confiance absolue) ;
- Comment noteriez-vous votre confiance dans le gouvernement sur une échelle de 0 à 5 ? (0 correspondant à aucune confiance et 5 à une confiance absolue) ;
- Comment noteriez-vous votre confiance dans les média mainstream sur une échelle de 0 à 5 ? (0 correspondant à aucune confiance et 5 à une confiance absolue) ;
- Comment noteriez-vous votre confiance dans les médias alternatifs sur une échelle de 0 à 5 ? (0 correspondant à aucune confiance et 5 à une confiance absolue) ;
- Comment noteriez-vous votre confiance dans les réseaux sociaux sur une échelle de 0 à 5 ? (0 correspondant à aucune confiance et 5 à une confiance absolue) ;
- Votre perception ou votre point de vue sur l'institution a-t-il été modifié par des éléments que vous auriez lu ou entendu ? Si oui lesquels, si vous vous en souvenez ? ;
- Combien de temps passez-vous sur Internet par jour ?.

## Footnotes

1. We did not specifically want to assess only men but the sample we had access to was only composed of men. This also fits with the current general population of the armies of the surveyed countries, which are largely composed of men. Only about 13.2% of French enlisted personnel are women (Ministère des Armées, 2017), 14.5% in the US Army (Barry, 2013), and 10.3% in the UK (Ministry of Defence, 2017).
2. There was no selection in the participants. This number is due to the fact that we decided to set the staged observation only after a first set of interviews to bolster the examination of our model, and because it required special agreements from the general staff. All the soldiers of the second set of interviews participated in the study.

