

# Social Integration of Millennial Generation in the Lithuanian Armed Forces - What Cultural Challenges are Waiting for Organization to Retain Individuals in the Military Service?

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## Abstract

Millennials currently are one of the largest members of the age cohorts performing military service among the world armies, also in the armed forces of Lithuania. The expectations of Millennials individuals are far more individualistic compared to previous generations: generation X, baby boomers. Researches show that millennials more often quit their jobs if the content of jobs do not meet their individual expectations. The vast majority of early military retirees in the Lithuanian armed forces belong to the category of junior officers (senior lieutenants and captains). The aim of this research is to reveal the value features of the social integration of the individuals of the millennium generation (officers, non-commissioned officers) serving in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The research is done by qualitative research method using a semistructural interview approach- a total of 22 informants were interviewed. The study shows that these sociocultural aspects are condition of social inclusion in the organization (or alienation): the importance of self-realization (more important than career) versus unfulfilled expectations in military service, individual expression versus restriction of individual expression, the importance of favorable conditions to be creative versus meaningless content of the service. This study shows what socio-cultural challenges are relevant when talking about the integration of people today in the Lithuanian Armed Forces and that the socio-cultural content of military service will be increasingly significant and relevant in the future.

**KEY WORDS:** *Millennials, structuration theory, military sociology, social integration, Lithuanian armed forces.*

## 1. Introduction

Social sciences and demographics define the age cohort of millennials with certain characteristics of cultural value specific to this age group [2]. Millennials are usually considered as individuals born in the 1980s. - 2000 [3]. Millennium representatives are currently one of the largest age cohorts in the world performing military service in world armies [2]. To understand the problems of integrating young people, it is necessary to emphasize the institutional structure of the military organization. The institutional side of the organization is defined by Charles Moskos in the famous model as a cultural set of values of a military organization that prioritizes the collective good (the state and its security) over the individual [8]. Military service requires much greater involvement and dedication from the individual compared to the civilian professions. This is the side of the organization that sociology classics refer to the totality or greedness of the organization toward the individuals [17], [16].

The problem emerges in retaining the millennial generation in the military service. Research confirms that millennials in the labor market find it much easier to change jobs if they do not meet their individual expectations [7]. These tendencies are also met in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Each year, a similar number of military officers finish their military service before time (not serving until retirement pension) and choose civilian professions. 64 officers, 2018 - 53 officers, 2019- 44 officers, 2020- 31 officers, 2021. - 34 officers (data of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, 2022). The vast majority of early retirements belong to the category of junior officers (senior lieutenants, captains). The generation of millennials serving in the army, its value spectrum experiences a certain confrontation against the institutional-collective values of the military organization. What value-cultural conflicts arise trying to socially integrate the generation of millennial individuals in the Lithuanian Armed Forces?

**The aim of this article** is to reveal the cultural and value features of millennials (officers, noncommissioned officers) social integration in military service in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The design of the article is based on the theoretical and empirical parts, composed of unique antagonistic meanings of social integration, presenting integrative

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meanings and disintegrating meanings. Such a design allows for a more accurate picture of social integration - not only integrating but also alienating.

**Literature.** The social integration of the millennials generation soldiers mostly has been studied by US researchers. In *The Millennial Generation and National Defense: Attitudes of Future Military and Civilian Leaders* [3], *Leading across Generations* [2] is a broadly defined concept of millennial. These works define the value, characteristics of millennials and what were the cultural reasons of the formation. The works are valuable because the characteristics of the millennial generation are compared with previous generations of age cohorts (Generation X, Baby Boomers) [2].

Swedish researchers [10] in the study *Work-life balance among newly plying officials: A qualitative study* reveal the difficulties that millennials in Swedish armed forces face combining their private lives (leisure, family life) with military service. The Dutch, Indian researchers in their studies *Cultural Differences on Employee-Manager Relationships and Employee Attitudes and Behavior* [15], *Development and retention of Generation Y employees: a conceptual framework* [7] reveal the cultural needs of the millennial generation in their work environment, higher expectations for colleagues and employers (seeking to maintain millennials, it is expected cultural similarity between the employer and the employee in the workplace), the courage to change jobs if personal expectations are not met.

## 2. Millennials culture and social integration

Individualism (*generation „Me“*) is named as one of the essential features of millennials. Millennials are far more individualistic compared to previous generations: generation X, the baby boomer generation [2]. Individualism is a certain component of human identity, it fundamentally leads to the formation of new roles, the perception of oneself as a more empowering, more reflective individual, more self-centered. As a result, millennials believe that they can become 'super stars', deserve national or even international attention [2]. Individualism manifests in various areas of life: for example, the implementation of personal, work goals (result-oriented), family experiences (emphasizing personal experiences, for example, strong and good relationships with children) [2]. Millennial activities are focused on personal achievements: they are striving for high results in work, personal life. Another important aspect is that the millennial generation has an exceptional desire for learning and development [7]. According to authors [7], this high expectation determines the ambitions of millennials in their work environment: the pursuit of rapid success, self-seeking, personal growth, job instability (individuals becoming much more unstable, changing job positions, "self-seeking").

Giddens structuration theory is used to explore various aspects of both social integration and social inclusion in organizations [6], [9], [14]. Why does the culture of millennial age cohort become so relevant within the framework of Anthony Giddens structuration theory? In this study, the millennial culture is perceived as a set of *rules* and *resources* whose *production* in social interaction (military service) determines their potential integration [4]. Classical authors like Marx and Elias perceive social integration through essentially related antagonistic perspectives [13]. Marxist tradition of meanings in groups of *solidarity* and *alienation* [13]. Elias through *involvement* and *detachment* [1]. In structuration theory, the reproduction of a social action by producing or reproducing it in social interaction resonates in two ways: receiving *support* (mediation) or provoking a *conflict* [6]. Depending on whether you can or cannot produce social systems.

Structuration theory, due to its ontological approach (*structural duality*), is one of the most appropriate theoretical bases for interpreting organizational contexts. The individual appears as the smallest unit for interpreting social change, a *reflexive project* (this concept is the main in structuration theory that raises new meanings in the self-enabling and revisable individual narrative) [5]. In that sense, social integration becomes closely related with individual life narrative, which poses all the aspects of *agency*: active, self-critical responses to social environment [5]. Interpretation of the relationship between the individual and the structure becomes essential in research for causal connections in the interpretation of social phenomena. According to Giddens, the central concern of structuration theory is organizational change in time and space [11]. The basis of structuration theory is the concept of *structural duality*. Structural duality is a conceptual approach that allows one to reconcile the micro and macro levels explaining social reality [11], [12], [14]. In social interactions, millennial individuals and their culturality have certain rules and resources whose output becomes relevant to individuals in this age cohort not only in micro level but also in macro. The aspect of structural duality becomes the most significant perceiving social integration of millennials. Structural duality encompasses different problems of social analysis: *action* and *structure*, *stability* and *change*, *institutions*, and *interactions* [6]. In this sense, the reproduction of a social action leads to the *supportive reaction* (solidarity), when the individual is integrated and maintained in the collective or causes a *conflict* that resonates as rejection (alienation) [14].

The structuration theory is based on three structural dimensions: *signification*, *legitimation*, and *domination* at the macrolevel of social interaction, which (partly) determines the resources and rules of individuals [10], [14].

*Signification* defines the rules that agent's emphasis, oriented to the discourses of collectives that allow the norms of social inclusion to be addressed in collectives (in this sense millennial culture becomes especially relevant). Usually, those discourses are regulated by a collective: team, organization, or even society [13]. These may be certain symbols, myths, metaphors related to the collective with at least formally equal access for all individuals [9]. This occurs during the social interaction of individuals, with individuals emphasizing and prioritizing the relevant aspects. *Domination* is related to resources (allocative and authoritative) that transform into a form of power [9]. Allocating resources are related to material objects- enabling the control of material objects: material products, money, and so on. Authoritative resources are related to intangible objects, enabling forms of control over individuals (salary, positions, and statuses). *Legitimation* defines the norms of legitimacy for the use of rules and resources at the macro-level legitimately. Social actors use these norms to reward (encourage) or punish (discourage) individuals. Social inclusion in communities is associated with principles of fairness and equality that apply to all members of the collective [9].

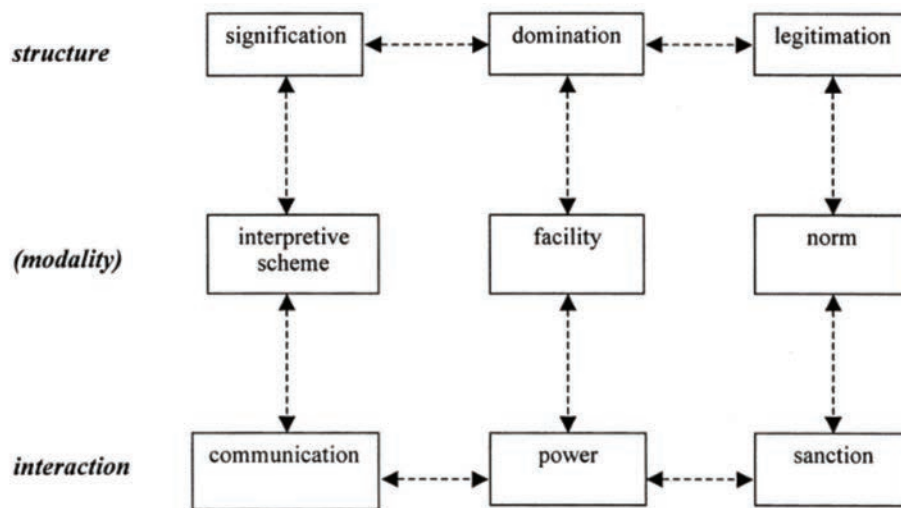


Fig 1. Structuration theory [9]

The duality of structure is the main axis in structuration theory. It enables perception of the social integration process of millennials considering the relationship between structures and agency. Social integration is understood from a structure level that works as inclusion using resources and rules or otherwise alienates (disintegrates). Within the framework of this study, it is important to understand the cultural aspects of millennia and its social integration in the military organization, perceived through the relationship between structure (military and its norms) and agency (the ability of millennials to act significantly). The duality of structure is so important because it allows us to talk about the change in the organization caused by the culture of millennials. Individuals act in two ways, accepting or opposing certain prevailing norms in the organization. So, therefore, in such strongly hierarchic, statutory, and strict organization such as the armed forces, the social integration of individuals is no longer considered solely by the institutional organizational side, but it is crucial to assess the involvement of agents through the ability to meet the individual needs, expectations of individuals, caused by millennialism.

### 3. Methodology

This study is carried out using the qualitative research method using a semi-structured interview. The informants selected for the study are active service professional military men of the Lithuanian Armed Forces who are currently performing military service and former servicemen of the professional military service who terminated their contracts prematurely (left the military service earlier, until retirement age and chose civilian professions). Interview data were collected in 2021 (March-November). In total 22 informants were interviewed: 16 men, 6 women, of whom (16 officers, 6 noncommissioned officers) aged 27-42. Military ranks, from corporal to major. Interview duration 41-95 min. (average 62 min.). The interviews were collected both live (face to face) and remotely, using communication platforms (zoom, Facebook, skype) acting using cameras (due to the intense pandemic situation).

The choice of two military men audiences (active personnel and and those who terminated before time) is purposeful and focused on the design of the study: first group (the military men taht terminated service contracts prematurely) is more focused on its choice, and reveals more disintegrating aspects than actively serving individuals.

Informants were asked open-ended questions, which were divided into main blocks according to the topics (prestige of the profession, assessment of the institutional factors of the military organization, social integration of the military profession in the organization and comparison of the military profession with civilian professions). The questions in each block are thematically formed with antagonistic meanings, for example: *Is military service a place where you fully realize yourself? (What helps to realize yourself and what hinders self-realization?)*.

The empirics were analyzed by open *axial* coding. The meanings of the text are divided into codes according to topics, codes into subcategories, and subcategories into categories. According to the topic, the categories and their antagonistic meanings are presented in the empirical part of the article, for example: (Integration- individual expression versus Disintegration- restriction of expression (and number of respondents)) (see Table No. 1. Individual expression versus restriction of expression).

The military demands loyalty from individuals and the secrecy of stored information due to its functional specificity. So, therefore, during this research it is not ruled out that the informants spoke in moderation on certain issues. All submitted material (names, places of employment) is subject to change due to ethical requirements of the study.

#### 4. Individual expression versus restriction of expression

Individualism and its various expressions are one of the essential cultural characteristics of the generation of millennials individuals [2]. In Table 1 the millennium generation officer's expectation of military service is submitted not only to express himself, but also to be a part of a change. This is one of the essential integrating characteristics of this age cohort. Not only the ability to express oneself but also to be able to change *structure* and thus produce a *social system*. The excerpt from eimys language reflects the essence of structuration theory, the duality of structure [11], [12], [14]. Individual expression reflects the high ambitions of the millennials to position the *rules* and *resources* that are so needed in social interaction to be the cause of change. Well, until I see that I can make some changes, I am very happy with this. <...> '. Social integration of millennials becomes closely related to the aspect of *agency*. It is what in structuration theory is called individual life narrative that poses all the aspects of agency: active, self-critical responses to the social environment [5].

Table 1

Individual expression versus restriction of expression

Integration	Frequency	Dezintegration	Frequency
Individual expression	5	Restriction of expression	7
<...>Well, there was that cultural shock when I came back... Aaa, where the world is still perhaps a <i>homosovieticus</i> legacy a bit... but it motivated me even more to try to change something. Perhaps not to pay attention to what others will think or say.. That is what you do... Well, and until I see that I can make some changes, I am very satisfied with this. <...> (Žeimys 34)		<...> Then, when I went on parental leave, I was out for a couple of years.. I could feel a little bit more free to live. I was able to take such a break, start planning my agenda, my vacation, my work, and it didn't depend on anything to reconcile with something you know.. And after a year I came back, it happened to me again.. We were on vacation with my family, but I needed to come back a little earlier to have such a lack of opportunity to plan my time... But what has changed, I say, I can plan my time! I have to work, I work longer, but I don't want to work a simple day (Zigmas 36) <...>  <...> The army... It is as a prison... you are always closed ...<...> (Šarūnas 36)	

On the other hand, traditional features of military organization, such as *totality*, *greed*, and *social isolation*, become more difficult for millennials to accept in terms of cultural content and act as a disintegrating factor. Restrictions on the freedom of individuals, which are normal norms in a military organization because of their specificity, are alienated norms for the culture of millennials. Assessing such a millennial reaction from the perspective of *legitimation*, individuals are limited in their ability to possess rules and resources not only at the micro level but also at the structure-macro level. Whereas social inclusion in communities by millennials is perceived with a strong expectation of individual expression and a sense of fairness, a restriction of liberty works as discouraging for millennials [9].

## 5. Self-realization is more important than a career versus unfulfilled expectations

Individualism manifests itself through various areas of life: for example, through the implementation of personal, work-oriented (result-oriented) goals [2]. This section will present the aspects of importance of self-realization and its antagonistic features- unfulfilled expectations (Table 2). Millennials' activities are focused on personal achievements: they are striving for high results in work, personal life, they have an exceptional stimulus for learning and development [7]. The eimys approach reflects the structural dimension of *Signification* (Fig. 1). Signification defines the rules that individuals emphasise, oriented on the discourses of the collectives allowing the norms of social inclusion to be addressed in collectives (in this sense, millennial culturality becomes especially relevant). Theory says that these discourses are regulated by a collective: team, organization, or even society [14]. Self-realization and its significance reflects high service expectations to express themselves that are not only collective but, above all, individualistic (able to realize oneself).

The inability to meet individual expectations is one of the most common texts encountered in empirics (Table 2). On the one hand, it seems normal that individuals cannot be satisfied with everything in an organization. However, these texts speak of individual expectations that are not met (in terms of content, they relate to adventure: "<...> Then, you will be able to shoot, analyze the enemy... <...>"). These are expectations related to self-realization that have not been met due to certain organizational circumstances (mostly of a bureaucratic nature). Going back to the structural dimension of *signification*, this dissatisfaction with the fact that one cannot realize oneself reflects a certain cultural conflict. The perception of value by millennials leads to the view that my work activities must allow individual self-realization. In reality, however, the content of military service does not always respond to the cultural needs of millennials, and this becomes a disintegrating factor.

Self-realization is more important than a career versus unfulfilled expectations

Table 2

Integration	Fre- quency	Dezintegration	Fre- quency
Self-realization is more important than a career.	7	Unfilled Expectations	10
<...>That climb is natural to us. If you are useful to the system, if you are not lazy, you are doing something, you will naturally end up somewhere... But that is not my goal... And that I want to be a captain in 10 years. No. I don't have that. For me, I prefer activities that would allow me to experience something, to do something. The expectation was one in which it provided a wide variety of new experiences. It is that I am sure there will be some experience and opportunity, regardless of my rank. I don't stress that much.<...> (Žeimys 34)		<...> Then come and calm down, because no one is running here... They ran and fought more in schools than in volunteers. Volunteers more than compared to professionals <...> (Adrija 32)  <...> That military training.. Because when you come into the army, what do you think? You will be physically strong, you will be physically prepared... Then, you will be able to shoot, analyze the enemy, etc. I say, in my opinion, we are stuck in paperwork, settlements, and not in training certain skills that a soldier, an officer, this profession needs so much... Well, there are political levels here, because we don't know politically what we need to demonstrate and what we need. But here watching from the ground... That is what would be needed- bright reforms.<...>(Ubyté 29)	

## 6. Confrontation against the system versus coping

Confrontation against the system is an expression of *conflict* that reflects a strong agency dimension among millennials (Table 3). The fact that millennials are highly critical, not afraid to speak out against authority, shows some of the conflicting tendencies in this age cohort. The confrontation in terms of authority shows that the generation of millennials is much more demanding in terms of *resources* and *rules* in relation to the authority of the organization. Confrontation is therefore a completely natural reaction of this generation to the misallocation of resources and rules

in terms of millennials attitude. Conflict is therefore a consequence of confrontation resonated as rejection (alienation) in social interaction in structural duality [14].

Confrontation against the system *versus* coping

Table 3

Integration	Fre- quency	Dezintegration	Fre- quency
Confrontation against the system	9	Coping	9
<p>&lt;...&gt; Then there was such a phase- if they don't like it, let them fire me... Well, we... somehow we do not do anything criminal or illegal... we just want that the system is better. That is what motivated us and where we are now...&lt;...&gt; (Žeimys 34)</p> <p>&lt;...&gt; It's important (career), but if I had to... I would leave the army and my hands would not shake... I can realize myself elsewhere .....&lt;...&gt; (Adrija 32)</p>		<p>&lt;...&gt; I tried to speak, to express myself, but when it broke... They poked me everywhere, I went on duty very often, they covered all the holes with me.&lt;...&gt; (Lina 29)</p> <p>&lt;...&gt;I have seen many conflicts. Even saw how they really coped with a person... The army, namely the army. He didn't listen, they left him after work until nine, he took incapacity for work, they put him on duty every Saturday... Such coping.. In Lidl, if they tell me - work six, ten days in a row. I'll tell you go yourself.. I'll call for the labor inspector. In the military, you can't tell. I didn't like that. &lt;...&gt; (Borisas 35)</p>	

Meanwhile, coping among millennials is perceived as an extreme aspect of social interaction (disintegration). Although millenials individuals call forms of coping, it is perfectly legitimate in an organizational sense and simply reflects the coercive side of the organization toward individuals. However, judging from the culturalism of millennia, this aspect is perceived as a disintegrating feature. The fact that millenials quite often mention alienation for coercion suggests that the total, coercive nature of the organization is becoming increasingly difficult to uphold to nowadays individuals. Assessing this change through structural prism of *legitimacy* that defines the norms to use rules and resources at the macro-level legitimately (Fig. 1). These elements of coercion towards millennials of individuals are perceived as unacceptable *rules* in social interaction [9]. Millenials individuals have high individualistic features of social integration, such as self-realization and individual expression. Therefore, the total features of an organization that manifest themselves as elements of coercion are perceived as highly critical.

Summarizing the synthesis of integrating and disintegrating factors in the social integration of millennials soldiers in military service, it is worth returning to the theoretical center of structuration theory, *structural duality* [6]. Social integration, based on structuration theory, is a successful production of the social system in military service [14]. Successful production of the social system is based on the cultivation of certain rules and resources in social interaction, which means that the individual can successfully produce the social system. Empirics reveal that the main conflict for the successful social integration for millenials generation in the military service arises from cultural millenials culture characteristics (individual expression, self-realization, ability to confront) implementation cause of traditional military organizational features (restriction of freedom, coping, unfulfilled expectations). The empirical design, based on the antagonistic meanings of social integration, reveals that the social integration of millenials individuals in an organization that emphasizes collective values is a too demanding expression of culturalism for the individualistic generation of millenials.

## 7. Conclusions

The study reveals that the social integration of millenials in the Lithuanian Armed Forces in the future (Z generation integration) will bring increasing cultural challenges. The main problem for the organization that possess traditional, extremely tightly structure will face is the question how to integrate individuals with ever-increasing individual ambitions into an organization that emphasizes collective values successfully? The desire to realize oneself, to express individual expectations, cannot always be fulfilled in such a strictly regulated, statutory organization as the military.

However, the integration of millenials in the organization itself leads to higher demands for service content. This is an age generation that is extremely critical for the unproductive content of activities, for 'sitting without work', and for social injustice. Future generations of individuals will want to realize their *agency* and be directly responsible

for building the organization, directly contributing to and creating the Lithuanian armed forces. A phenomenon such as ‘service from salary to salary’ is not the cultural phenomenon that characterizes young people today and future generations of young people.

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