



From the Deputy

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Autres thèmes

An assistant is a person who has a role in a primarily official or state setting, a role that consists of assisting another person. Nevertheless, the assistant does not seem to be very present in the business world. At a time when the military apparatus tends to apply methods derived from civilian management, it would be a mistake or even a mistake to try to eliminate military assistants under the pretext of savings and rationalisation.

Before talking about the assistant, it is interesting to know how the Larousse defines it: "A person associated with another to help him in his duties". This rather general definition reveals two important notions. The first is the fact that the assistant is associated with another person without the hierarchical relationship being clearly expressed. The second is that he or she is assigned the following mission: he or she must assist the first person in his or her duties, which implies that the deputy has no other missions than those within the perimeter of the person he or she is assisting.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that the word "assistant" does not exist on its own when consulting a well-known encyclopedic site on the Internet[1]; it is always used as a qualifier. In the same vein, it is easy to see that Google, apart from dictionary definitions, associates the word deputy only with official functions: deputy mayor, administrative assistant, security assistant, deputy secretary-general (UN or EU)...

A deputy is a person whose role is mainly official or state-related, and who assists another person. Nevertheless, the deputy does not seem to be very present in the business world. At a time when the military apparatus tends to apply methods derived from civilian management, it would be a mistake or even a mistake to try to eliminate military assistants under the pretext of savings and rationalisation.

There are therefore many disparities and specificities which explain these organisational differences. We will develop them on the basis of a study of financial issues, processes

and finally relational aspects.

On financial issues, we will successively address the notions of profitability and remuneration.

Profitability is one of the first elements that could explain the differences in appreciation of the deputy's role. The firm is a profit-making organisation, which explains why profitability is a predominant criterion in the firm, which is therefore more naturally oriented towards efficiency. The world of defence is more based on efficiency and justification of expenditure from the smallest euro. Consequently, in the company, expenses that are not necessary for its proper functioning do not exist. One could object that the largest companies have vice-president positions. While at first reading this title might suggest deputies at the highest level, a closer study shows that the title of vice-president reflects a function of "top manager" in charge of an area or sector of the group's activity. This corresponds to a hierarchical positioning linked to a level of remuneration and not to the ability to replace the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. The best proof of this state of affairs is that when a chairman is replaced, his successor is rarely one of the vice-chairmen. Conversely, the appointment of the last Chief of the Armed Forces Staff is an illustration of what is very regularly practised within the armed forces, namely the appointment of the deputy to succeed the chief.

A second element to consider is remuneration. In the civilian sector, remuneration is indexed to objectives. Therefore, a deputy cannot have the same objectives as his or her boss because they cannot share the financial gains. Conversely, a military commander and his deputy are often of similar or even identical ranks and their pay is roughly the same, because it is not correlated with whether or not objectives are achieved. Performance is evaluated by another process, that of annual appraisal.

Having seen the financial impacts, the processes deserve to be studied to deepen the differences between the two worlds.

Access to information via the organizations' information systems is another factor that differentiates the military from the civilian world. The Intradef network, on which the defence information and communication system is based, is disconnected from the Internet, although some gateways for e-mail exchanges exist. It is therefore not possible to consult one's e-mails outside a computer connected to the network, as one could do at home for example. Technical advances may change this state of affairs, but at present, for occasional absences such as leave or periods of external training, it is therefore essential to have an assistant, otherwise the chain of command will become blocked. Even if it is binding on a day-to-day basis, recent controversies over NSA espionage [2] have shown the merits of a system isolated from the Internet, such as Intradef. In the company, even for those most sensitive to data confidentiality, such as the banking sector in particular, information systems rely on the Internet. With IT equipment controlled by the security department and even fingerprint-controlled access to the monitor, roaming executives can connect to the system and therefore feel less need for an assistant.

At the military level, the main mission of a chief, especially in operations, is to command and control. While the decision rests solely with the chief, this decision is most often made with the advice of at least his deputy(s), if not the entire staff. This situation can be found in the civilian world. On the other hand, the military assistant is very often entrusted with a mission to monitor the decision. This supervisory mission is rarely assigned to one of the chief's deputies in the business world. In the best case scenario, the chief will verify

by himself, but will instead set up a reporting system using KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), or else the verification will be entrusted to internal audit to avoid any conflict of interest.

Finally, the last point to be considered is that of interpersonal relationships.

Not surprisingly, the assistant (or second) is very present in the military world. The first task of the deputy is to replace the head of the deputy. This notion is particularly prevalent in the Army, where death is a factor in all operations, whatever the weapon or speciality. On the other hand, there are few deputies in the company who are supposed to be able to carry out all the tasks of their leader. When one or more deputies are appointed, they are dedicated to a particular mission. Moreover, the mission of replacing the boss is almost non-existent in the business world, where being replaceable is considered a weakness. On the contrary, it is necessary to demonstrate on a daily basis that one is irreplaceable in the smooth running of the company in order to be able to keep one's position in an ultra-competitive world. The organisation also locks this in by setting up different penal and financial delegations between the manager and his deputy. This distorts the relationship of trust between the manager and his deputy.

On the other hand, the relationship between a military commander and his deputy is very special and not everyone can identify with the few generalities that can be drawn from it. Nevertheless, although most often imposed by authority, this relationship implies a great deal of mutual trust and a certain common vision of how to carry out missions successfully or, failing that, perfect intellectual discipline on the part of the deputy. There is also a certain division of labour between the chief and his deputy when both are physically present. Indeed, the chief will tend to focus more on the external relations of the unit and on the long term, while the deputy will mainly ensure the smooth internal running of the unit and the short term. This can be observed both at the level of the basic army unit and on board a ship. This can be observed at the basic Army unit level, on board a Navy ship, or even at the top of the hierarchy when observing the Chiefs of Staff and their Majors General. Also, these relationships are strengthened in peacetime during the training and training phases such as manoeuvres and exercises, in order to ensure optimum functioning in crisis or even combat conditions in current theatres of external operations as well as during internal missions. In the company, on the other hand, the leader conducts all these aspects at the same time and in all situations, with the exception of the combat situation. If necessary, he will call on vice-presidents or others to whom he will entrust a specific mission internally or externally but always with associated objectives. Interpersonal relations therefore take on absolutely different dimensions in the two worlds studied.

Through these different aspects, we were able to see that the deputy's place is very different in private enterprise and in the military world. These specificities of the military assistant therefore plead in favour of maintaining assistant positions in the armed forces.

Moreover, this redundancy of personnel, which is a key criterion of the resilience of the military tool, is costly and not necessary to put in place in the civilian world. It multiplies payroll costs for tasks that are not of obvious necessity, since the lives of the staff are rarely at stake. Nevertheless, in some companies, resilience is carefully analysed, sometimes borrowing from the military world, which could be a subject of study in itself.

1] Wikipedia: <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Search?search=adjoint&go=Go>

2] NSA: National Security Agency: a government agency of the United States Department of Defense, responsible for signals intelligence and the security of the U.S. government's information and data processing systems (Wikipedia).

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