

Research on the Construction System of the US Non-Commissioned Officer Corps Based on the Grounded Theory

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Abstract. The U.S. military's non-commissioned officers (NCOs), often regarded as the "backbone of the armed forces", epitomize innovation and expertise in NCO development. Employing Grounded Theory, this study investigates the U.S. military NCO corps construction system. Analyzing 30 documents, including policy papers and official reports, yields a comprehensive framework. Comprising four domains—professional competence, professional development, professional norms, and professional care—interconnected to forge a resilient NCO corps. With 17 sub-domains and 77 concepts, this system underscores competence, guided development, norm adherence, and holistic care. Insights gleaned inform strategies to enhance NCO readiness in the complex landscape of contemporary warfare.

1. Introduction

Throughout the annals of American military history, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) have stood as pillars of strength, earning the revered title of the "backbone of the military." Originating in the Continental Army of 1775, during the era of the American Revolutionary War, Baron von Steuben meticulously selected and trained troops, solidifying the foundation of the modern U.S. military's NCO corps [1]. Across the course of military development, NCOs have proven to be steadfast cornerstones, with their proficiency and dedication contributing to the formidable prowess of the U.S. Armed Forces. The U.S. military's achievements in NCO development hold invaluable lessons for nations worldwide, particularly in bolstering readiness for modern warfare's intricacies.

NCOs have played an indispensable role in shaping unit performance and preparedness. Acknowledging their significance as leaders, mentors, and skilled operators, the U.S. military has established a robust framework for NCO development. This comprehensive approach not only nurtures their professional capabilities but also underscores their ethical responsibility and care for fellow service members. In the face of evolving global security challenges, the U.S. military's NCO corps has consistently adapted, underscoring their role as linchpins in various operational settings.

The trajectory of the U.S. military's NCO construction has been marked by the fusion of innovative ideals and practical experiences. Its efficacy lies in its holistic structure, which encompasses professional competence, developmental trajectories, ethical benchmarks, and the well-being of NCOs. As nations worldwide strive to

bolster military preparedness in the face of contemporary security demands, a deep comprehension of the U.S. military's NCO construction system offers a treasure trove of insights and prospects.

Consequently, this study embarks on an exploration of the U.S. military's NCO corps construction system, guided by the Grounded Theory framework. By analyzing an expansive dataset, comprising legal codes, constitutional provisions, U.S. Department of Defense policies, official reports, and branch-specific publications, this research aims to unearth the subtleties that underpin the bedrock of the U.S. military's NCO construction system. Employing the Grounded Theory's rigorous three-tier coding process—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—this study seeks to establish a coherent conceptual framework, elucidating the core constituents of the NCO construction system while revealing the intricate interrelationships that bolster its effectiveness.

In the subsequent sections, this paper will delve into the methodologies employed, the conceptual framework constructed, and the nuanced analysis of the US NCO corps construction system. By contextualizing these findings within the broader spectrum of contemporary military preparedness, this study aspires to provide actionable insights and recommendations that can enrich the strategies and practices of diverse military forces, thereby fortifying their foundations in the pursuit of excellence and preparedness.

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2.Theoretical foundation

In 1965, sociologists Glaser and Strauss introduced Grounded Theory as a pioneering methodology in their work "Awareness of Dying" [2]. Two years later, their seminal publication "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" [3] established this approach as a transformative paradigm for qualitative research, offering fresh perspectives and innovative pathways. Grounded Theory's systematic framework involves meticulous procedures for organizing, synthesizing, and interpreting primary data, culminating in the development of comprehensive theoretical models. The pivotal stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding constitute the core of this method, rendering Grounded Theory an effective tool for extracting meaning from qualitative data, thereby transforming complex insights into structured frameworks and actionable guidelines [4].

Grounded Theory's methodology for data collection spans three main approaches: interview (observation) methods [5,6,7], text analysis methods [8,9], and hybrid methods that combine interviews and text analysis [10,11]. Particularly, text analysis stands as a robust method to delve beyond textual surfaces and explore profound layers of meaning, unraveling latent depths that elude conventional reading. Incorporating both established theories and personal interpretations, secondary data sources enrich the researcher's conceptual sensitivity, offering novel perspectives and theoretical constructs for data analysis, thereby upholding a sense of continuity in research [12].

Unlike quantitative research paradigms, Grounded Theory is particularly adept at constructing intricate theories within contexts replete with diverse concepts and multifaceted relationships between variables. Its

applicability has transcended its initial boundaries encompassing anthropology, education, psychology, and social work, branching into numerous facets of everyday existence [13]. This investigation capitalizes on Grounded Theory to meticulously catalogue and analyze official U.S. policy documents related to NCO corps development. Through meticulous coding and systematic analysis, the study aims to distill vital theoretical insights and assemble a comprehensive framework that underpins the evolution of the U.S. military's NCO corps.

3.Methodology:

3.1.Data collection

To comprehensively and accurately portray the development of the U.S. military's NCO corps, this study employed a rigorous data collection approach. After extensive review of scholarly literature and consultation with experts in the field, a well-defined data collection system was formulated. The primary data sources for this investigation include the 2021 edition of the United States Code [14], the U.S. Constitution and its amendments [15], as well as policy documents released by the U.S. Department of Defense. Supplementary data sources encompass policy documents and official research reports from various branches of the U.S. military. Through exhaustive searches of pertinent policy documents pertaining to NCO corps development, the retrieval process concluded on March 20, 2023. After meticulous manual screening to eliminate duplicates and irrelevant materials, a total of 30 sample documents were obtained. A comprehensive overview of these pertinent documents is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic information on documents related to the construction of the NCO corps

No.	File Number	File Name	File Category	Issuing department
W01	AD 2017-28	《NCO and Staff NCO Promotion Recommended List》	Directive	Army
W02	AP 600-25	《U.S.Army Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide》	Pamphlet	Army
W03	TC 7-22.7	《Noncommissioned Officer Guide》	Guidebook	Army
W04		《Preparing the Noncommissioned Officer Corps For The 21st Century》	Research Report	Army War College
W05		《The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer Backbone of the Armed Forces》	Research Report	National Defense University Press
W06		《The Evolution of Noncommissioned Officers in Training Soldiers》	Research Report	Institute of Land Warfare
W07		《The Constitution of the United States》	Law	United States Congress
W08		《United States Code》	Law	Office of the Law Revision Counsel of the U.S. House of Representatives
W09	DoD I 1304.26	《Qualification Standards for Enlisted Personnel》	Instruction	Department of Defense
W10	DoD I 1304.31	《Enlisted Bonus Program》	Instruction	Department of Defense

W11	DoD D 1350.2	《DoD Military Equal Opportunity Program》	Directive	Department of Defense
W12	DoD I 1308.3	《DoD Physical Fitness/Body Composition Program》	Instruction	Department of Defense
W13	DoD D 1322.18	《Military Training》	Directive	Department of Defense
W14	DoD I 1322.26	《Distributed Learning》	Instruction	Department of Defense
W15	DoD I 1348.33	《DoD Military Decorations and Awards Program》	Instruction	Department of Defense
W16	DoD I 1100.21	《Voluntary Services in DoD》	Instruction	Department of Defense
W17		《Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022-2023》	Plan	Department of Defense
W18		《The Department of Defense (DoD)'s Wounded, Ill, and/or Injured Compensation and Benefits Handbook》	Guidebook	Department of Defense
W19	AR 600-8-19	《Enlisted Promotion and Reduction》	Regulation	Army
W20	AP 600-35	《Relationships Between Soldiers of Different Ranks》	Pamphlet	Army
W21	AR 350-1	《Army Training and Leader Development》	Regulation	Army
W22	AR 600-100	《Army Profession and Leadership Policy》	Regulation	Army
W23	AR 601-280	《Army Retention Program》	Regulation	Army
W24	AR 621-5	《Army Continuing Education System》	Regulation	Army
W25	AR 1-201	《Army Inspection Policy》	Regulation	Army
W26	AR 600-20	《Army Command Policy》	Regulation	Army
W27	AF.I 36-2618	《The Enlisted Force Structure》	Instruction	Air Force
W28	AF.I 36-2406	《Officer and Enlisted Evaluation Systems》	Instruction	Air Force
W29	CJCSI 1805-01b	《Enlisted Professional Military Education Policy》	Instruction	Joint Chiefs of Staff
W30		《Training and Education 2030》	Research Report	Marine Corps

3.2. Coding process

Utilization of Grounded Theory for the analysis of qualitative data revolves around the essential application of the constant comparative analysis method [16]. Continuous comparative analysis involves an ongoing process of juxtaposing data with data and theory with theory, followed by the extraction of pertinent categories and their attributes based on the interrelations between data and theory [17]. Coding serves as a pivotal juncture between data collection and the unveiling of novel theories. Through coding, the events encapsulated within the data can be elucidated, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their significance. The Grounded Theory coding process can be deconstructed into three distinct stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In this study, the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo11 was employed as a supplementary tool for encoding the collected textual materials. The subsequent sections delve

into an elaborate explanation of the three successive stages in the coding process.

3.2.1. Open coding

Open coding embodies a process of conceptual exploration. During this phase, researchers must approach data collection with a heightened awareness of prevailing theories, thereby meticulously selecting and scrutinizing materials. Subsequently, these materials are dissected, broken down, scrutinized, compared, and systematically extracted, juxtaposed, modified, and synthesized from the raw data, eventually culminating in the conceptualization of emergent themes.

In the context of this research, the open coding phase yielded a total of 77 distinct concepts. The intricate process of extracting and configuring concepts from the raw data is elaborated upon in Appendix A. The coding process is exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2. Exemplar of the coding process

Original Text	Concept
NCOs are responsible for Soldier readiness and play a key role in unit readiness. This competency includes: inspections, comprehensive Soldier fitness (physical, spiritual, emotional, social, and family), equipment maintenance, Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP), resiliency, Medical Protection System (MEDPROS), and financial readiness. (W03) They are the commander's eyes and ears and are responsible for the organization's state of readiness. (W05)	Readiness Duties
Military inspections were created by Peter I of Russia for checking on conditions of unit administration, services and material supply of the troops. Today, they provide the means to assess the capabilities of an organization and to identify any potential problems. (W03) In combat, inspecting subordinates is a life or death business. By ensuring that the members of a unit have all of the equipment required for the mission—and that it is in good working order— NCOs/POs ensure the effectiveness of the unit and enhance the safety of its members. (W05)	Readiness Inspection
Understand and teach the impact of Soldier's individual readiness on the unit. ... Leverage current and proposed initiatives (ESB, EIB, EFMB, ACFT) to drive readiness; foster and support relationships with supporting organizations for readiness work; manage human resources to maintain a stable level of individual readiness. ... By forecasting deficiencies and gaps resulting from future equipment and personnel changes, prioritize the readiness of the entire unit; proactively address soldier issues that could affect unit readiness status; assess and manage the readiness of the entire platoon. (W03)	Readiness Management

3.2.2. Axial coding

Axial coding is an intermediate stage in the grounded theory's sequential coding process, building upon the results of open coding to create higher-level clusters. This process aims to discover and establish various organic relationships between primary and secondary concept categories, thereby reorganizing dispersed data in novel ways [17]. During axial coding, the researcher focuses on one central concept, the "axis," for in-depth analysis, continuously seeking its related relationships, and

ultimately aggregating several relevant concepts to form new categories.

In this study, during the analysis of concepts formed in the previous open coding stage, it was observed that "duties of readiness, readiness inspections, readiness management" all fall under the category of readiness capabilities. Similarly, terms such as "professional responsibilities, soldier creed, code of conduct" could be summarized as professional standards. Consequently, this study proceeded to further abstract and synthesize concepts based on these foundations, resulting in the formation of 17 secondary categories. The process of axial coding is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Axial coding process

Concept	Subcategory
Readiness Duties, Readiness Inspections, Readiness Management	Readiness Capabilities
Command Responsibilities, International Assistance, Joint Operations, Command Principles, Command and Control	Operational Command Abilities
Training Management Skills, Training Plan Formulation, Training Risk Management	Training Management Abilities
Leadership Character, Leadership Development Approaches, Leadership Development Areas, Leadership Essence, Leadership Needs Model, Chain of Leadership, Leadership Development Objectives, Leadership Development Strategies	Leadership
Essence of Communication, Communication Effectiveness, Modes of Communication	Communication Skills
Program Execution, Program Maintenance, Program Supervision	Program Management Abilities
Source of Selection, Selection Criteria, Selection Incentives	Selection
Training Standards, Training Techniques, Training Characteristics, Training Objectives, Training Resources, Training Plans, Training Domains	Training
Purpose of Assessment and Certification, Assessment and Certification Methods, Assessment and Certification Process, Assessment and Certification Tools, Assessment Feedback	Assessment and Certification
Retention Objectives, Promotion Mechanisms, Promotion Incentives, Promotion Qualifications	Retention and Promotion

Conditions of Retirement, Modes of Retirement, Retirement Placement, Awareness of Retirement Services	Retirement
Ethical Perspectives, Values, Core Qualities	Ethical Standards
Professional Responsibilities, Soldier Creed, Military Traditions, Military Etiquette, Oath of Enlistment, Code of Conduct, Military Ceremonies, Dress Requirements, Role Definition	Professional Standards
Regulations, Reporting and Complaints, Appeal and Reconsideration, Inspection and Supervision, Military Discipline Facilities, Punitive Measures	Disciplinary Constraints
Commendation and Rewards, Military Compensation and Pay, Welfare Facilities, Leave	Welfare and Benefits
Medical Security, Support for Military Families, Legal Assistance, Personal Care	Health Care
Organizational Atmosphere, Interpersonal Relations, Working Environment	Organizational Environment

3.2.3. Selective coding

The process of selective coding involves the selection of a core category concept from all the previously identified subcategories. Through continuous analysis, relevant subcategories are gathered and organized around this core concept to systematically illustrate and validate the relationships between the main and subcategories. This process also involves populating subcategories that require further refinement or development in the future [17]. During this phase, researchers identify the most critical core theme within the research topic, one that can encompass and unify other related subjects. The overall analysis of the study is then organized around this core theme, unifying all research findings within its scope [18]. In this study's selective coding phase, the research pondered questions such as "At what conceptual level can these subcategories belong to a larger category (core category)?" and "How can these subcategories be interconnected to form a systematic theoretical framework?" [17]. By analyzing the theoretical density and interrelationships of the current subcategories, relevant subcategories were integrated. Ultimately, the study generated core categories for the development of the U.S. military Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) corps, encompassing Professional Competence, Professional Development, Professional Norms and Professional Care. Refer to Table 4 for an illustration of the selective coding process.

Table 4. Selective coding process

Subcategory	Core Category
Readiness Capabilities	Professional Competence
Operational Command Abilities	
Training Management Abilities	
Leadership	
Communication Skills	
Program Management Abilities	Professional Development
Selection	
Training	
Assessment and Certification	
Retention and Promotion	
Retirement	

Ethical Standards	Professional Norms
Professional Standards	
Disciplinary Constraints	
Welfare and Benefits	Professional Care
Health Care	
Organizational Environment	

3.3. Saturation test

Regarding the saturation test, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed in their seminal work "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" that the decision to stop sampling different groups depends on categories, i.e., the theoretical saturation of categories. Saturation implies that researchers no longer encounter new data while developing categories. When researchers repeatedly encounter similar instances, they can empirically ascertain that category development has reached saturation. At this point, alternative methods can be explored to collect more diverse data, ensuring that the saturation determination is based on a wide range of data associated with the categories [3]. Urquhart C (2022) provided a clear elucidation of saturation, proposing that saturation is judged based on the appearance of new codes during data analysis. Specifically, when the same codes recur in the data without the emergence of new codes, saturation can be deemed achieved [19].

This study employed a concurrent data collection and analysis approach. After completing the initial data collection, researchers closely monitored additional data mentioned during the data analysis process, engaging in ongoing comparisons and timely supplementation to ensure comprehensive and accurate data collection. Upon completing the analysis of textual data from W23, it was observed that no new information emerged, and new concepts or categories could not be extracted. The relationships among categories and concepts were substantially clear. To establish saturation, the researcher continued analyzing textual data from W24 to W30. No new information or concepts were generated, indicating that theoretical saturation was achieved within the current research context.

4. Findings

4.1. Conceptual framework of the US NCO corps construction

After continuous analysis, comparison, adjustment, and synthesis of 30 textual sources, this study has established the conceptual framework the US NCO corps construction.

This framework comprises four primary categories: professional competence, professional development, professional norms, and professional care. It further includes 17 subcategories such as readiness capabilities, selection, ethical standards, and others, as well as 77 specific concepts, including readiness duties, sources of selection, working environment, and more. (refer to Table 5).

Table 5. Conceptual framework of the US NCO corps construction

Core Category	Subcategory	Concept
Professional Competence	Readiness Capabilities	Readiness Duties, Readiness Inspections, Readiness Management
	Operational Command Abilities	Command Responsibilities, International Assistance, Joint Operations, Command Principles, Command and Control
	Training Management Abilities	Training Management Skills, Training Plan Formulation, Training Risk Management
	Leadership	Leadership Character, Leadership Development Approaches, Leadership Development Areas, Leadership Essence, Leadership Needs Model, Chain of Leadership, Leadership Development Objectives, Leadership Development Strategies
	Communication Skills	Essence of Communication, Communication Effectiveness, Modes of Communication
	Program Management Abilities	Program Execution, Program Maintenance, Program Supervision
Professional Development	Selection	Source of Selection, Selection Criteria, Selection Incentives
	Training	Training Standards, Training Techniques, Training Characteristics, Training Objectives, Training Resources, Training Plans, Training Domains
	Assessment and Certification	Purpose of Assessment and Certification, Assessment and Certification Methods, Assessment and Certification Process, Assessment and Certification Tools, Assessment Feedback
	Retention and Promotion	Retention Objectives, Promotion Mechanisms, Promotion Incentives, Promotion Qualifications
	Retirement	Conditions of Retirement, Modes of Retirement, Retirement Placement, Awareness of Retirement Services
Professional Norms	Ethical Standards	Ethical Perspectives, Values, Core Qualities
	Professional Standards	Professional Responsibilities, Soldier Creed, Military Traditions, Military Etiquette, Oath of Enlistment, Code of Conduct, Military Ceremonies, Dress Requirements, Role Definition
	Disciplinary Constraints	Regulations, Reporting and Complaints, Appeal and Reconsideration, Inspection and Supervision, Military Discipline Facilities, Punitive Measures
Professional Care	Welfare and Benefits	Commendation and Rewards, Military Compensation and Pay, Welfare Facilities, Leave
	Health Care	Medical Security, Support for Military Families, Legal Assistance, Personal Care
	Organizational Environment	Organizational Atmosphere, Interpersonal Relations, Working Environment

4.2. Construction of the US NCO corps system

Based on the conceptual framework of the US NCO corps construction formed by the grounded theory, this study

constructs the US NCO corps construction system, as shown in Figure 1.

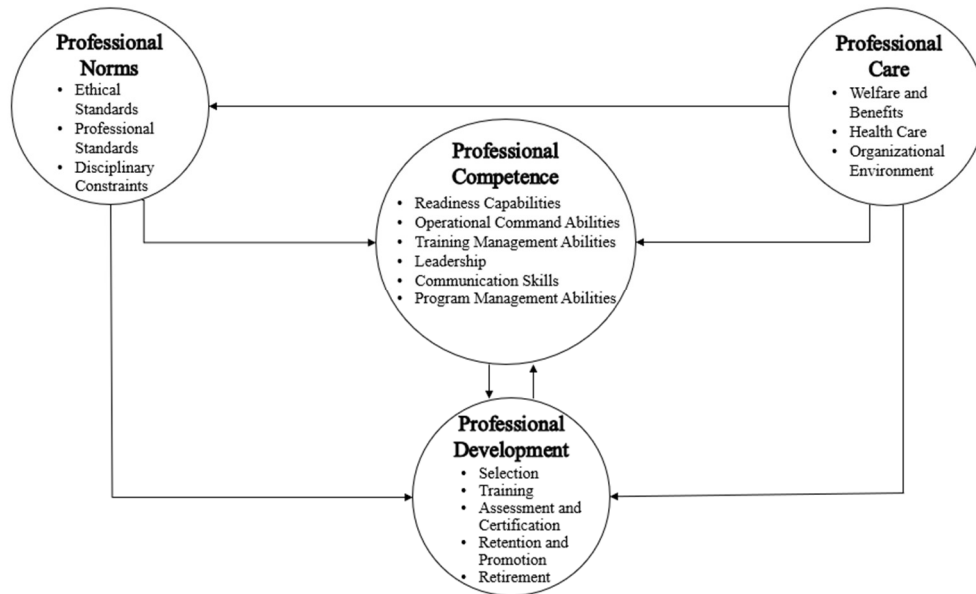


Fig. 1. Structure of the US NCO corps construction system

The US NCO corps construction system comprises four main dimensions: professional competence, professional development, professional norms, and professional care. Among these, professional competence stands as the cornerstone of military noncommissioned officer development, equipping them with the necessary skills and qualities to fulfill their duties and carry out tasks effectively. Professional Competence primarily encompasses readiness capabilities, operational command Skills, training management abilities, leadership, communication skills, and program management abilities.

Professional development provides a pathway for noncommissioned officers' professional advancement and growth, laying the foundation for personal development and career progression. It mainly includes selection, training, assessment and certification, promotion and retention, as well as the retirement System.

Professional norms serve as the guiding principles for noncommissioned officers' morality and behavior, ensuring their adherence to military laws, regulations, and ethical guidelines, thereby maintaining a positive military image. Professional norms primarily comprise ethical standards, professional standards, and disciplinary constraints.

Professional care safeguards noncommissioned officer development by addressing their physical and mental well-being, as well as family needs. It provides support in areas such as medical security, military family assistance, legal aid, and personal support, ensuring comprehensive protection for noncommissioned officers in both their professional and personal lives. Professional care mainly encompasses welfare and benefits, health care, and organizational environment.

4.3. The synergy of four dimensions in the US NCO corps construction

4.3.1. Professional competence and professional development

To start, professional competence forms the foundation of career progression in the NCO Corps. NCOs must possess specific professional capabilities to excel in their roles and fulfill their responsibilities effectively. Whether it involves leadership, managerial skills, or communication abilities, the development of these professional competencies is crucial for the growth and advancement of NCOs throughout their careers. Only by continuously learning and enhancing their professional skills can NCOs remain competitive, especially when confronting complex tasks and challenges. Moreover, professional development provides NCOs with opportunities and platforms to enhance their professional competence. NCOs can expand their skill sets by participating in various training programs, pursuing further education, engaging in practical training, and undertaking job rotations. The U.S. military offers diverse Professional Development paths and promotion opportunities, enabling NCOs to align their development with their interests, abilities, and career aspirations. Through dedicated effort and learning, NCOs can elevate their professional competence continuously. Additionally, the ongoing improvement of professional competence acts as a driving force for professional development. As NCOs enhance their competencies, they become capable of assuming higher-level and more challenging roles, bearing greater responsibilities and tasks. The enhancement of professional competence opens up broader avenues for NCOs' professional development, providing support for achieving higher ranks and professional status within the military. In summary, the relationship between professional competence and

professional development is mutually reinforcing. NCOs drive their professional development by continuously improving their professional abilities, while professional development offers NCOs opportunities and platforms to develop their professional competence. Through this virtuous cycle, NCOs can attain their career objectives, continually elevate their standing and impact within the military, and make substantial contributions to both the military and national defense.

4.3.2. Professional norms and professional competence:

First and foremost, professional norms serve as guiding principles in the development of professional competence for NCOs. These norms outline the standards and behavioral guidelines that NCOs must uphold in their work, defining their responsibilities and duties explicitly. They provide NCOs with clear direction, guiding them in cultivating and improving competencies that align with normative requirements. By adhering to professional norms, NCOs can establish professional ethics, expertise, and a sense of responsibility, thereby continuously enhancing their professional competence. Secondly, professional norms play a crucial role in elevating NCOs' professional competence. Adhering to these norms not only helps NCOs establish a positive professional image but also fosters self-discipline, responsibility, and team awareness. Strict adherence to professional norms enables NCOs to cultivate discipline and organizational skills, improve work efficiency and quality, and maintain positive cooperation and collaboration with others. These factors collectively contribute positively to the development of NCOs' professional competence.

4.3.3. Professional norms and professional development:

First and foremost, professional norms provide direction, structure, and constraints for the professional development of NCOs. These norms require NCOs to maintain a high level of discipline, respect for others, adherence to regulations, and the upholding of ethical standards while fulfilling their duties, tasks, and daily work. Only by complying with professional norms and rigorously following superiors' directives and orders can NCOs earn the trust and recognition of their superiors, potentially gaining more opportunities for development and promotion. Secondly, professional norms offer criteria for evaluating and recognizing NCOs' professional development. The military employs various assessment and evaluation mechanisms to assess and recognize the professional competence and performance of NCOs. In these evaluations, NCOs' adherence to professional norms, ethical behavior, and professional integrity are considered critical factors. If NCOs excel in adhering to professional norms, they are likely to receive higher evaluations and recognition, subsequently opening doors to promotion and development opportunities. In summary, there exists a close relationship between the professional norms of U.S. military NCOs and their professional development.

Professional norms offer guidance, structure, and boundaries for NCOs' Professional Development, while also providing criteria for evaluating and recognizing their career progression. Adhering to professional norms is an essential requirement for NCOs, and only by aligning with these norms in terms of ethics, behavior, and duties can they earn the trust and recognition of superiors, thus gaining more professional development opportunities.

4.3.4. Professional care and professional competence:

Professional care significantly contributes to enhancing the professional competence of NCOs. When the military demonstrates care and support for NCOs and their families, NCOs feel valued and encouraged, subsequently igniting their motivation and work drive. Professional care alleviates NCOs' concerns related to personal matters, allowing them to concentrate more on learning and enhancing their professional competence, consistently improving their expertise and knowledge base. Moreover, professional care encompasses provisions such as training opportunities, career guidance, and development plans, aiding NCOs in strategizing and achieving their career goals, thereby promoting the holistic development of their capabilities. Additionally, emphasizing care for NCOs fosters a sense of warmth and cohesion within the military, inspiring them to participate more actively in teamwork and collaboration. This positive work environment facilitates information sharing, mutual learning, and experience exchange, further enhancing NCOs' professional competence.

4.3.5. Professional care and professional development:

Professional care provides support and assurance for the professional development of NCOs. The active implementation of professional care furnishes NCOs with a stable environment and platform for professional development, encouraging them to continually learn, grow, and progress. Furthermore, the military's care for NCOs includes offering career guidance, personal counseling, and feedback, helping NCOs plan and execute their professional development strategies. This support and guidance empower NCOs to better grasp the direction and path of their professional development.

4.3.6. Professional care and professional norms:

Professional care facilitates NCOs' adherence to professional norms. When the military addresses the personal needs, welfare, and development of NCOs, NCOs feel valued and cared for, strengthening their sense of belonging and loyalty to the military. This care and support create a conducive work environment, making it easier for NCOs to understand and embrace professional norms, while also consciously complying with normative requirements. The implementation of professional care stimulates NCOs' professional ethics and sense of

responsibility, encouraging them to actively follow professional norms and set a positive example.

5. Conclusions and Implications

In this study, a conceptual framework of the US NCO corps construction was constructed through data analysis of 30 documents, primarily derived from the 2021 edition of the United States Code, the U.S. Constitution and its amendments, and policy documents released by the U.S. Department of Defense. Supplementary materials included policy documents from various military branches and official research reports. Grounded theory informed the three-level coding process, resulting in a comprehensive system encompassing four main categories: professional competence, professional development, professional norms, and professional care. Within these, there are 17 subcategories such as readiness capabilities, selection, ethical standards, and others, as well as 77 specific concepts, including readiness duties, sources of selection, working environment, and more.

The construction system of the US NCO corps comprises four core elements: professional competence, professional development, professional norms, and professional care. Professional competence stands at the heart of NCO corps development, with professional development offering the pathway for NCOs to advance in their professions. Professional norms provide the ethical and behavioral standards that guide NCOs, while professional care ensures the well-being of the NCO corps. These elements interact and intertwine, collectively forming the foundation of the US NCO corps construction system.

The insights gained from this study have several implications for military preparedness and NCO development in nations worldwide.

(1) Emphasis on developing professional competence: This research underscores the critical importance of nurturing and enhancing the professional competence of military personnel. Armed forces around the world should prioritize the development of soldiers' technical skills, leadership abilities, and combat readiness to ensure their capability to handle a diverse array of tasks and respond to various threats effectively.

(2) Establishing clear professional development paths: Providing soldiers with clear career paths, training opportunities, and promotion avenues, similar to the U.S. model, can motivate them, boost morale, and enhance loyalty. Nations should consider adopting structured career construction systems that offer military personnel a sense of purpose and progression within the armed forces.

(3) Upholding professional norms and ethical standards: Professional norms and ethical guidelines serve as the cornerstone of any military. Nations should develop and rigorously enforce professional standards to instill discipline, accountability, and teamwork among soldiers.

(4) Comprehensive professional care: Soldier well-being, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health, plays a pivotal role in their performance and morale. Nations should establish holistic support systems, including psychological assistance, family support, and

training and development programs, to ensure that soldiers receive the care and support they require throughout their careers.

(5) Regular evaluation and adaptation: Recognizing the evolving nature of military environments and threats, nations should periodically assess their NCO corps construction systems. Flexibility and adaptability are key, and adjustments and improvements should be made as necessary to meet changing challenges and requirements.

In summary, the study of the US NCO corps construction system offers valuable lessons that can guide nations in enhancing their military preparedness and the quality of their NCO corps. These insights can aid nations in better meeting their national security needs and ensuring their soldiers remain competitive and adaptable in ever-changing military landscapes.

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