

Application of the Broken Windows Theory in the Context of Military Organizational Behavior and Discipline

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Abstract — This article examines the applicability of the criminological broken windows theory in the context of military organizational behavior and the maintenance of military discipline. The conceptual link between this theory and the phenomenon of normalization of deviance is analyzed, and their mutual complementarity in explaining the processes of disciplinary erosion within military organizations is substantiated. The study is of a theoretical-analytical character and traces the mechanisms through which the toleration of seemingly minor violations gradually weakens the organizational culture and creates the preconditions for more serious deviations.

Keywords — broken windows theory, military discipline, organizational culture, normalization of deviance

I. INTRODUCTION

Military discipline is the foundation upon which combat readiness, unit cohesion, and ultimately the ability of the armed forces to fulfill their constitutional tasks are built. The maintenance of discipline is simultaneously a legal obligation, a managerial function, and a cultural phenomenon that is not exhausted by the formal observance of normative prescriptions.

The broken windows theory is a criminological concept formulated by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in an article published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1982 [1]. It offers an explanation of the processes through which visible disorder and the toleration of minor violations create an environment conducive to escalation toward more serious antisocial manifestations. Although developed in the context of urban crime and policing, the theory possesses considerable analytical potential for other structured hierarchical environments, such as military organizations.

According to the authors, the visible signs of disorder and antisocial behavior in the urban environment create conditions that encourage further disorder and crime, including more serious forms of offenses. This theoretical proposition is also supported by an earlier experiment conducted by another researcher, in which an abandoned automobile in a neighborhood with visible signs of disorder was rapidly vandalized and destroyed, while an identical automobile in a well-maintained environment remained untouched for a longer period.

The application of the theory in the context of the armed forces may yield specific and measurable practical benefits. On the one hand, it provides the command staff with an instrument for the early identification and counteraction of persistent negative group habits that traditionally undermine military discipline: non-regulation interpersonal relations between service members, the systematic toleration of tardiness and lapses in duty assignments, a formalistic attitude toward the maintenance of equipment and weaponry, and the selective observance of requirements concerning appearance and military courtesy. On the other hand, the consistent application of the principle of repairing the broken windows contributes to the strengthening of trust along the chain of command, to the enhancement of combat readiness through a daily maintained standard, and to the formation of a sustainable organizational culture in which the written rules correspond to actual conduct.

On this basis the working hypothesis of the present study is formulated: the consistent counteraction of seemingly minor violations within the military organization, by analogy with the repairing of broken windows, leads to a sustained improvement of the disciplinary environment, the limitation of negative group habits, and the reduction of the preconditions for serious organizational failures.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

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The present study is of a theoretical-analytical and interdisciplinary character. It is not based on empirical data collected specifically for its purposes, but on the analysis and juxtaposition of established scientific concepts with the current normative framework.

The materials employed may be grouped into three categories. The first encompasses classical scientific works in the fields of criminology, the sociology of organizations, and safety science: the original exposition of the broken windows theory by Wilson and Kelling [1] and its extended practical elaboration by Kelling and Coles [13]; Harcourt's critical analysis of the empirical foundations of the theory [2]; Diane Vaughan's study of the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster and the normalization of deviance [3]; the works of James Reason on the management of organizational risks and safety culture [10]; the research of Weick and Sutcliffe on high-reliability organizations [11]; Sidney Dekker's conception of a just culture [12]; and Goffman's analytical framework concerning total institutions [8]. The second category encompasses the current normative framework of the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of defense and the armed forces: the Law on Defense and the Armed Forces [4]; the Regulations on Military Service of 2025 [5]; the previous Regulations on Military Service of 2008, used for comparative purposes [6]; and the Implementing Regulations of the Law on Defense and the Armed Forces [7]. The third category comprises theories explaining the behavioral mechanisms within the organization — above all, Bandura's social learning theory [9].

The following scientific methods have been applied in the study: the deductive-analytical method, the comparative method, conceptual analysis, normative-legal analysis, and the combined methods of synthesis and induction. The deductive-analytical method permits the derivation of specific consequences for the military organization from general theoretical premises. The comparative method has been applied in the juxtaposition of the criminological context in which the theory was originally formulated with the military organization as a particular type of institutional environment. Conceptual analysis is directed toward tracing the connection and interaction between the broken windows theory and the concept of normalization of deviance, as well as toward their synthesis within a common explanatory framework. Normative-legal analysis has been applied to the interpretation of the relevant provisions of the Law on Defense and the Armed Forces and of the Regulations on Military Service in the light of the theories under consideration. Finally, through the methods of synthesis and induction, a model for the prevention of disciplinary erosion applicable to the conditions of the armed forces has been derived.

III. EXPOSITION

The fundamental postulates of the broken windows theory may be synthesized as follows: visible disorder — graffiti, broken windows, litter, damaged infrastructure — signals to potential offenders that social control in a given environment has weakened. Furthermore, the environment communicates with its participants: a single broken window that remains unrepaired conveys the message that society is unable or unwilling to defend itself against violations. The result is a weakening of informal social control and a reinforcement of the perception that the rules are conditional. In this sense, disorder is not merely a backdrop, but an active signaling mechanism.

In this regard, the theory rests upon three interrelated elements of social control: norms defining expectations for behavior; monitoring — the observation of compliance with the norms; and signaling through the visual and behavioral indicators of what the actual, rather than the formally declared, state of affairs is.

The broken windows theory has found its most extensive application in the context of policing. Kelling and Coles developed and systematized the practical aspects of its implementation in an extensive study devoted to the restoration of order and the reduction of crime in the urban environment [13]. The most well-known practical implementation of the theory took place in New York under the leadership of Police Commissioner William Bratton (1994–1996), whose Quality-of-Life initiative was directed against minor offenses — fare evasion in the subway, public drinking, panhandling, and disorder. By 1996, when Bratton left his post, serious crimes in New York had decreased considerably and the number of homicides had fallen by approximately half. These data, however, should not be read as unequivocal proof that the effect was attributable solely to the application of the theory.

At the same time, the theory has been the subject of serious scholarly criticism. It has been pointed out that its aggressive application may lead to over-repression against marginalized communities, that alternative explanations exist for the decline in crime — demographic changes, economic factors, changes in police statistics — and that the causal link between disorder and serious crime has not been fully demonstrated empirically [2]. Consequently, the theory may be employed primarily as an explanatory and cautionary framework rather than as a universal causal law. Despite the criticisms directed at it, the theory remains highly influential and has been transposed beyond criminology — into education, healthcare, and organizational management.

The broken windows theory is convincingly complemented by the concept of normalization of deviance. This concept was formulated by Diane Vaughan, a sociologist at Columbia University, in her study *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (1996), devoted to the disaster of the Space Shuttle Challenger on 28 January 1986 [3].

Vaughan defines the normalization of deviance as a gradual process in which persons within an organization become so accustomed to a particular deviation from the rules that they cease to perceive it as a deviation, even though it clearly exceeds their own safety standards. The key mechanism is accumulation: a one-time deviation may arise under external pressure, but if it does not lead to immediate adverse consequences it establishes a precedent for future tolerance. Over time, repetition displaces the official perception of normalcy.

In the case of the Challenger, engineers had repeatedly observed erosion of the O-rings during previous flights, but since none of these observations had resulted in a catastrophe, the deviation gradually came to be perceived as acceptable. Instead of being treated as a warning signal, the recurring damage to the seals became an expected and tolerated element of operations. With each successive successful flight, the threshold of acceptable risk shifted upward and the sense of danger diminished. On 28 January 1986, during a launch in unusually low temperatures, the O-rings ultimately failed, leading to the

destruction of the shuttle and the death of its seven crew members. The tragedy demonstrates that the true danger lies not solely in a single technical defect, but in the institutional culture that gradually erases the boundary between the permissible and the fatal.

In a similar manner, within military organizations, when the circumvention of the rules becomes routine and routine violations are perceived as customary practice, the average service member adopts them as the *de facto* standard of behavior. In this way, the formula "We have always done it this way" gradually displaces the written rules and supplants normative discipline with group habit.

The broken windows theory and the normalization of deviance are mutually complementary concepts that describe one and the same fundamental process from different perspectives.

The broken windows theory emphasizes visual signals and their impact on the behavior of individuals entering a given environment. It explains how the environment shapes behavior from the outside inward: the external signs of disorder signal weakened control and encourage violations, or at least lower the threshold of restraint against committing them.

The normalization of deviance describes the reverse process — from the inside outward: how the internal culture of the organization gradually redraws the boundaries of the permissible, without the participants realizing that they are already operating outside the original standard. Persons outside the organization (third parties) may classify a given behavior as unacceptable, but to the internal participants it already appears normal because it corresponds to their internalized attitudes.

Applied jointly, the two theories provide a comprehensive explanatory framework for the processes of disciplinary erosion: visible disorder simultaneously signals weakened control to newcomers and reinforces the normalization of deviance among the existing members of the organization.

Military organizations are environments in which the broken windows theory possesses considerable analytical value owing to a number of structural characteristics. It should not be mechanically transposed from the urban environment to the military environment, but it offers a useful perspective for the analysis of the disciplinary environment, the command climate, and the role of visible standards.

The hierarchical structure characteristic of the military environment means that the behavior of commanders constitutes a visible signal that is reproduced down the chain of command. The toleration of a violation by a commander often functions as a more powerful practical signal than a series of written orders demanding compliance with discipline. To this is added the physical environment of the military formation: barracks, motor pools, staff offices, weapons-storage facilities, which is immediately visible and communicates with the service members. An uncleaned unit area, a disorderly warehouse, the improper wearing of the uniform, or defective equipment may function as the military equivalent of a broken window. Military service presupposes the intensive integration of new and experienced service members, in the course of which the newcomers rapidly assimilate the actual, rather than merely the formal, norms of behavior.

The armed forces constitute a total institution in the sense of an organization claiming comprehensive control over its members, including their behavior, dress, gestures, and public image — a concept formulated in the classical work of Erving Goffman [8]. It is precisely this total character that renders the visible public behavior of service members a particularly informative indicator: it manifests the degree to which the institution actually exercises the control it claims. Visible behavioral deviations in the public sphere may likewise function as a sign of broken windows. The careless wearing of the uniform, the demonstrative disregard for saluting, or the systematic failure to meet physical standards do not automatically constitute evidence of operational unpreparedness, but they may serve as early indicators of declining standards and weakening command control.

The mechanism through which the toleration of minor violations may escalate into systemic disciplinary breakdown may be described as a chain of six successive phases.

In the first phase — initial deviation — a seemingly insignificant violation appears: lateness by a few minutes, an unbuttoned button on the uniform, a missed inspection. The commander elects not to react, regarding the violation as inconsequential.

In the second phase — signaling — the absence of a reaction is read by the other service members as an indication that the standard has already shifted, or at least that its enforcement is conditional.

In the third phase — normalization — the deviation is repeated and begins to spread. Both veteran and newly assigned service members gradually come to perceive it as standard practice rather than as an exception.

In the fourth phase — escalation — the tolerated minor violations generate a self-reinforcing environment in which the threshold of the permissible shifts progressively and comes to encompass increasingly substantial deviations.

In the fifth phase — withdrawal of control — disciplined service members become demotivated. They either adapt to the lowered standard or cease to expend effort in maintaining order, since they observe that order is not being defended consistently. Inaction is exhibited on the part of both the command and the rank-and-file personnel.

In the sixth phase — critical event — the accumulated erosion materializes in a serious incident, a mission failure, or the destruction of command trust.

This chain of successive toleration of minor violations in peacetime bears a direct relation to the combat preparedness of the troops, since it is precisely in the everyday environment that the attitude toward the standard and toward its obligatory character is formed.

The commander who consistently enforces the requirements concerning appearance and behavior in the everyday public environment cultivates an organizational disposition for the consistent enforcement of combat standards as well. Conversely, the commander who tolerates everyday violations forms a disposition of selective enforcement — destructive precisely under conditions of combat stress. The mechanism operates

symmetrically: the organizational habit cultivated in the everyday environment is carried over into the crisis environment as well.

When minor deviations from the standard are repeated without consequences, the threshold of tolerated deviation gradually rises. The careless wearing of the uniform is not equivalent to failure in the execution of a combat mission, but it may be part of the same cultural pattern of declining standards. By analogy, the systematic neglect of the outward manifestations of discipline does not automatically denote the non-execution of orders, but it creates an environment in which the obligatory character of the standard appears increasingly conditional. Crises rarely occur abruptly; they are typically the result of a prolonged process of accumulation of normalized minor deviations.

A commander who does not exercise his authority in respect of publicly visible everyday violations conveys nonverbal signals to his subordinates that his requirements are conditional and selective. Such signaling is devastating to command authority — precisely the authority upon whose predictability and consistency the execution of orders in critical situations rests.

Of particular significance in this context is the role of the non-commissioned officer corps as the first line of disciplinary control. By analogy with the broken windows theory in its original form, non-commissioned officers are the functional equivalent of the permanent police patrol: their daily presence, immediate observation, and prompt reaction to deviations constitute the primary mechanism for the maintenance of order within the immediate organizational environment.

The public image of the service member is a directly observable indicator of the disciplinary state of the armed forces. Its principal components — the tidiness of dress, physical condition, the rendering of salutes, and conduct in public — may be regarded as functional proxy indicators of the quality of organizational control and of the actual presence of disciplinary standards.

Military dress fulfills a functional, identificatory, and symbolic role simultaneously. The manner in which the uniform is worn in the public sphere constitutes one of the most typical examples of a broken window within the military organization. A carelessly worn uniform — disheveled, unbuttoned, lacking the prescribed elements (for instance, without headgear) — represents not only a visible violation of the normative requirements but also a signal to the other service members that the rules may be treated as optional. Particularly indicative is the practice of daily wearing of field (camouflage) dress in an urban setting without operational necessity, since it signals not functionality but a lowered institutional standard.

Physical fitness is a normatively established requirement and a condition for the continuation of military service under Article 187, paragraph 1, of the Law on Defense and the Armed Forces [4]. The visible physical condition of the service member in the public sphere is a directly observable indicator of compliance with these standards. As an organizational broken window, the systematic and publicly visible non-compliance with the physical requirements may operate on three levels: at the individual level, as a sign of reduced readiness; at the command level, as a signal of weakened control over the standards; and at the institutional level, as a factor undermining public trust in the combat capability of the armed forces. The effect is particularly

unfavorable when such a condition is visible among the officer and non-commissioned officer corps, since these categories are required to serve as exemplars.

The rendering of a salute — the greeting addressed to a service member of higher rank — is an immediately visible test of the functioning of the chain of command. It is not a ceremonial anachronism but a public demonstration of the recognition of hierarchy. An army in which the personnel consistently observe the requirements of saluting and military courtesy in the public sphere demonstrates a functioning hierarchy. Conversely, an army in which these requirements are systematically neglected in public demonstrates an erosion of the hierarchical order.

Essential is the distinction between formal and conscious discipline. Disciplined behavior exhibited solely within the confines of military installations and only under direct supervision constitutes formal discipline. Disciplined behavior in public space, in the absence of direct control, is a hallmark of genuinely internalized discipline. It is precisely this latter discipline that constitutes the precondition for the execution of orders in a combat environment under disrupted communications, upon the loss of commanders, and under extreme psychological pressure. Public behavior is a test of precisely this internally assimilated discipline.

The Law on Defense and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria establishes the legal framework of military discipline. Article 242 of the Law defines the types of violations of military discipline; with the most recent amendments, non-compliance with the ethical rules of conduct of service members has been expressly included as a violation giving rise to grounds for disciplinary liability.

From the perspective of the broken windows theory, the normative system establishes the formal norms and the mechanisms of monitoring. Its effectiveness, however, also depends on the third element — signaling, that is, on the actual readiness of commanders to apply the disciplinary instruments consistently and in cases of minor violations as well. A norm that is not applied visibly and predictably gradually loses its disciplining force.

On 22 July 2025, the new Regulations on Military Service of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria entered into force [5]. They replaced the Regulations that had been in force since 2008 [6]. The new Regulations were developed in the context of the Armed Forces Development Plan up to 2026 and reflect the restructuring carried out in a significant portion of the armed forces.

Pursuant to Article 1, paragraph 2, of the new Regulations, they determine the rights and duties of service members concerning the organization and execution of military service in garrison areas and beyond them, during participation in missions, as well as the procedure for conducting ceremonies involving troops. Article 4 defines military service as a complex of continuous activities, rules, and norms directed at ensuring the fulfillment of the tasks of the armed forces. Article 5 defines military order as a system of activities and norms directed at ensuring the conditions for the equipping and maintenance of military installations, the implementation of the daily schedule, the observance of the relationships among service members, and the requirements concerning their appearance.

Particularly indicative is the regulation of the physical environment and appearance in Article 18, which governs the elements of the areas of military formations, as well as in Articles 24–26, which contain the requirements concerning the wearing of uniform clothing and distinctive insignia. These provisions bear a direct relation to the broken windows theory, since they establish the standard of visible order, the maintenance of which constitutes the first line of defense against disciplinary erosion.

This theoretical framework permits the derivation of a model for the prevention of disciplinary erosion within military organizations.

By analogy with Bratton's policing approach in New York, the commanders of military formations may apply a systematic visual audit of the environment in the units under their command. Such an audit should encompass at least three dimensions: the physical dimension — the condition of premises, motor pools, warehouses, equipment, and checkpoints; the behavioral dimension — punctuality at formations and duty assignments, compliance with the requirements concerning appearance, uniform, saluting, and military courtesy; and the communicational dimension — the tone of address, the manner of reporting incidents, and the readiness of subordinates to signal problems.

The principal countermeasures should include: the cultivation of a strong safety culture grounded in trust and shared values — as substantiated in detail in the works of James Reason on the management of organizational risks [10]; the maintenance of a state of chronic unease, by means of periodic safety stand-down days and cross-training; and the construction of a just culture that distinguishes unintentional errors from the irresponsible non-observance of the rules. These approaches, however, should be adapted to the particularities of military service and not mechanically transposed from civilian high-risk organizations.

A strong safety culture presupposes an environment in which every service member, regardless of his or her position within the hierarchy, feels both obligated and empowered to signal potential risks, without fearing that a well-intentioned warning will be treated as disloyalty. Such an environment is constructed through consistent leadership behavior, transparent communication, and a clearly demonstrated priority accorded to safety and readiness over the formal reporting of tranquility.

Chronic unease signifies the purposeful maintenance of professional vigilance even during periods of apparently normal functioning. Rather than treating the absence of incidents as proof that the system is safe, organizations should consistently assume that latent threats exist, awaiting favorable conditions to manifest themselves. This approach is characteristic of so-called high-reliability organizations, which operate in high-risk environments yet maintain a low frequency of accidents precisely owing to a disciplined suspicion toward apparent calm — a phenomenon systematically investigated in the works of Weick and Sutcliffe [11].

Periodic safety stand-down days represent a planned suspension of current activity, during which teams analyze accumulated experience, review procedures, and openly discuss problematic situations. Cross-training complements this practice, since it enables service members to familiarize themselves with the functions and limitations of their colleagues in other sections,

thereby broadening perspective and facilitating the recognition of risks that are invisible within the confines of narrow specialization.

Lastly, a just culture, in the sense developed by Sidney Dekker [12], introduces a clear and predictable framework for the evaluation of human errors. It requires the distinction between: the unintentional error, committed notwithstanding the conscientious efforts of the service member; risk-taking behavior, arising from an underestimation of danger; and the deliberate violation, associated with the conscious disregard of established rules. Only the last of these categories justifies a disciplinary sanction in the full sense, while the first two should also be employed as occasions for organizational learning. Without such predictability, any system begins to incentivize the concealment, rather than the reporting, of errors.

The broken windows theory in the organizational context acquires particular depth when applied to the behavior of the leaders themselves. A commander who tolerates his own violations transmits a twofold signal: that the standards are of negligible importance, and that control has weakened. Conversely, small but consistent actions on the part of the commander demonstrating personal adherence to the standard exert a disproportionately large influence on organizational culture.

When a leader disregards a rule he has himself imposed upon his subordinates — irrespective of whether it concerns lateness to a briefing, a missed mandatory inspection, or non-observance of an established protocol — the subordinates rarely perceive this as an isolated episode. They read it as a tacit shifting of the standard. If the commander does not wear a helmet and gas mask after having required this of all others, the message is unambiguous: the rules exist more for form than for substance. The effect is multiplied down the hierarchy, since each successive leadership echelon begins to perceive the deviation as tacit permission to lower its own standard as well.

The psychological mechanism underlying this dynamic is convincingly explained by the social learning theory of Albert Bandura [9], according to which persons model their behavior above all on the actions, rather than on the words, of authority figures. When a discrepancy exists between the declared expectations and the observed behavior of the leader, the subordinates follow the behavior, not the declaration. From this arises the erosion of trust — a process whereby each successive inconsistency between word and deed progressively renders the formal rules meaningless and transforms written procedures into hollow bureaucracy.

The reverse direction of influence is no less powerful. The commander who conspicuously observes even the smallest requirements — who arrives first, who inspects his personal equipment in accordance with the established procedure, who openly acknowledges his own mistakes — creates an environment in which the standards are perceived as living and obligatory. These seemingly minor gestures function as symbolic markers that continuously reaffirm the value framework of the organization. Like the well-maintained façade in the original theory, they signal that someone is in fact watching, cares about order, and defends it.

This effect is particularly illustrative in crisis situations. When, acting under pressure, the leader maintains adherence to

the established procedures rather than circumventing them in the name of speed or convenience, he transmits the strongest possible message: standards are not a luxury for tranquil times, but precisely an instrument for the overcoming of difficulties. Conversely, if at the first difficulty the commander himself violates the protocol, the entire system of rules is revealed as ornamental, valid only under favorable conditions.

Ultimately, the broken windows theory, applied to leadership behavior, reveals a fundamental truth about organizational culture: it is formed not by what is written in the manuals and directives, but by the daily, visible, and consistent actions of those who stand at the apex of the hierarchy. Every small concession by the leader is a crack in the window; every small manifestation of discipline is a timely repair that prevents further destruction.

The criticism of the broken windows theory in the context of policing — more specifically, the danger of over-repression — is relevant to the military context as well. The application of the theory does not signify zero tolerance in the sense of the mechanical punishment of every minor violation. In a military environment, this signifies that the commander should respond to every violation, but the response must be proportionate, consistent, and formative, rather than merely punitive. It is consistency, and not maximum severity, that constitutes the decisive factor in the maintenance of a healthy disciplinary environment.

The transposition of the theory from the urban environment to the military organization is not free of challenges. Military organizations differ from urban communities in several essential parameters: membership is institutionalized, the hierarchy is formal and legally established, control is structured and multilayered, and sanctions are normatively regulated. These differences entail that the environment within the military organization is not confined to the material setting but also encompasses the organizational culture, the command climate, and the mechanisms of selection, training, and socialization.

One of the principal dangers is the risk that disciplinary control may degenerate into an instrument of harassment, formalism, or the suppression of constructive criticism. It is precisely for this reason that any invocation of the broken windows theory in a military context must be accompanied by clear boundaries between the maintenance of the standard and the abuse of power.

As in the original criminological discussion, the link between the toleration of minor violations and the occurrence of serious incidents in a military environment is correlative rather than strictly causal. Consequently, the theory should be regarded as an element of a broader explanatory framework rather than as a sole and self-sufficient causal chain. Its strength lies not so much in the promise of absolute causality as in its capacity to capture the early signals of organizational erosion.

IV. CONCLUSION

The broken windows theory of Wilson and Kelling, supplemented by Diane Vaughan's concept of normalization of deviance, provides a valuable analytical and practical framework for understanding and counteracting the processes of disciplinary erosion within military organizations.

The theory offers an explanatory model of the mechanism through which the toleration of seemingly insignificant violations gradually weakens the organizational culture. Furthermore, it emphasizes the significance of the physical environment and of visual signals as indicators of the state of discipline — an aspect elaborately regulated in the Regulations on Military Service. At the same time, the theory substantiates the necessity of a consistent, albeit proportionate, response to all violations — not so much for the sake of the sanction itself as for the signal that the response transmits to the entire organization.

The normative framework of the Republic of Bulgaria — the Law on Defense and the Armed Forces, its implementing regulations, and the Regulations on Military Service — provides an adequate legal basis for the maintenance of military discipline. The inclusion of non-compliance with the ethical rules of conduct as a violation of military discipline under Article 242 of the Law represents a step in the proper direction. The legal framework in itself, however, is insufficient unless it is supported by consistent command practice and by an organizational culture that renders the standards visible and effectively obligatory.

Of particular importance is the application of the derived model with respect to the officer corps. By virtue of his rank and in accordance with the established traditions of military service, the officer is the bearer and transmitter of a value system that far exceeds the framework of the specific functional duties. The visible conduct of the officer in public space — the observance of the requirements concerning appearance, military courtesy, the maintained physical fitness, and adherence to the disciplinary standards outside any directly assigned duty — shapes the perception, both of the subordinates and of society, of the essence of officer's honor. The toleration of minor personal deviations on the part of an officer, even when not directly connected with the exercise of command authority, operates as a broken window within the officer corps and gradually undermines the overall level of the disciplinary standard. Conversely, the consistently demonstrated personal adherence to the requirements on the part of the officers in any public situation functions as a daily instrument for the preservation of officer identity and for the construction of an integral military culture in which discipline is a personal responsibility rather than an externally imposed obligation.

The challenge remains precisely in the sphere of organizational culture — in the readiness of commanders at every level to repair the broken windows in a timely manner, consistently, and without ostentatious formalism, before small cracks turn into wide breaches. In this sense, discipline is not merely a matter of sanction, but above all a matter of a daily maintained standard that is seen, applied, and defended.

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