

# SEAM Values & How Ukrainians Conduct the War

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## Abstract

In this article we explore the intersection of the Socio-Economic Approach to Management (SEAM) values and the networking methods used by the Ukrainian military and civil society to fight the Russian full-scale invasion started in 2022. SEAM values emphasize the full use of human potential in management, which aligns with the collaborative, networking, and adaptive approaches taken by Ukrainian military personnel and civilians to resist the invasion. We also examine how the Ukrainian army and society have mobilized and utilized its resources to fight the war, and how this aligns (or not) with the principles of SEAM. We investigate if SEAM can borrow anything from the Ukrainian wartime experience and vice versa.

**Key words:** SEAM, Ukraine, developing human potential, organizational cohesion.

We have observed the relationship between the core values of the Socio-economic Approach to Management, or SEAM, (Conbere & Heorhiadi, 2018) and the operational strategies adopted by Ukrainians in their conduct of warfare in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Our assumption is that these values have helped the Ukrainian military to succeed in their fight against a much larger Russian military. SEAM and the Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion share three essential values: developing human potential, organizational cohesion, and absolute respect and love for people.

## Development of human potential

To begin, we will consider the concept of using and developing human potential. Within the Ukrainian armed forces and society at large, a remarkable propensity for self-organization has emerged, even predating the onset of the full-scale conflict. Occupation is not a new experience for Ukrainians: Nazis in World War II, Russians before and after World War II until independence in 1991. In earlier years western Ukraine was part of Lithuania, Austria-Hungary and Poland. Survival depended on relationships developed out of sight of authorities, which is to say, Ukrainians survived by self-organizing in small groups.

Normally, when one thinks of military culture, things that come to mind are strict hierarchies, unwavering obedience to superiors, and an acceptance of the fact that each soldier is but a small, uninformed cog in a big wheel. The Ukrainian army of today is much more flexible than that. Ukrainian officials say it was the flexible command structure that allowed the army to cause the quick Russian collapse at the beginning of the full scale invasion. “The Ukrainian army has the freedom to make decisions at every level,” the Minister of Defense of Ukraine Oleksii Reznikov says, likening it to NATO standards. “They do it quickly, unlike the Russians.” (Shuster & Bergengruen, 2022).

Impactful events like the Orange Revolution in 2004, EuroMaidan in 2013, and the ongoing Donbas war since 2014 have collectively contributed to a pattern of defying conventional norms to attain essential goals. This embodies the essence of Ukraine's drive to overcome challenges and extract the full extent of its potential. In the times of the former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia, the Ukrainian state was corrupt. The Ukrainian government was modeled on the old Soviet top-down, rigid system. After the beginning of the war in 2014 (the invasion and annexation of Crimea) the government struggled to combat corruption. So, the trust in the government was never absolute, and people started to self-organize for the resistance against the invasion. Each is an example of self-organizing in order to develop the potential for a better, less corrupt life in Ukraine.

Within the Ukrainian armed forces, the principle of organizational cohesion becomes of critical importance. Unlike conventional military structures, Ukrainian forces operate as decentralized networks, with responsibility distributed at lower levels of the hierarchy. This decentralized approach was prominently observed at the beginning of the full-scale invasion in 2022. According to Jeffrey Edmonds, a former CIA analyst and Russia director on the National Security Council, "Ukrainians have demonstrated much better distributed tactical-level operations...They're much more disciplined" than the Russian army (Shuster & Bergengruen, 2022). Jim Settele, the Executive Director of the School of Policy and International Affairs at the University of Maine observed that Ukrainians used guerrilla counterinsurgency tactics with small groups along with the utilization of cutting-edge weaponry from international sources, like anti-tank weapons, Javelins, and Stinger missiles, and those small platoon groups were able to successfully halt the Russians (Tcopson, 2022).

The Ukrainian military has adeptly displayed tactical flexibility in response to the evolving dynamics of 21st-century warfare. Their strategy encompasses an array of methods, ranging from conventional warfare to guerrilla tactics and cyber warfare, all tailored to counteract Russian aggression. Notably, small and highly mobile units have been deployed for targeted strikes against Russian positions. Leveraging their superior terrain knowledge, these units swiftly adapt to changing circumstances. The Ukrainian context promotes an adaptive mindset, wherein superiors not only anticipate but actively demand autonomous decision-making and responsibility from subordinates.

In stark contrast, the Russian military has relied on traditional tactics such as large-scale ground invasions and aerial assaults. At its most obvious, the top down approach was represented by the "meat waves" by the Wagner Group prisoners/mercenaries that were the disposable infantry of the Russian offensive in Eastern Ukraine in the winter of 2022-23 (Lister et al., 2023). Although effective to some extent in territorial acquisition, these strategies exposed Russian forces to considerable losses and resource depletion. Unlike the Ukrainian approach, which prioritized adaptability, the Russian military emphasized detailed planning and strict command structures.

General Zaluzhny, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, was surprised by Russia's blunders. When the enemy faced heavy resistance or lost the ability to resupply, they did not retreat or shift to a different approach. "They just herded their soldiers into the slaughter," Zaluzhny said. "They chose the scenario that suited me best of all" (Shuster & Bergengruen, 2022).

An anecdote illustrates the difference between the armies: Oleksandr Kostyuk, who previously headed the IT services department at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, served as a lieutenant and platoon commander in the war, despite lacking prior military experience. His approach mirrored the wider Ukrainian military character, encapsulated by goal-setting followed by empowering subordinates to independently navigate the path toward achieving those goals. After setting the goals and objectives for his unit, he told his people: "You need to find a way to achieve these goals on your own. If you are unable to decide, I will provide a detailed order, but there is no guarantee you will like it " (Kolomiichuk, 2023).

This spirit of collaboration is further evidenced by stories from the Ukrainian military (Zog, 2023). The account highlights the counsel for Ukrainian soldiers to acquaint themselves with peers in the trenches and neighboring units. The purpose of this spirit of camaraderie is to foster effective collaboration, enabling units to function cohesively beyond top-down directives. This diverges notably from the Russian army's inflexible top-down approach, which may be seen, for example, in the order given to the Russian soldiers in the Eastern Ukraine, to kill anyone retreating from the front lines, no matter what the cause.

Curiously, in a recent publication by the West Point Modern War Institute, Russian military theorists received praise for their advocacy of tactically independent units, such as battalions, which are deemed essential for countering precision long-range weaponry (Noorman, 2023). The author somehow avoided the discussion about the extent to which these ideas are being used in the current Russo-Ukrainian war by the Russian army. Independent and initiative operation is possible only when the soldiers are highly motivated (as the Ukrainian military are). Russian troops (except for highly professional airborne-assault units and Wagner mercenaries) are unable to act without top-down control.

Nevertheless, within the Ukrainian Army, the willingness and propensity of commanders to both permit and embrace responsibility are not universally steadfast. Kramer and Schneider (2023), former instructors from the US Army who provided training to Ukrainian units during the war, commented that numerous senior Ukrainian Army commanders still exhibited the persisting Soviet-era mindset, which centralizes decision-making at higher echelons. In contrast, they emphasized that the US Army empowers officers commanding units directly on the battlefield to wield significantly more autonomous decision-making authority. Their observations underscored the ongoing transformation within the Ukrainian military's officer corps. Younger officers recognized the imperative to shed antiquated mindsets, yet they confronted resistance from elder officers deeply rooted in Soviet doctrine and centralized planning.

### **Organizational cohesion**

In SEAM, organizational cohesion is very important. Cohesion is the ability of employees to work cooperatively without needing direction from hierarchical superiors. This is exactly what happened in the Ukrainian society.

The failure of the Russian invasion of Ukraine can be attributed in part to the robust total defense efforts executed by Ukraine during the most important initial 72 hours of battle. Notably, strategic Ukrainian cities situated directly along the borders exhibited remarkable resilience in the

face of relentless assaults. Notable among these are Chernihiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv, which played a decisive role in thwarting the swift advance of Russian forces toward Kyiv.

The rapid transformation from regular civilian routines to staunch resistance signifies a profound shift in mindset. This transformation is fueled by two important factors. Firstly, Ukraine's political decentralization since 2014 has vested local governors and mayors with decision-making autonomy, boosting a sense of self-reliance. This empowerment facilitated swift localized decision-making, eliminating the need for centralized directives from Kyiv. Secondly, the experiences post-2014 and intensive training efforts since 2021 have equipped Ukrainian administrations and political leaders with the awareness to respond effectively in times of conflict.

The steadfast determination displayed by major Ukrainian cities and their urban populations exemplifies the core tenet of total defense – an approach wherein the aggressor confronts not only the military but an entire society united against them. This strategy endowed Ukraine with remarkable resilience across diverse fronts, exemplified by its rapid recovery from Russian strikes targeting critical infrastructure such as railways, highways, and energy facilities. This achievement facilitated continuous support for both the civilian population and military operations. It encompassed the distribution of foreign military aid, equipment, and logistical backing for combat troops.

The previous governments in Ukraine were marred by corruption, which eroded the trust of the Ukrainian people. Then came President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who stepped up when it mattered most. There's a widespread belief shared by people of different political opinions that Zelenskyy stood against corruption and diligently worked to unify Ukraine while seeking help from other countries. He became a sort of role model for leadership, articulating the anger and determination of the Ukrainian people and rallying them to stand strong against the Russian invasion, with the goal of regaining all the territories Russia had taken. In SEAM jargon, Zelenskyy's steering of the nation brought cohesion to national work, fighting the war and supporting the military.

### **Respect and love for people**

SEAM and the Ukrainian war effort share the spirit of absolute respect and love for people as one of their core values. This principle resonates deeply, driving individuals toward defending their homeland and backing the army with unwavering support. This collective sentiment has forged a united and engaged force within Ukrainian society, rallying all of the population to the cause of total defense. It is true that there are some who unscrupulously have profited from the war, or fled to avoid fighting. However, compared to the low support for the government prior to EuroMaidan 2013, the current support is tremendous.

The details of this fact were accurately documented in a report authored by Nico Lange (Lange, 2023), a Senior Advisor at GLOBSEC (Munich Security Conference) and former Chief of Executive Staff at the German Federal Ministry of Defense. His extensive study, conducted from 2022 to 2023, comprehensively examined the evolving war dynamics. The report, titled "How to Beat Russia: What Armed Forces in NATO Should Learn from Ukraine's Homeland Defense," captured his primary observations gleaned from fieldwork in Ukraine. Lange concluded that Ukraine's capability

to overcome Russia came not solely from military hardware, but also from the human factor. The report search into how Ukraine's steadfast affection for its nation plays a crucial role, in uniting the people in an unstoppable surge forward. From the valorous soldiers stationed at the frontlines to the devoted civilians offering indispensable aid, undeniable love for the nation has served as a propelling force. This isn't mere sentiment; it's a dynamic impulse driving action and resoluteness.

Here is a personal anecdote to illustrate this point that sharply underscores the deep-seated love for the nation. In 2014, at the onset of the war, one of the authors' brother-in-law was drafted as a crew member for a self-propelled howitzer. Unfortunately, a critical challenge arose – none of the 20 howitzers in his battalion were operational. However, the strength of community and shared purpose illuminated the way. Farmers from nearby areas stepped up, volunteering their expertise to repair the diesel engines of the howitzers, and demonstrating their commitment to the nation's defense.

This heartwarming example encapsulates the profound bond between the Ukrainian people and their homeland. It transcends mere obligation; it's an authentic and steadfast connection. This collective sense of duty and love remains a driving force moving the nation forward in times of adversity, channeling individual actions into a unified movement for the greater good.

In an unprecedented development within the first hours of the conflict, the civilian population emerged as a crucial asset, providing millions of additional sets of eyes and ears for the army and security forces. The Ukrainian Armed Forces and the SBU (Ukrainian Security Service) swiftly established Telegram channels on February 24th, 2022, disseminating directives for reporting critical information. Leveraging the ubiquity of cell phones, Ukrainians documented columns of vehicles, Russian positions, troop movements, and other crucial data. This surge of citizen-generated intelligence expedited swift data collation, real-time analysis, and precise targeting.

Ukrainian society also played a vital role in mobilizing the armed forces from the outset of the conflict. Images of lengthy recruitment lines on February 24th, 2022, reverberated globally, showcasing the rapid response of highly trained individuals volunteering for military service. Effective processing of volunteers' information into modern IT systems yielded a rapidly expanding, dependable database of skills and locations, forming the bedrock of the military's personnel reserve.

These initiatives found fertile ground in Ukraine due to its distinctive history, marked by the emergence of horizontal social networks following significant events such as the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan. These networks seamlessly transitioned to support the armed forces, playing a decisive role in their reconstruction and equipping post the annexation of Crimea and Russian intervention in the Donbas.

In summary, Ukraine's effective defense strategy harnessed cultural dynamics, robust civil society involvement, and global community support, yielding remarkable military accomplishments even against formidable odds. The nation's unwavering commitment to its homeland is evident, propelling it forward with resolute unity.

## **Challenges to be resolved**

As the conflict persists, certain inadequacies within the internal culture of the Ukrainian armed forces have come to light. Among these challenges is developing the ability to transition from a decentralized defensive approach to a more methodical and disciplined offensive stance, employing larger formations. Although the Ukrainian Army's adeptness at self-organization has proven highly effective in various aspects, the integration of independently operating units and leaders into more extensive formations for significant offensives has proven intricate.

A notable illustration of this predicament emerged in 2023 when the Ukrainian army lost control of the city of Soledar due to a lack of coordination. Tom Cooper, a renowned Austrian war blogger closely following the conflict, referred to the Ukrainian units struggling in Soledar as the “Soledar Debating Club” (Cooper, 2023).

As underscored by Kramer and Schneider (2023), former US Army instructors and founders of the Ukraine Defense Support Group based in Kyiv, a significant challenge confronting the Ukrainian Armed Forces is their uneven execution of combined arms operations. The absence of coordination between tank and infantry units has resulted in escalated casualties and mission failures. Tanks often serve as mobile artillery, with the essential synergy between armor and infantry remaining inadequately exploited. Furthermore, the coordination of artillery fire is disjointed, and operational sequencing lacks cohesion, leading to coordination challenges and concerns about friendly fire incidents among unit commanders.

## **Conclusion**

When we examine the commonalities between socio-economic approach to management (SEAM) and the Ukrainian war effort, we can observe a shared focus on human potential. SEAM emphasizes the development of human potential, aiming to reduce dysfunctions within the system, foster organizational cohesion, and promote respect and love for people. Similarly, Ukrainians in war also strive for extensive and full utilization of human potential.

SEAM recognizes the need to address and reduce dysfunctions within a system. In a similar manner, Ukrainians in war also confront various dysfunctions and are often compelled to override existing structures and problems, inventing new ways of acting to overcome challenges.

SEAM encourages organizations to steer towards common goals. Similarly, Ukraine mobilizes the entire society to resist invading forces. The collective effort and determination to defend Ukraine serve as a unifying force, driving Ukrainians toward a shared purpose.

In conclusion, the SEAM values of developing human potential, fostering organizational cohesion, and promoting absolute respect and love for people align harmoniously with the way Ukrainians conduct war, and we believe, have been a significant part of the success of the Ukrainian military.

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