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EMBODIED-MEANING INTEGRATION AND THE DYNAMICS OF MEANING FIELDS IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL AFTER COMBAT EXPERIENCE: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF WORLDVIEW RECONFIGURATION

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Abstract. The article substantiates an integrative theoretical model of embodied-meaning integration and the dynamics of meaning fields in the consciousness of military personnel after combat experience, conceptualized as a holistic process of reconstructing the internal worldview. The methodology includes theoretical-analytical, comparative-conceptual, and structural-functional approaches, as well as theoretical and visual modelling. The results demonstrate that meaning transformation unfolds across five key levels – embodied-somatic, cognitive-narrative, moral-value, social-identity, and existential – forming a coherent system of reorganization. The proposed structural and flow models describe both the architectonics of meaning and the mechanisms of its integration following war-related extreme events. It is concluded that the meaning dynamics of military consciousness is multilayered and can serve as a foundation for developing psychocorrectional programs focused on embodied-meaning integration during veterans' post-war reintegration.

Key words: embodied regulation, meaning fields, moral integration, narrative transformation, existential perspective, social identity, combat experience, meaning-making.

Introduction. In global psychological science, the problem of meaning transformation after traumatic events is viewed as a multilayered process encompassing the bodily, emotional, cognitive, and value systems of the individual. Research confirms that combat experience induces profound disruptions in basic world assumptions, destabilizes established self-narratives, and creates a need for reconstructing psychological integrity (Janoff-Bulman, 2022; Park, 2010; Adler et al., 2021). Within body-oriented and neurophysiological approaches, particular attention is paid to the role of interoception, proprioception, and autonomic regulation as mechanisms that enable access to the meaning processing of traumatic experiences (Payne et al., 2015; Porges, 2011; Mehling et al., 2023).

A significant contribution to understanding meaning-making processes has been made within meaning-making research, which demonstrates that interpreting traumatic events is a key mechanism for restoring coherence in one's life story and for renewing value structures (Park, 2010; Neimeyer, 2001; Gillies & Joseph, 2022). Models of posttraumatic growth emphasize the possibility of generating new meanings and life orientations following encounters with extreme events (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Tedeschi, 2023). A separate line of contemporary research focuses on the phenomenon of moral injury, where transformations in the moral dimension of experience and the restoration of moral integrity are considered critical components of posttraumatic adaptation (Williamson et al., 2021; Litz et al., 2022).

In the Ukrainian scientific discourse, interest in meaning-making under wartime conditions is rapidly increasing. Empirical studies demonstrate substantial shifts in value orientations, self-awareness, responsibility, sense of community and belonging, and future perspectives among military personnel returning from combat (Reva, 2024; Pohorilska et al., 2024; Zakharia, 2023). Within the existential-systemic paradigm of consciousness proposed by S. Kalishchuk, meaning is conceptualized as an integral unit of psychic organization and the structural foundation of human interaction with the world. The architectonics of meaning includes bodily, emotional, cognitive, value-based, and

existential components that together form a coherent system of lived experience (Kalishchuk, 2020; Kalishchuk, 2023).

Despite considerable progress in international and Ukrainian research, the relationship between bodily regulation, affective processes, and meaning fields after combat experience remains insufficiently described. The mechanisms through which bodily-sensory activation, interoceptive sensitivity, and affective processing contribute to the renewal of meaning structures and the integration of combat experience into a coherent worldview remain understudied. There is likewise a lack of theoretical models that combine meaning architectonics with embodied-meaning integration.

The aim of this article is to articulate a theoretical and methodological model of embodied-meaning integration and the dynamics of meaning fields in the consciousness of military personnel after combat experience, explaining the mechanisms of worldview reconfiguration following extreme wartime events.

Main Part. In accordance with the stated aim, the following research tasks were identified:

1. to analyse international and Ukrainian concepts of meaning-making, posttraumatic growth, moral-value integration, and body-oriented approaches;
2. to formulate the theoretical foundations of embodied-meaning integration in the context of combat experience;
3. to conduct a structural-functional analysis of meaning fields in the consciousness of military personnel;
4. to substantiate a conceptual model of worldview reconfiguration and develop its graphical representations.

Materials and Methods. The material for this study consists of a corpus of Ukrainian and international scholarly works devoted to the meaning paradigm of consciousness (Kalishchuk, 2020; Kalishchuk, 2023), post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Tedeschi, 2023), meaning making (Park, 2010; Neimeyer, 2001), moral injury (Williamson et al., 2021), and body-oriented and neurophysiological models of regulation (Payne et al., 2015; Porges, 2011; Mehling et al., 2023), as well as recent Ukrainian research on meaning transformation among veterans (Pohorilska et al., 2024; Reva, 2024).

The methodological framework includes theoretical-analytical and comparative-conceptual analyses, the structural-functional approach, the method of theoretical modelling, and visual modelling techniques. These methods made it possible to construct both structural and processual (flow) models of embodied-meaning integration.

Results and Discussion. The results of the theoretical and methodological analysis demonstrated that the dynamics of meaning structures in military personnel after combat experience have a systemic, multilayered, and bodily rooted character. Within the meaning paradigm of consciousness (Kalishchuk, 2020), meaning structures function as integrative formations that unify bodily-somatic reactions, emotional codes, cognitive schemas, moral-value orientations, identity positions, and existential meanings. Combat experience, as an extreme existential and bodily event, initiates the process of their reorganization – a process described in contemporary literature as a transition from fragmentation to integration, and from chaos to an ordered meaning system (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Park, 2010; Wong, 2023).

Based on the integration of these theoretical approaches, five key blocks of meaning transformation were identified, each representing a distinct level in the dynamic reconfiguration of meaning structures after combat exposure. These blocks reflect the sequence through which meaning reconstruction unfolds – from bodily-sensory reactions to the formation of an updated life perspective. A structured presentation of each level follows.

1. Bodily-Somatic and Affective Foundations of Meaning Change

Recent Ukrainian psychophysiological studies (2023–2025) confirm that combat experience primarily affects the bodily-sensory and affective levels, which serve as the «entry channel» for expe-

riencing trauma. Research by M. Hryniova (2023) demonstrates pronounced markers of autonomic hyperactivation among service members following deployment, including disrupted respiratory rhythms, instability of cardiorespiratory regulation, and changes in interoceptive sensitivity. Studies by O. Malyshevska (2023), along with analytical reports from the Military Center for Mental Health of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine (2023), confirm the presence of somatic traces of combat events—muscle rigidity, micro-alarms in the body, and reactive bodily responses—that function as sensory triggers within the meaning system of the service member.

In body-oriented models of trauma (Payne et al., 2015; Porges, 2011; Kuhfuß et al., 2021), it is emphasized that restoring bodily regulation, as well as interoceptive and proprioceptive sensitivity constitutes a fundamental condition for accessing the emotional and meaning-related content of traumatic experience. Findings from systematic reviews and randomized trials (Andersen et al., 2021; Kuhfuß et al., 2021) demonstrate that somatic stabilization reduces hyperactivation, supports the integration of fragmented sensory memory traces, and enables cognitive–narrative processing of events. These findings align with Ukrainian empirical observations highlighting the bodily nature of disrupted meaning coherence during the initial post-rotation period and the importance of embodied-meaning integration in restoring service members' capacity to make sense of their experience (Pohorilska et al., 2024; Reva, 2024).

Thus, the bodily-affective layer forms the primary contour of meaning system reorganization, creating the conditions for transitioning to higher levels of processing—cognitive, narrative, and reflective. It is at this stage that fragmented experience becomes available for structuring and embedding within meaning schemas.

Gradual reduction of bodily dysregulation opens access to cognitive and reflective processing, forming the second mechanism—cognitive-narrative reconstruction. At this level, chaotic or fragmented elements of experience acquire causal-temporal structure, initial meaning links emerge, and the event becomes «embedded» into the personal life narrative.

2. Cognitive-Narrative Changes and the Reconstruction of Life Meaning

Cognitive-narrative transformations manifest as shifts in interpretations, reconstruction of meanings, and renewal of the internal autonarrative. Research by Park (2010) and Neimeyer (2001), along with contemporary Ukrainian studies (Reva, 2024; Pohorilska et al., 2024), demonstrates that meaning recovery among military personnel is associated with forming coherent connections between wartime events, personal responsibility, experiences of loss, feelings of guilt, acquired strengths, and future life perspectives.

In this context, the cognitive-narrative mechanism acts as a structural integrator of the meaning system: it restores temporal continuity, establishes causal connections, forms the «framework» of an updated life story, and ensures the alignment of experiences with value positions. This corresponds to the concept of meaning universals described by S. Kalishchuk (2020), within which meaning integration occurs through constructing links among experience, thought, moral evaluation, and narrative reflection.

Such reconstruction restores the individual's sense of internal continuity and agency, laying the groundwork for engaging with deeper moral and value-related dimensions of experience.

Once the basic temporal-meaning structure is restored, the meaning system transitions to the level of moral-value integration—the third mechanism, during which service members reconsider responsibility, justice, guilt, and moral integrity. Harmonizing the autonarrative opens the space for processing the moral and ethical dimensions of wartime experience, forming the next layer of meaning transformation.

3. Moral-Value Shifts and the Phenomenon of Moral Injury

Contemporary Ukrainian studies (Kovalov, 2023; Yatsenko, 2024) confirm that moral dilemmas, witnessing destruction, the necessity of making decisions under threat, as well as encounters with

borderline situations of war, become central determinants of meaning changes in military personnel. These findings are consistent with international work within the framework of moral injury (Williamson et al., 2021), which describes the disruption of basic moral orientations, the loss of moral-value integrity, and the emergence of an internal conflict between values and compelled actions.

Within the meaning paradigm of consciousness, this process is viewed as a change in moral-value universals – deep meaning structures that define conceptions of good and evil, responsibility, duty, humanity, the limits of what is permissible, and the value of human life (Kalishchuk, 2020). Under the impact of combat experience, these universals undergo deformation, which is manifested in experiences of guilt, shame, ambivalent feelings about one's actions or inaction, and in difficulties maintaining moral-value integrity.

The moral-value mechanism performs a critically important function in the structure of meaning reorganization: it determines how a service member integrates the experience of war into their value system, and whether they are able to construct an updated moral position without self-destructive self-blame. In this process, a key role is played by acknowledging responsibility, accepting vulnerability, rethinking the boundaries of humanity, and restoring connection with social identity, which corresponds to Ukrainian data on the importance of moral support from comrades and society (Kovalov, 2023; Yatsenko, 2024).

Once the service member restores a basic sense of value integrity, the next dimension of meaning dynamics becomes the rethinking of social bonds and one's role in different communities – that is, the process of socio-identity changes.

4. Identity Transformations and Social Embeddedness

War radically reshapes the socio-identity structures of military personnel. Ukrainian studies (Zablotska-Zhytka, 2023; Demchenko, 2024) show that after rotation there is a complex process of re-negotiating the relationships between civilian, military, and veteran identities. These shifts directly influence the meaning system, as they determine how the service member interprets their role, responsibility, scope of influence, and belonging to various social communities.

Research by Pohorilska and colleagues (2024) emphasizes that meaning making under conditions of war is formed in interaction with others: through the support of comrades, engagement in communities, experiences of solidarity, and collective coping. Social ties thus function as a stabilizing factor for the meaning system after traumatic events and contribute to restoring the sense of «self-in-the-world».

In the model of meaning architectonics developed within the meaning paradigm (Kalishchuk, 2020), the identification level serves as the «social framework» of the meaning system: it aligns internal experiences with the context of group norms, roles, and values. This level determines whether a service member will be able to integrate combat experience into their life story and construct a new agentic position after returning to civilian life.

Once socio-identity stability has been re-established, meaning dynamics shift to the deepest level – existential-transcendent changes, where the service member rethinks issues of life, death, freedom, responsibility, and the personal meaning of what has been lived through. Once social identity becomes rooted, the meaning system transitions to the level at which the most fundamental questions of existence are addressed – the existential-transcendent dimension.

5. Existential-Transcendent Changes and the Reconsideration of Life

Ukrainian studies from 2023-2025 (Zablotska-Zhytka, 2023; Reva, 2024) confirm that for many military personnel, the experience of loss, encounters with existential limit situations, and direct contact with mortality become catalysts for profound existential transformations. Veterans reconsider fundamental questions of life meaning, their presence in the world, and the boundaries of personal responsibility, freedom, dignity, and humanity.

These findings are consistent with the principles of existential positive psychology 2.0 proposed by Wong (2023), where suffering is seen not solely as a destructive factor but as a source of deep

growth, opening possibilities for renewing value orientations and expanding one's life perspective. International empirical studies emphasize that service members often form a new level of life meaning through reflection on loss, survival, responsibility toward comrades, and duty to society (Cox et al., 2023), which fully corresponds to Ukrainian data.

Within the meaning paradigm (Kalishchuk, 2020), the existential-transcendent level is the «upper horizon» of the architectonics of meaning. It enables the integration of bodily reactions, affective states, cognitive reconstructions, moral evaluations, and identity changes into a coherent, structured, and personally significant worldview. At this level, an updated life perspective is formed – the capacity to envision a future despite traumatic experience.

In summary, the five mechanisms described – bodily-emotional, cognitive-narrative, moral-value, socio-identity, and existential-transcendent – constitute a unified dynamic system of reorganization of meaning structures in military personnel. Each mechanism reflects a specific level of the architectonics of meaning, but it is precisely their interaction that ensures the transition from fragmentation and disintegration to coherence, agency, and a renewed life perspective.

This approach makes it possible to view meaning change not only as a consequence of traumatic impact but also as a process of gradual restoration and reconfiguration of the inner world – a process that is crucial for psychological resilience, moral-value integration, and the post-war reintegration of military personnel.

Further analysis of the obtained results requires integrating the identified mechanisms into a coherent theoretical-methodological framework. Since meaning changes in service members are formed at different levels of experience – from bodily-somatic to existential – there is a need for a model capable of simultaneously representing the structure of these levels and the dynamics of their interaction. This need is consistent with the principles of the meaning paradigm of consciousness developed in the works of Kalishchuk (2017, 2020), where meaning structures are conceptualized as a multilevel system that includes cognitive contours, mnemonic contexts, meaning universals, and mechanisms of reorganizational action.

On the basis of this paradigm, as well as contemporary international approaches to post-traumatic change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Park, 2010; Wong, 2023), the article proposes an original integrative model of the architectonics of meaning in military personnel with combat experience. It includes two complementary visual representations – structural and processual (flow) – which together make it possible to trace both the internal organization of the meaning system and the process of its reorganization after combat exposure.

The first element of the model is a structural representation (Table 1), which displays nine levels of meaning architectonics – from somatosensory and affective to cognitive, identity, existential, and integrative. The table summarizes stable meaning formations described in the works of Kalishchuk (2017, 2020) and presents architectonics as a multilevel system of interrelated elements that respond to the extreme experience of war.

Based on the table, a structural model of the architectonics of meaning was developed (Figure 1). It graphically depicts the hierarchical configuration of levels, showing how bodily-somatic, emotional-affective, cognitive, moral-value, and existential structures form an integrated meaning framework of the service member's subjective reality. The figure highlights that the meaning system is not static but functions as a coordinated architectonics in which each level influences the others.

The combined structural and processual models demonstrate that the meaning system of a service member is multilayered, dynamically changing, and embodied. The reconfiguration of the worldview after combat experience unfolds through a series of interconnected mechanisms – bodily-somatic experiencing, emotional organization, cognitive–narrative interpretation, moral reevaluation, socio-identity transformations, and existential integration. This sequence shows that meaning dynamics is inherently processual and develops through the ongoing alignment between bodily reactions, emotional experience, values, social forms of belonging, and life perspective. It is this integrative movement that enables the emergence of a coherent, renewed worldview.

Table 1

Structural Architectonics of Meanings in Combat-Experienced Military Personnel

Level	Psychological Content	Key Mechanisms	Manifestations in Service Members
Somatosensory	Primary bodily sensations, sensory traces of experience	Regulation, autonomic stabilization	Tension, hypertonus, threat scanning
Affective	Tension, hypertonus, threat scanning	Emotional differentiation, validation	Emotional differentiation, validation
Cognitive	Evaluations, interpretations, meaning constructions	Reappraisal, reframing	Catastrophizing, fragmentation of meanings
Imaginal	Images, scenarios, internal representations of events	Imagery integration	Surges of imagination, flashbacks
Moral-Value	Ethical orientations, moral meaning of events	Moral integration	Moral injury, shifts in values
Identity	Social role, belonging, self-identification	Conflict between civilian and military identities	Conflict between civilian and military identities
Reflective	Meaning-making, self-observation	Reflection, metacognition	Search for meaning, re-evaluation
Existential	Questions of life, death, and limits	Existential meaning-making	Experiences of loss, profound re-evaluation of life
Integrative	Synthesis of levels, a new worldview	Meaning integration	Restoration of coherence and the capacity to act

Note: The model synthesizes the principles of the meaning paradigm of consciousness (Kalishchuk, 2020) in combination with the concepts of post-traumatic growth, existential positive psychology 2.0, and contemporary approaches to embodied meaning integration (Payne et al., 2015; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Wong, 2023).

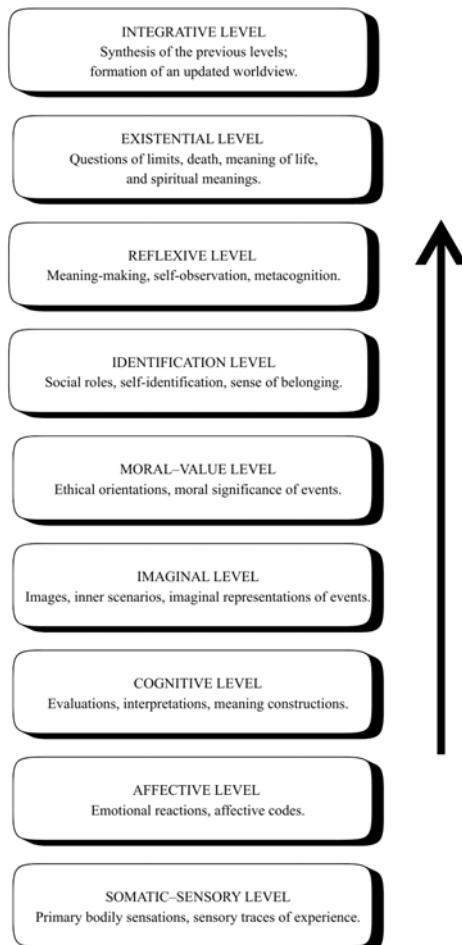


Fig. 1. «Structural Model of the Architectonics of Meaning in Combat-Experienced Military Personnel»

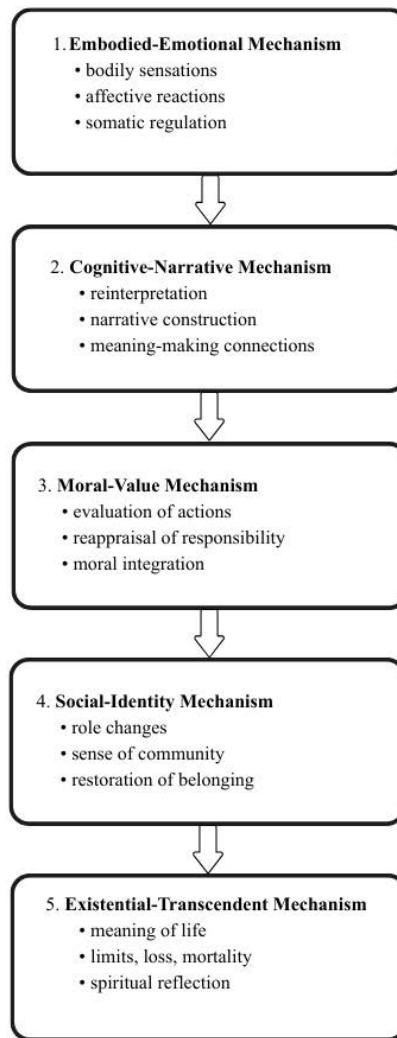


Fig. 2. «Levels of Psychocorrective Processing of Meaning Dynamics in Combat-Experienced Military Personnel»

Discussion. The results demonstrate that the meaning dynamics of military personnel after combat experience cannot be reduced to symptomatic changes or adaptive reactions; rather, they constitute a profound reorganization of meaning structures. In this context, the proposed model of meaning architectonics conceptually aligns with the meaning paradigm of consciousness (Kalishchuk, 2020), in which meaning functions as an integrative factor that unites bodily, affective, cognitive, moral, socio-identity, and existential levels.

A comparison of the findings with contemporary international theoretical models reveals several important correspondences. The concept of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Tedeschi, 2023) emphasizes that positive changes arise from active cognitive and existential work with the content of traumatic experience – corresponding to the cognitive–narrative and existential levels of our model. Moral injury models (Williamson et al., 2021) correlate with the identified moral-value shifts and the need to restore moral integrity as a precondition for integrating the experience. Body-oriented approaches (Payne et al., 2015; Porges, 2011; Kuhfuß et al., 2021) confirm the importance of somatosensory and interoceptive regulation, which our model identifies as the foundational basis of meaning change.

At the same time, the results reveal a distinct Ukrainian specificity in meaning-making processes among service members. Recent Ukrainian studies (Reva, 2024; Hryanova, 2023; Kokhan, 2024; Pohorilska et al., 2024; Military Center for Mental Health, 2023) show that meaning transformations unfold in interaction with collective identity, experiences of community, a sense of service, and responsibility toward the state. This amplifies the significance of the socio-identity level, which is often peripheral in Western models.

An important analytical result is that the structural and processual models allow meaning dynamics to be conceptualized not as a set of separate mechanisms but as a unified process with its own internal logic and sequence. A service member does not merely «experience» trauma – they reconfigure their lived world. In this sense, meaning architectonics emerges as a system capable of self-organization and renewal, fully consistent with the concept of reorganization action within the meaning paradigm (Kalishchuk, 2020).

The practical value of the proposed model lies in its potential use for designing psychocorrective and psychotherapeutic programs focused on bodily-meaning integration. Understanding that meaning changes unfold across levels – from bodily to existential – enables psychologists, psychotherapists, and veteran service specialists to build interventions that correspond to a client's internal readiness at each stage. This is particularly important when working with veterans for whom not only stabilization but also the restoration of subjectivity, moral integrity, and a coherent worldview is crucial.

Overall, the results confirm that the meaning dynamics of military personnel constitutes a multidimensional process in which bodily, affective, cognitive, moral, social, and existential components form a unified system. This underscores the need for a multidisciplinary approach and opens perspectives for further theoretical and empirical investigations.

Conclusion. The conducted theoretical analysis has enabled the substantiation of an integrated model of the architectonics of meaning in combat-experienced military personnel and the description of the dynamics of its reorganization under extreme wartime conditions. It has been shown that the meaning system of service members is multilayered, embodied, and dynamic, and that meaning changes encompass somatosensory, affective, cognitive, imaginal, moral-value, socio-identity, reflective, and existential levels.

The proposed structural and processual models demonstrate that the reorganization of meaning structures unfolds as a sequential process of experiencing, interpreting, and integrating combat events, within which bodily regulation, cognitive reconstruction, ethical reflection, and social support play central roles. Within this framework, psychological support acts as a catalyst for transitioning from fragmented experiences to an organized meaning system and contributes to the restoration of internal coherence.

The scientific novelty of this work lies in integrating the meaning paradigm of consciousness, contemporary international approaches to post-traumatic change, and Ukrainian empirical studies, which has made it possible to construct a model relevant both for analyzing worldview dynamics and for developing psychocorrective interventions for veterans.

Future research directions include empirical validation of the proposed model, developing reliable tools for assessing meaning dynamics, and creating psychological support programs oriented toward bodily-meaning integration and veteran reintegration after war.

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