REFLECTIVE MANAGEMENT THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A SECURITY CHALLENGE

Stevo Jaćimovski[1]
University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

Abstract: Reflective management is one of the methods used for managing complex systems. This paper examines various aspects of reflective management and its impact on social structures through social networks. Examples of reflective influence on the motivation of social network users are provided. An assessment of the consequences of reflective management on the corresponding societal structures in terms of security is also presented.

Keywords: Reflective management, social networks, motivation, users, security

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *society* often implies that its members share some common concerns or interests towards a common goal. As such, the term society is frequently used as a synonym for the people of a country who have common institutions responsible for civic welfare (Wikipedia, n.d.a). A social community represents a very complex system. The behavior of a complex system, which is aimed at achieving a goal, is realized through appropriate management. There are several types of management in complex systems, with the following three types being characteristic:

– Programmatic management, which leads the system to achieve the goal through appropriate commands that follow a specific program.

– Reflective management, which is realized in the system by introducing certain motives into the system that stimulate the achievement of the desired goal;

– Adaptive management,[2] which achieves the goal by having lower-level subsystems fragmentarily copy the behavior of higher-level subsystems. These higher-level subsystems must have appropriate receptors and effective means and capabilities to assess their impact on the environment.

---

1 Corresponding author: Stevo Jaćimovski, Retired Professor, University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies in Belgrade. Email: stevo.jacimovski@kpu.edu.rs

2 It is particularly prevalent in living complex systems.

In the centuries-old philosophical tradition, reflection was understood as the ability to analyze one's own thoughts. In the 1960s, Vladimir Lefebvre (Владимир Лефевр) significantly expanded the understanding of reflection by introducing the concepts of reflective systems and reflective management, which fundamentally changed the way that complex social systems are studied (Лефевр, 2003).

This paper addresses reflective management through social networks as a security challenge, which has become particularly pronounced in recent decades due to the development of new technologies. This method of management is widely prevalent in the spheres of economy, education, culture, and politics. In light of current global events, the collapse of the unipolar system, the emergence of a multipolar system, the intensification of inter-state relations, and the development and application of new technologies, reflective management is becoming increasingly significant for study and understanding, particularly in the area of state security systems, especially in the regions of the former Yugoslav republics, the Western Balkans, and the post-Soviet space.

REFLECTIVE MANAGEMENT

At the core of reflective management lies a motivational mechanism. The interacting parties, or opponents, will be referred to as the subject and the object. The opponent (the object of management) is outmaneuvered by the subject through the imposition of false motivations for future actions. Reflective management involves influencing an opponent or partner to accept what is unfavorable for them but advantageous for the party engaging in reflective management (Лефевр, 2009).

Reflective management is the influence exerted by one party (the manipulator, the subject) on the decisions made by the opponent or partner (the object) by imposing initial premises that lead the object to act in the manner desired by the manipulator.

In our case, reflective management occurs when the subject creates an informational field around the controlled object. This field contains information about what the controlled object should do. Consequently, the object performs actions determined by the subject. The object believes that this decision was made voluntarily and that they had the freedom of choice (Цырельчук et al., 2008).

12

Mechanisms of Reflective Management

The foundation of reflective management consists of various psychological mechanisms that influence the formation of opinions and decision-making processes of individuals. Such mechanisms (like conformity, self-image "I", social

"I", etc.) are well-studied and are used to impose specific goals when transmitting information by those who wish to manage a particular target group.

Conformity as a phenomenon represents the adaptation of an individual to society or social groups. To function adaptively within human society, everyone must, to some extent, be conformists, that is, adhere to the norms and requirements of the society in which they live. The other option is to live in isolation from others, as only then can one live according to one's own discretion and rules. Psychological experiments have been conducted concerning the process of conformity. The most famous is the so-called Asch experiment, which was devised by Polish psychologist Solomon Asch in 1950 (Wikipedia, n.d.b). In this experiment, the respondent was placed in a group of 5 to 7 confederates, who were aware of the true purpose of the experiment but were presented to the respondents as genuine participants. The participants were shown a card with a single line, followed by another card with three lines labeled A, B, and C.
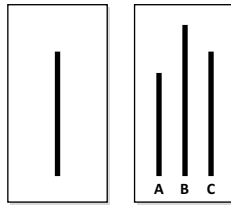

Figure 1. Asch experiment

The objective of the experiment was to determine whether respondents would conform, despite the correct answer being obvious, and respond incorrectly due to the pressure of confederates. The majority of the respondents agreed with the incorrect answer, even though they believed otherwise.

When Solomon Asch later asked the participants why they did not trust their own eyes, some responded that they thought they were not seeing correctly since everyone else answered differently. Others knew that the others were giving wrong answers but feared social rejection and thus answered in line with the majority.

This conformity experiment scientifically confirmed how difficult it is to resist group pressure. It also highlighted the immense influence of the group and how challenging it is for the average person to stand out and oppose the majority.

The self-image or "I" of a person is a stable set of their psychological attitudes, value orientations, sensory preferences, and views on various aspects of life. It is important that the concept of the "I" is a holistic construct, a special standard through which we perceive the world around us and our actions within it. It is clear that for continuous action and assessment of changes in the external world, a stable and unchanging standard is necessary. Therefore, a person has psychological defense mechanisms aimed at preserving the "I" unchanged.

Another important concept of a person is the "social I"—a system of moral values, moral guidelines, ideas about God, good and evil, heroes and enemies, the meaning of history, and other fundamental concepts. We can assume that the "social I" is our collective "I" (Андриенко, 2000).

In the process of reflective management, it is fundamentally important to spread such information through social networks that will undermine faith in the value system of the "I" and the "social I" (or bring them into conflict) within a particular social community. Under these conditions, individuals and the entire community accept the imposed value attitudes as their own (Лепский, 2003).

Language

The influence on an individual, on their "I" or "social I", is exerted through various means, the primary one being language. Since childhood, people have been accustomed to viewing and judging the world through a system of structured words, phrases, and statements. From the moment of birth, a child experiences the world around them through their native language, in which all objects, phenomena, and feelings have their labels. Gradually, it becomes apparent that fundamental knowledge about the world is formulated in a linguistic, verbal form, creating a logosphere.

A person does not live only in a world of objects and events but also in a world of language, which is foundational for them.

The change in the vocabulary of a language can be natural, reflecting changes in living conditions. Additionally, the change can be artificial, designed to alter life by either reducing its understanding or enhancing it.

Language, as a system of concepts through which a person perceives the world and society, is the most important means of subjugation. The widespread use of new words that sound exotic in the media is a likely sign of a large informational campaign aimed at specific economic and political goals. Slogans directly "set the direction" of behavior because they already contain instructions for actions ready to be followed. We are witnessing the uncontrolled use of the English language and, in this way, the imposition of Anglo-Saxon concepts, value systems, etc. This phenomenon has become particularly pronounced with the development and use of new technologies developed in the USA.

For example, Hollywood and its productions are considered to have imposed their system of values on the rest of the world, similarly to the military and economic power of the USA.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

By the end of the twentieth century, humanity had entered the era of information technology. The IT industry deals with the production, processing, storage, and transmission of information. The introduction of modern information technologies has led to the widespread use of communication through social networks and the emergence of a new social phenomenon—the phenomenon of virtual social networks in the global Internet space. The Internet represents a virtual network that serves as a medium for providing services related to establishing connections between its users and the information resources corresponding to their interests, which are installed on websites of the global network.

Social networks provide a range of important social functions: communication among their members, the exchange of information between them, the formation of virtual interest groups, professional communities, and more. Unfortunately, these networks often replace live human communication. As a result, the perception of reality by network users is transformed and shifts into the virtual world. The involvement of millions of people in a virtual environment enables the shaping and manipulation of public opinion (Лепский, 2010a).

The role of social network moderators

Computer network technologies enhance the effectiveness of reflective management. Social networks create a specific virtual world that surrounds the user. This world is shaped by diverse information circulating through the network, through the natural reflection of reality during direct communication between participants of certain events and the dissemination of their information via social networks, as well as through the formation of informational situations by specially trained specialists.

At first glance, it may seem that a person has access to various sources, perspectives, and evaluations of reality. It appears that the user has access to a world of objective, independent information, which will enable them to form true beliefs and motivate their further actions in the right direction.

In reality, the flow of information is controlled by moderators who have broader rights than ordinary users on social network platforms. They have the authority to delete and edit others' messages, delete user accounts, restrict users' rights to edit and view the site. Each site has its specific list of moderator permissions and responsibilities (Лепский, 1999).

The purpose of moderation systems is ostensibly to maintain order on the site and control content rather than user behavior. However, moderators often overlook this distinction. To influence user motivation, they may engage in the strategic "insertion" of specially prepared information into the network, which induces specific user behaviors. This can involve spreading rumors, publishing

15

unverifiable information, refuting or confirming analytical reports, and disseminating information that convinces the public of the veracity of certain events.

Additionally, moderators determine the editing or deletion of messages on the network. Consequently, the meaning of information can be distorted, influencing the beliefs of network users. Individuals with unstable views, weak "I" or "social I", easily succumb to the required norms of social behavior (Лепский, 2010b).

Example 1: When the United States was preparing to attack Yugoslavia, it managed to gain total control over almost all information flows in the Western Hemisphere (including internet channels). Western internet resources operated under command, and any deviation from U.S. guidelines was suppressed. As a result, the entire world believed that the Serbs were responsible for the killings of Albanians, while Kosovar fanatics were turned into innocent victims.

Example 2: The restriction on publishing information by then-U.S. President Donald Trump during the 2020 election campaign on the social network "Twitter."

TECHNIQUES FOR IMPLEMENTING REFLECTIVE MANAGEMENT

The implementation of reflective management has a multi-vector character. Here are some characteristic directions of action:

– Computer technology or software-mathematical influence on social networks
– Exerting influence on decision makers
– Exerting influence on individual users
– Influence through agents of influence

Computer technology

This section addresses the influence of the subject of reflective management on technical means of collecting, processing, transmitting, and displaying information to impose their viewpoints on the opposing side.

On the one hand, computer technologies reduce the time required for gathering, processing, and transmitting information, while on the other hand, they significantly shorten the decision-making time. Under these conditions, technical means can distort information, ultimately leading to the formation of the necessary influence on users by virtual reality.

In this context, software-mathematical influence on social networks aims to distort, replace, or destroy information stored in social network databases or reduce the efficiency of their operation, or disable computers or networks.

The main methods of influence in the field of computer technologies can include embedded "logic bombs,"[3] computer viruses, special programs, and other means for destroying, suppressing, and falsifying information, including tools for protection against these attacks.

Exerting influence on decision-makers

The next segment of reflective management is the influence on decision-makers. This influence can be exerted through user groups that hold authority for a particular individual and are united in a network by conducting a set of reflective control actions. In this way, it is possible to achieve the desired decision from leaders through intermediaries who have been subject to reflective influence.

Altering the assessments and views of people who are decision-makers can create conditions for controlling various processes. Having a tool such as social networks can elicit a desired reaction from users as a result of coercion or encouragement to take appropriate action (Лепский, 2010).

An appropriately formed informational situation can prompt public opinion towards protest actions, which in turn forces the military-political leadership of a country to take retaliatory measures. Simultaneously, by compelling individuals to make wrong decisions, it is possible to create an impression of incompetence among those responsible for these decisions in the top leadership or public. This can lead to the removal or restriction of the powers of certain leaders. Such provocations can result in a loss of initiative among leaders at various levels or the formation of public opinion and sentiment that creates difficulties for the functioning of government bodies. This leads to the creation of a state of controlled chaos and instability within social communities.

Example: The overthrow of the government in Serbia in 2000, color revolutions in the Middle East, Ukraine, and so on.

Influence on decision-makers can also be exerted through user groups that represent authority for a particular person and are united in a network by conducting a set of reflective control actions. In this way, it is possible to achieve the desired decision from leaders through intermediaries who have been subject to reflective influence.

Example: Creating the perception of the harmless impact of depleted uranium on human health in Serbia and Republika Srpska under the influence of "authorities" from medical circles (Jokić, 2008), reducing the number of victims in death camps in the NDH under the influence of leading in the field of historical sciences, and so on.

17

---

3 A logical bomb is a malicious program designed to cause damage at a specific point in time, but remains inactive until that moment.

Exerting influence on individual users

Reflective management can be organized separately for each network user through targeted informational influences, allowing for specific impacts on their decisions. The total potential actions of users will be formed from the set of expected actions of these individuals, and through coordinated management via social networks, it is possible to achieve more global results of their subcontrol activities.

Example: The collapse of the "Twin Towers" in New York City in 2001. Despite assertions from construction experts about the impossibility of their collapse due to airplane impacts, the incident influenced citizens to accept it as a terrorist act threatening every U.S. citizen. This activity is considered to have been directed against the American population itself, aiming to restrict their rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

Influence through agents of influence

Through social networks, it is possible to create a foundation for "agents of influence" to implement changes in existing behavioral stereotypes of people and alter their beliefs, thereby determining the activities of organizations, groups, and specific individuals. By creating the right conditions, the legalization of inserted agents can be facilitated. Consequently, this can influence the quality of enacted laws, obstruct or promote their consideration, encourage public support for a project, and motivate agents of influence to implement it.

REFLEXIVE CONTROL IN THE MILITARY DOMAIN

Recent events concerning leaked Pentagon documents have brought the practice of reflexive control into the spotlight, which many scholars recognize as one of the most effective methods of conducting modern, so-called hybrid wars (Лепский, 2016).

A striking example of the successful and comprehensive use of reflexive control techniques during World War II was Operation Mincemeat, conducted by the British Admiralty's intelligence division (Воеводин, 2000). This operation implemented the technique of "making the false seem real, and the real false." The Allied forces needed to capture Sicily. While Sicily remained in German hands, they controlled the entire Mediterranean; without capturing Sicily, it was impossible to launch military operations in Italy. How could the Allies ensure that the Germans believed that another target, rather than Sicily, would be the primary objective of the Allied forces? The decision was to misinform the enemy. To achieve this, it was planned that documents revealing the Allies' plans would fall into enemy hands.

The scenario developed as follows: the body of a staff officer, along with a letter, was found in the sea. The officer had been flying from England to Africa when his plane was shot down. The officer fell into the sea wearing a life jacket and perished. The letter he carried indicated that the preparations for an attack on Sicily were a diversionary maneuver, and the real strike would be directed at Sardinia and the eastern Mediterranean, with troops landing in Greece.

The results of Operation Mincemeat were profound. The Germans concentrated their troops in Greece, undertook extensive coastal fortification work, laid minefields, and positioned coastal batteries. They even redeployed a tank division to Greece. Significant resources were transferred from Sicily to Sardinia and Corsica. By the time the German command realized that Sicily was the actual target, it was too late to rectify the mistake.

A similar operation occurred during the Allied landings in Normandy in World War II (Воеводин 2000). Throughout this period, German forces were misled by various techniques into believing that the landings would occur across the English Channel at Calais (a logical assumption given that Calais is the closest point to the British coast). When German forces were partially redeployed to strengthen defenses at Calais, the Allies landed in Normandy, significantly farther from Calais.

The key elements of reflexive control, from a security-military perspective, are as follows (Бегеза, 2023; Бухарин, 2007):

– Distraction: Creating real or imaginary threats to vital enemy positions (flanks, rear, etc.) during the preparatory phase of military operations, forcing the enemy to reconsider the rationale of their decisions;

– Overloading: Bombarding the enemy with large volumes of contradictory information to overwhelm their decision-making processes;

– Paralysis: Creating the perception of specific threats to the enemy's vital interests or weakest points, leading to indecision or inaction;

– Exhaustion: Forcing the enemy to undertake futile actions, thereby depleting their resources and weakening their armed forces;

– Deception: Provoking the enemy to redeploy their armed forces to a threatened region during the preparatory phases of military operations, based on false information;

– Division: Convincing the enemy to act against the interests of their coalition, causing internal strife and weakening their collective efforts;

– Assurance: Persuading the enemy that ongoing preparations are merely routine training exercises rather than offensive actions, thus lowering their vigilance;

– Intimidation: Creating a perception of overwhelming superiority to demoralize the enemy;

– Provocation: Forcing the enemy into actions that are beneficial to the other side;

– Suggestion: Spreading information that legally, morally, or ideologically influences the enemy's decisions and actions;
– Pressure: Disseminating information that discredits the enemy's leadership in the eyes of their population, undermining their authority and control.

CONCLUSION

Information influence through social networks can take the form of creating various situations, effects, and information stimuli. These stimuli motivate certain individuals or the public to accept decisions that benefit the influencing party, leading to actions based on these decisions. By subordinating the consciousness and behavior of the enemy's leadership, the influencing party creates conditions for superiority over them. Historically, this superiority has been held by Western countries.

However, with the rapid development of social networks on the Internet, independent networks have emerged, free from government and political influences. Additionally, the rise of influential information resources created in China, Russia, and Muslim countries within the global information space has disrupted the long-standing dominance of Western information resources. These new resources are being utilized in an information war aimed at creating a fairer world for future generations. This information war is a struggle against the emerging global order, which promotes LGBT culture and arts, Satanism in ideology, the cult of the digital world intending to usher us into the Matrix of a global government, the WHO acting as a medical Gestapo, among other threats (Губанов, 2010).

States should establish bodies within their security structures composed of competent individuals trained in hybrid warfare. These bodies would monitor and take measures to prevent malicious informational influence on all segments of society.

However, what measures can be proposed to protect individuals from information influence? Unfortunately, all state measures will be insufficient, as the information security of an individual primarily depends on the individual themselves. There is only one way to develop self-awareness and reflection: a state policy that prioritizes science, culture, and education.

20

REFERENCES

Андриенко, Е. В. (2000). *Социальная психология.* Москва: Мир.

Бухарин, С. Н., & Цыганов, В. В. (2007). *Методы и технологии информационых войн.* Москва: Акдемический проект.

Бегеза В. (2023, 2 мая). Виталий Бегеза: США используя рефлексивное управление через «слив» секретных данных провоцирует Россию на наступление. *Информационно-экспертный центр Изборский клуб.* Retrieved May 2, 2023, from https://izborsk-club.ru/24271

Цырельчук, Н. А., Цырельчук И. Н., & Цырельчук Н. Н. (2008). *Рефлексивное управление.* Минск: Минский государственныйвысший радиотехнический колледж.

Губанов, Д. А., Новиков, Д.А., & Чхартишвили, А. Г. (2010). *Социальные сети: модели информационного влияния, упраления и противоборства.* Москва: Физматлит.

Jokić, N. (2008, 19 decembar). Ekskluzivno – američki novinar Robert Parsons obelodanio „Vestima" sakriveni izveštaj UN o osiromašenom uranijumu. *Vesti*, Frankfurt. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from https://evropskahronika.wordpress.com/2014/05/17/82/

Лефевр, В. А. (2003). *Рефлексия.* Москва: Когито-Центр.

Лефевр, В. А. (2009). *Лекции по теории рефлексивных игр.* Москва: Когито-Центр.

Лепский, В. Е., & Рапуто, А. Г. (1999). *Моделирование и поддержка сообществ в Интернет*. Москва: Институт психологии РАН.

Лепский, В. Е. (ред) (2003). Рефлексивные процессы и управление *Тезисы IV Международного симпозиума 7-9 октября 2003 г.* Москва: Институт психологии РАН.

Лепский, В. Е. (2010a). Технологии управляемого хаоса – оружие разрушения субъектности развития. *Информационные войны,* 4, (69–78).

Лепский, В. Е. (2010b). *Рефлексивно-активные среды инновационного развития,* Москва: Когито-Центр.

Лепский, В. Е. (2016). *Технологии управления в информационных войнах* (*от классики к постнеклассике*). Москва: Когито-Центр.

Воеводин, А. И. (2000). *Стратагемы - стратегии войны, манипуляции, обмана.* Красноярск: Кларетианум.

Wikipedia (n.d.a). *Društvo*. Retrieved January 10 2024, from https://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Društvo

Wikipedia (n.d.b). *Asch conformity experiments*. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asch_conformity_experiments.