A Systems Analysis:

Award Recognition within the Army's Military Intelligence Corps Association (MICA)

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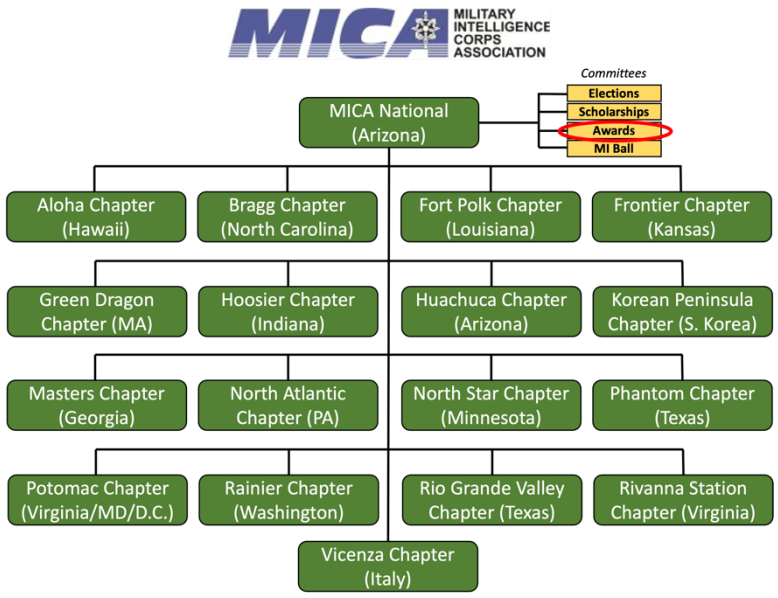
Recognizing your workforce for exceptional performance or specific acts that go above and beyond normal role responsibilities is a key facet of organizational culture that has the power to attract or potentially repel member loyalty. As companies attempt to better understand how to convince present and future workers that they will be appreciated for their efforts, it's critically important to realize how these recognition programs can influence behavior and thereby impact an organization's productivity (Gately, 2019). To ensure organizations strengthen their culture with this productivity multiplier, it's useful to analyze how companies develop processes to instantiate recognition as part of normal day-to-day operations. For this type of analysis to be fruitful, both systems and their internal processes should be dissected to understand what's working as well as where improvements can be made to address inefficiencies.

This paper employs a systems analysis approach to explore such a recognition program within a professional society in the U.S. Army, the Military Intelligence Corps Association, or MICA. Established in 1994 as a non-profit association, MICA acts as the expert guild for the Army's intelligence branch, more formally called the Military Intelligence (MI) Corps. MICA was formed to preserve history, educate and share knowledge, honor past and present professionals, and award individuals for exemplary acts of service (MICA National, 2022). Membership is comprised of actively serving, reserve component, retired service members, and contractors as well as others

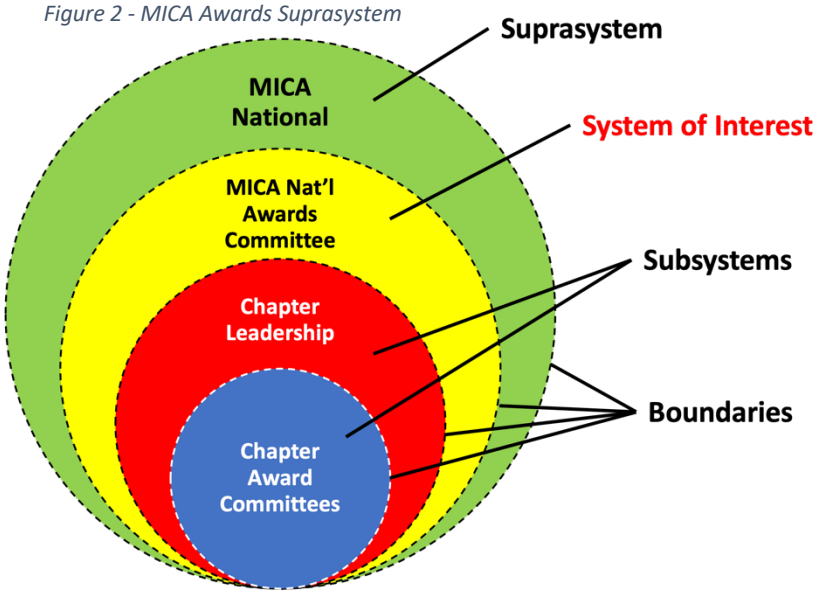
Figure 1 - MICA Organizational Hierarchy (MICA National, 2022)



who support the Army intelligence mission. Figure 1 details the relatively flat organizational hierarchy: a central, national headquarters presides over numerous regional chapters that have been organized at the state level. Where organizational membership is comparatively high, or in larger states (like Texas), multiple chapters have been organized. Within MICA, several committees are organized to manage various activities or processes directed at specific outcomes occurring at both the national and chapter level. Some of the key committees include Elections, Scholarships, Awards, and the annual MI Ball. The MICA National Awards Committee (red circle in Figure 1) will serve as the system of interest for this analysis. There are four different awards this committee deliberates over, and this analysis will explore how the interrelated entities within that committee integrate to support their primary objective, or goal, of rewarding MICA members for their accomplishments.

MICA awards are recognized at the national level, so the suprasystem to be explored includes the approval authorities comprised of all the entities from the awards committees and chapter leadership at the regional level up through the Executive Board at the national headquarters (see Figure 2). For this analysis, subsystems of the MICA National Awards Committee include those subordinate entities critical to the effective execution of the MICA awards system and include leadership and award committees at the regional chapter level. The final elements of the MICA system are those boundaries that separate the systems and indicate unique norms or operational requirements specific to each system or subsystem. An example of a system-specific requirement is that each regional

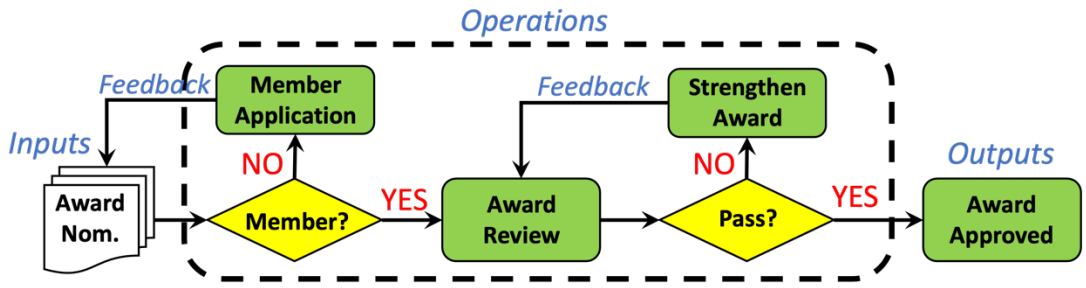
Figure 2 - MICA Awards Suprasystem



chapter maintains its own constitution or charter that provides guidelines and policies for that chapter, such as how they manage their local awards process. Boundaries also serve as filtering mechanisms by ensuring only MICA members participate in the awards program.

With the system structures identified, the next phase of analysis is understanding how systems and subsystems relate to one another. Those relationships are a product of the physical characteristics of the systems and the processes within those systems. Figure 3 describes the process outlined in the MICA Constitution transforming chapter inputs (award nominations) into outputs (approved awards):

Figure 3 - MICA Award Process (Chapter Level)



Step 1. Chapter validates that both nominator and nominee are members of MICA.
Step 2. Chapter reviews award nomination packet. If required, strengthen the nomination.
Step 3. Approve award. Forward chapter-approved award to MICA National Awards Committee.

The MICA National Awards Committed confirms that all steps have been followed and verifies the nomination meets the standards outlined in the award guidelines policy. The last step is to forward the award to the MICA Executive Board for final review and approval. While this appears simple and straightforward, numerous relationships and communication nodes are at work within the suprasystem to ensure timely award approval. The next phase of analysis will dig into how the subsystems work together to make this process succeed.

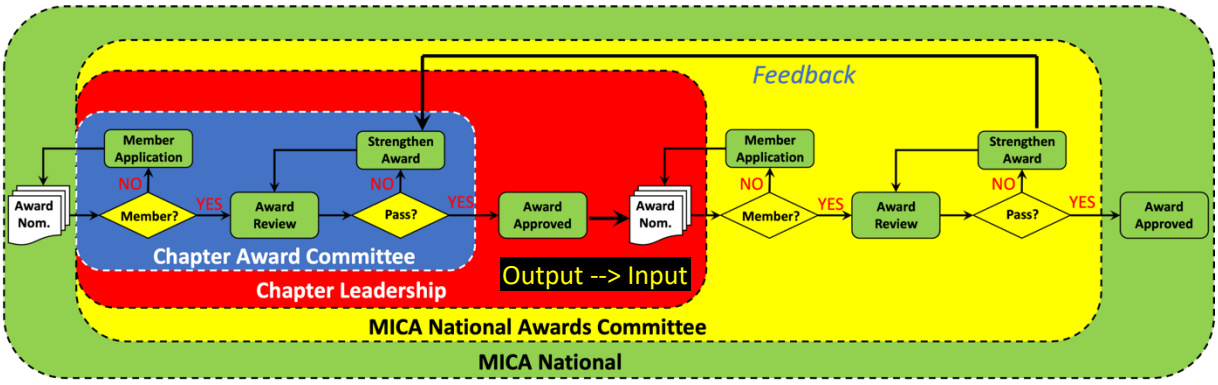
While the process diagram in Figure 3 shows the bare essentials for awards, inputs can be divided into various types that ensure the process and larger system maintain their efficiency. These inputs are usually brought from outside the system and either causes a change in system operations or force new activities to begin. To operate as designed, systems

require information organized in a way that conforms to process requirements, thereby reinforcing order. If data enters in an unexpected way or format, there's a good chance the system will be unable to process the request. This type of entropic input is likely to lead to confusion and delays in processing awards. Maintenance inputs are those raw materials the system needs to function properly. In this case, the award nomination packets serve that purpose as they are a requirement to initiate the approval process. The association members also provide critical maintenance input by writing, receiving, and processing the award packets. Another type of initiating resource is signal inputs. These resources are necessary to ensure the system keeps operating as designed to achieve its goals. Signal inputs for the MICA system at all levels include the chapter charters and MICA Constitution that contain bylaws and process guidance for the entire suprasystem. These inputs are transformed by the system's operational processes to produce outputs that align with organizational goals and objectives. Those outputs should be a valuable stand-alone product or a resource that can act as an input for another element in the suprasystem. If an output is a key artifact the process was designed to produce, it's referred to as a formal achievement (FA). If all goes according to plan, the approved nomination at the chapter level is their FA. What happens if the output is not produced as expected? For awards, this can be anything from excessive typos to a nomination judged as thin on accomplishments. In that case, the nomination would not be moved forward in the approval process until it has been refined into a better product. The review committee or chapter leadership are usually the ones to provide critiques of poor nominations. Figure 3 shows two opportunities where feedback can be offered to ensure process guidelines are followed. Once the nominator addresses the feedback issues, the nomination then continues its journey to becoming an approved nomination. For MICA, this is only half the process as the award packet must then make a similar trip through higher-level review at the National Headquarters (HQ).

To this point, the Chapter approval process has mainly been discussed in isolation. As depicted in Figure 2, the Chapter Award Committee subsystem is but one piece in the larger

award approval ecosystem. Below, Figure 4 describes the full process between Chapter and National HQ by overlaying the awards process onto the suprasystem diagram. The only additional element is a feedback loop between the MICA National Awards Committee and the Chapter initiating the nomination in case more information is needed. Seeing the process displayed in this end-to-end fashion highlights some unique aspects of the suprasystem. For

Figure 4 – End-to-End Awards Process



one, the system and subsystem boundaries (dashed lines) are now viewed in the context of the overall process making it easier to visualize how inputs and outputs move between organizations. The most obvious of these is when a Chapter's approved award becomes the input for the MICA National portion of the process. Since the subsystems allow information to be shared between elements, they are considered open systems. This open quality is controlled by the interface between subsystems. For MICA, the interface manifests in specific rules and policies dictating how inputs and outputs cross boundaries from one organization to the next. The resource flow, in turn, is a product of how organized and practiced the organization is at managing the awards program. This selectivity can be quickly reduced if key personnel transition out, leaving the organization with an inexperienced process manager. Boundary conditions differ considerably, however, when looking at the suprasystem. The entire awards program relies on resources and processes internal to MICA. To initiate a nomination requires an association member. In this respect, the MICA awards ecosystem can be characterized as a closed system and requires no authorities or enablers from the outside. Lastly, this contextual

view identifies which parts of the processes are managed by the subsystems. For example, the leadership or executive board at both Chapter and National levels approve nominations. Most of the Chapter process is duplicated at the National level. While this ensures similar quality standards are shared between organizational levels, it also introduces a level of inefficiency. Such system dissonance could be quite dysfunctional if an award is needed quickly, and time is lost repeating steps accomplished earlier in the process. To address these types of challenges, another method of feedback is required, one that occurs outside the awards program.

For organizations to evolve and meet the needs of their members over time, there must exist maintenance engagements where the association discusses whether the association is on track to meet its mission for existing. MICA accomplishes this through periodic meetings and conferences. These gatherings serve a variety of purposes from discussing budget, to establishing projects, to executing elections. More important than any of these topical agenda items is the ability for members to communicate what's working and occasionally what's not. When procedural friction arises due to policy changes (or from status quo policies that have yet to change), these engagements provide an opportunity for the demands or desires of one of the subsystems to be met by another. This needs satisfaction comes in many forms and could be as simple as providing funding guidance or clarification on a procedural change. Chapters can satisfy this for the National HQ as well, just by demonstrating adoption of new standards. The key is that a forum exists for the organization to improve when external realities or relationships change. This adaptation could ensure critical programs, such as member recognition, aren't mired in "the way we've always done things," but moving towards a more ideal, less complicated version.

MICA exists in large part to maintain the history and lineage of the Army's intelligence profession. Recognizing service members and civilian professionals for their deeds and commitment is integral to that mission. To remain relevant, organizations must periodically evaluate how well they are meeting those key mission imperatives. While MICA's recognition

program is effective, specific inefficiencies between subsystems need to be addressed in an environment of waning resources and near real-time expectations of our digital communications landscape. Duplication of effort will continue to frustrate those in the system and may limit the ability to attract younger, more forward-thinking members. Fortunately, the organization and its processes are not too large or complex that they can't be easily modified to try alternative solutions quickly. Trying something new, no matter how small, may be the start to discovering an entirely new way to strengthen this community and grow it in unexpected directions.

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