

ESTABLISHING LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY SKILLS FOR FUTURE OFFICERS

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Abstract: *To be, to know, to do - express clearly and concisely the features characteristic of a leader. Military leadership skills are manifested through high principles, professionalism, moral integrity, the ability to lead people, discipline and rule compliance. The quality of applied leadership is influenced by the leader's ability to acquire the power associated with the formal position and the way he uses it in the process of influencing the behavior of subordinates. Leadership is an issue that is intensively studied, because the style of the leader determines the effectiveness of any organisation. One of the reasons why current scientific concerns are focused on the study of the leadership development methods and on the selection of leaders who have the skills and abilities to successfully perform such functions. In this article we have used reference works of the literature to carry out a study on the manifestation of leadership skills and leadership abilities amongst military students. In military organizations, authority is perceived as a right, a power to command, to issue orders or to command subordinates to obey, but also as a prestige reflected by the respect of those around the military leader, highlighting him as a person who imposes himself through knowledge and behavior. Authority is often accepted in two ways: either through coercion and the exercise of power, or on the basis of belief and influence.*

Keywords: leader, authority, leading style, personality traits

1. Introduction

In a civilised society, management is an intensely studied subject because leadership style influences the effectiveness of any organisation. This is one of the reasons why current scientific research focuses on exploring ways to improve management and selecting leaders who demonstrate the skills and abilities to successfully perform such roles.

The premise from which we start our research is that people in leadership positions influence the effectiveness of any organisation. By setting standards, goals and priorities a leader can bring changes in day-to-day performance. He can

permanently influence its direction of development by setting a strategic vision and formulating long-term goals. Among the numerous organisations, one of the most involved in the overall evolution of society as a whole is the military organisation.

In the field of the military, the issue of leadership takes a particular importance and special character, because the training of personnel and the structuring of operations are planned taking into account conditions of activity that may be completely different from those existing today. These conditions may bring unpredictable elements and significant

changes compared to organisational anticipations and predictions.

In order to perform their missions and achieve their goals, the military needs leaders who can coordinate and organise them, who can create the conditions for responsible involvement in the performance of specific tasks. Effective commanders have certain specific characteristics that are fundamental to the leadership approach and the achievement of an optimal psychosocial climate [1]. The list of desirable qualities for a leader is practically endless. While many characteristics (e.g. honesty) are expected from all members of the military profession, there are some attributes that are vital for military commanders: loyalty, integrity, initiative, determination, selflessness.

The commander's entire personality has an impact on the work of his subordinates and on their level of satisfaction, confidence and trust in themselves and in the institution, integration into the group, stability and security. Military vocation, as well as leadership skills, represent the inner essence of the individual to adopt a career in the army, to devote his whole being to the general interest of the defence of the homeland. This calling, as a predisposition, requires a strong will, an ambition and a desire oriented towards continuous self-improvement.

2. Research Methodology

The purpose of the research is to improve the investigation of leadership and authority in military students by demonstrating leadership skills and identifying preferred styles. In this context, for the development of the text formulated above, I listed the following *objectives*, the following:

- Identifying leadership potential in military students;
- Personality trait analysis;
- Distinguishing leading styles;
- Identifying the dominant leadership style in practical activity;

The goal and objectives of the research have enabled us to launch the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: We assume that personality traits influence leadership potential.

Hypothesis 2: We assume that there are differences in the application of leadership styles, and that the rational style prevails.

The success and effectiveness of any institution or organisation depends to a large extent on individual performance, which is influenced by a variety of factors, including the leadership style of managers and organisational culture. It is important to focus strategically on coordinating, training and motivating human resources, taking into account all the effects that result from personalising the relationship between managers and employees. In this context, we have proposed for analysis two questionnaires to determine the leadership potential and which leadership style is preferred by the students of the Armed Forces Military Academy.

The used questionnaires serve as assessment tools to analyze the leadership potential and preferred leadership style of students. "Knowing how to lead is not knowing how to dominate, it is knowing how to persuade people to work towards a common goal" [2]. For a military leader at the beginning of his career, pedagogical skills are essential for the effectiveness of his action, as he must influence the behaviour of his subordinates. Among the skills needed by a military leader, those related to leadership are of fundamental importance and are a priority in the training process. Each individual has, to a certain extent, predispositions, inclinations and aptitudes that enable him to develop his leadership skills. In the context of specific military activity, these skills are general and specific.

In our study we used a sample based on students from the Military Academy "Alexandru cel Bun" from different years of study. In the present research, 50 students aged between 21- 24 years were included. We focused on students in the

third year of study to allow us to make a more objective analysis of the data, as they are in the last year of undergraduate study and the next stage is their affirmation in their professional activity.

The research method chosen for data collection was the questionnaire. In the research procedure, the questionnaire questions were applied individually, and the participants were assured in advance that the answers to the questionnaires would be strictly confidential.

In the analysis of hypothesis no.1 the research was carried out based on the application of the questionnaire formulated by psychologist Oliver L. Niehouse, designed to detect and measure leadership potential (adapted in the Romanian version by A. Neculau) [3]. The soldiers in the subunit who achieve maximum results in the process of training and carrying out combat actions, show remarkable educational and sports performances, show outstanding intellectual abilities, stand out for their general and specialized knowledge, exceptional character and personality qualities, acquire a certain ascendancy in relation to others and exert an increasing influence on them.

The influence of the military within the subunit is directly proportional to their personal qualities, reflected in the conscience of the collective and expressed in its opinion. When a soldier is seen by the group as having remarkable qualities and consistent behaviour, the process of recognition of his authority in a particular direction or field begins. This is, in effect, the exercise and perception of authority. For the purpose of analyzing hypothesis no. 2, we have advanced the study and identification of leadership style in the experimental group by applying the Leadership Style Identification Questionnaire [4]. In order to improve the performance of the military leader in the execution of his leadership duties, it is necessary to turn our attention to aspects concerning personality traits, the manifestation of authority through the

application of styles, as well as the ways of influencing subordinates.

The questionnaires used serve as assessment tools to find out the leadership potential, the leadership style preferred by the students and to what extent they resemble those applied in the management/leadership practice of the institution where they learn. In particular, the relationships between military members on the same level of the hierarchical structure (equal in rank and function), but also the relationships with superiors (heads) are inevitably strongly emotional. Thus, by virtue of their human condition, a distinct type of relationship is established between soldiers as a result of the direct perception of those around them, beyond (or rather concomitantly with) formalised, formal relationships. It should also be kept in mind that most formal leaders gradually integrate the elements specific to informal leaders, adding to the authority that derives from their status and the power of influence that is acquired through the art of Officers working in the military sector require special training to be able to distinguish between: - managing the institution/organisation and the processes within it; - managing the interactions between people to achieve the objectives set out in management decisions; - socialising and motivating people to become voluntarily involved in supporting the organisation and its objectives; - managing the organisation to ensure the material, financial and informational conditions to support the performance of the organisation.

3. Presentation and Interpretation of Comparative Scientific Research Data

Authority, in military organizations, is conceived at the same time as a right, a power of command, to give orders or to impose obedience on subordinates, and as a prestige manifested by the respect of those who surround the military leader, marking him as a person who imposes himself through knowledge and behavior [5].

The art of leadership is acquired through practice and effort, even if doubts arise from inadequate preparation, modesty, lack of confidence or lack of experience. This process often starts when individuals discover that they have qualities and strengths associated with being a leader and is a true agent of change in organisations in the first place. Leadership potential manifests itself through leadership mastery. To lead is to know when to use authority and when to use influence, when to ask questions and when to express opinions or communicate decisions, when to challenge and when to praise behaviour. An exceptional leader is one who recognizes the importance of valuing the skills of team members and leads them to greater efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore, leadership is not a title and leadership ability is not inborn. Leadership ability is something developed by each individual. Blanchard K., in his book, “The Heart of a Leader”, states, “If you want to know why your people don't perform, take a look in the mirror” [6]. Leadership is a unique form of human behavior that requires the integration of character, knowledge and experience. Achieving leadership potential starts with a good understanding of yourself. When we know ourselves, we can maximize our positive traits and become aware of our weaker qualities. This awareness helps us reach our true leadership potential.

The results obtained in the Questionnaire for detecting and measuring leadership potential (adapted in Romanian by A. Neculau) are reported in the figure below. For the data analysis it is important to point out that the questionnaires were filled anonymously, no platoons were indicated, only the number of students and the year of study were taken into account.

Reporting the results of the Leadership Potential Questionnaire:

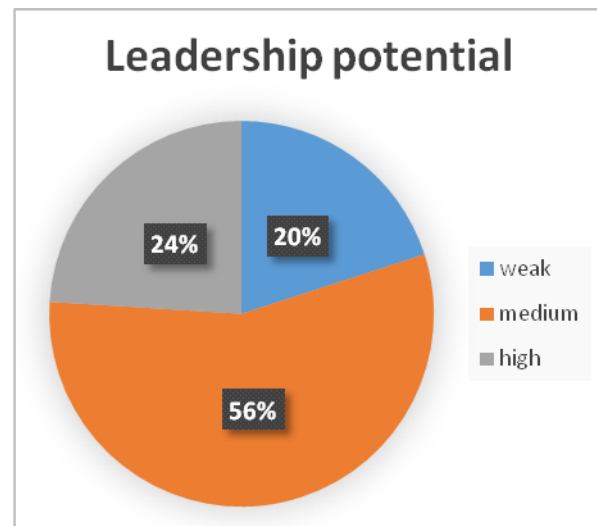


Figure 1: Leadership potential.
Source: Author's research.

The results indicate that 24% of the students surveyed had *high potential*. It is encouraging that high potential among students has also been identified. The percentage established shows that, even if it is small compared to other qualifications, it persists and is reflected in the contingent of enrolled students who are able to develop both their personal and professional qualities. The model of effective leadership for them is real and they are not limited to performance.

The highest percentage was obtained by the *medium leadership potential* 56%. More than half of respondents are aware of developing leadership qualities. Since they are in training we consider this a good result. They have a theoretical background on the portrait of a leader and their professional work will allow them to build on it. The one who has the desire to always study is developing and has a growing potential.

The results at the *weak potential leader* 20% were predictable from the considerations that students are in training. They analyze leadership capabilities more from a subordinate position. The lack of applicability of these capabilities limits them in developing their leadership potential. The leader's role in the leadership process is expressed by his/her

personality, motivations, competencies and legitimacy. Subordinates, in turn, contribute their personality, competencies and expectations to the situation. The situation is determined by certain resources, tasks, structures and rules specific to military life. In the area where these three variables overlap, leadership potential can increase.

Leading style. The literature determines several classifications and typologies of leadership styles. Likert R. proposes the following styles for analysis: - authoritarian - democratic and permissive [7]. The authoritarian style is characterized by the exercise of authority through coercion, the duties of commanders and subordinates being very clear in the process of exercising the managerial act, being more task-oriented. The democratic style is characterised by personal example and persuasion, where the important decisions taken by the commander are the work of a collective activity, with subordinates being constantly oriented towards the perspective of activities, ensuring their conscious involvement in the process of fulfilling their professional obligations. The permissive style (*laissez-faire*) is characterised by tolerance and freedom of action, with the boss passing on tasks to subordinates from the higher levels, with little contribution to guiding and directing people to carry them out. Each style is effective if it is applied in the situation that requires it.

According to the way leadership is exercised, the literature mentions several types of leadership styles resulting from personality traits, leadership theories or the way of activity [8]. To determine the leadership style applied to military students we used the Questionnaire in which the following styles are described: rational, dependent, avoidant, intuitive, spontaneous. We applied this Questionnaire because it includes a more varied list of styles and each style has advantages and disadvantages. The differences between styles derive mainly

from leader personality traits (individualism, charisma, opportunism, diplomacy), work experience and emotional intelligence. Determining the predominant leadership style among students, we obtained the following results: Reporting the results of the Leadership Style Questionnaire:

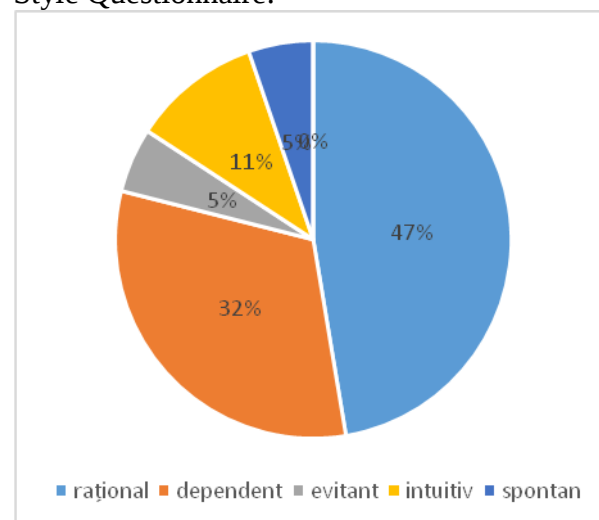


Figure 2: Leading Style.
Source: Author's research.

Rational style leadership dominates in all platoons. Those who apply this style use a logical and organised approach to leadership, and develop detailed plans for implementing decisions. The leadership style is based on analysis and action. It is similar to the classical form - the democratic style, but oriented towards the participative one.

The accumulated score in this style is the highest in all three platoons. The students' priority attitude towards this style is manifested by the fact that they tend towards this behaviour. Thus, they opted for this style 44%. The high share, denotes the fact, that the preference of this style results from the use of intrinsic motivators, and those who make mistakes are helped by other employees to correct themselves. Analysis and argumentation are used by both managers and subordinates.

Dependent style - rely predominantly on advice, support and guidance from others in their command activity. Here the help of

those close to them is considered indispensable when weighing and choosing alternatives. This style can be likened to democratic-consultative.

The accumulated score for this style is 33%. This style is also among the student preferences. The result obtained implies the conclusion that, not having experience of leadership activity, many students need mentoring or guidance from their superiors.

Avoidant style postpones and/or avoids taking a decision. This style is associated with the passive style. It describes leaders who do not react systematically to situations and problems they face. Passive leaders avoid clarifying disagreements, stating expectations and setting goals and standards to be achieved by subordinates. This style often has a negative effect on desired results. In the avoidant style there is a low percentage 6%.

Intuitive style focuses on intuition and impressions in making a decision; it does not look for evidence to argue for leadership activity. This leadership style becomes visible only after the future manager/leader has been invested with administrative authority; it is determined by the leadership style of the person in question, which is thus a predictor of the working styles within the group, by being determined by the image of the leader and the practical ways in which he/she leads, by the adoption by copying by employees of forms of behaviour, often external, and by the culture of the organisation of which the work group is a part. The percentage for this style is 11%.

Spontaneous style make decisions on the impulse of the moment, quickly and without much deliberation. This style can be found in both authoritarian and democratic behaviour. It is dictated by situations as well as the personality of the leader. The percentage is 6%. Low results for this style are presumably due to lack of experience, mistrust and lack of knowledge. We believe that among the students such results are predictable and

indicate that the work of leadership carries responsibility, confidence and capability.

From what is reported in the results we will mention that students tend to develop leadership skills. Some of them are reluctant in their leadership potential, however, the presentation of the style shows us their desire and perseverance to evolve towards gaining authority. Thus, the functional value of real authority, or rather its strength of manifestation, is also determined by the relationship between the authority of the institution and the authority of its leader, in the sense that the authority of the institution, of the military organisation in our study, also has its mark on the authority of the leader, as it is a transfer that is almost self-evident. But certainly, and perhaps to a greater extent, the authority of the leaders at all positions in the hierarchy provides the real dimensions of the institution's authority - it raises it or lowers it; it depends on the qualities, character and conduct of its leaders, their professionalism, morality and experience.

4. Conclusions

The potential of an effective leader manifests itself through his or her professionalism, knowledge and actions. Professionalism means: loyal to the organization, performing selfless service, taking personal responsibility. A professional possessing good character traits is expressed by: honesty, competence, responsibility, integrity, courage, imagination, loyalty.

As the results of the research evidence confirm, the leadership potential in many of the students is average. The interpretation of these results partially confirms hypothesis 1 put forward at the beginning of the research. Personality traits are not sufficient for high potential. This is evident because students still lack the necessary experience, knowledge, skills, abilities, competences that provide plasticity in leadership activity. Instead, we see significant progress in the application

of the Leadership Style study. Students responded more from the preferred style position. Not having practical experience in leadership they were more oriented to the theoretical part, which is what style they would prefer to implement in their professional work. All proposed leadership styles were chosen, the difference exists in percentage. Hypothesis 2 put forward at the beginning was validated, the rational leadership style predominated among the students.

Leadership style applied highlight the authority and influence of the leader. By working on developing leadership capabilities and applying a combination of styles resulting from leadership situations, the leader can assert authority and influence. Thus, without authority there can be no true leadership. The only way to keep people's respect and esteem is to truly earn it. Each of us is ultimately judged for who we are, for our actions and in no way for what we try to appear to be.

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