

INNOVATION OF TRAINING OF YOUNG MILITARY LEADERS FROM GENERATION Z IN REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

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Abstract: *Commanding and managing a military formation is never easy, but it can be even more challenging when the commander has less professional experience than his subordinates. In such a situation, very quickly, the commander can lose the trust of his subordinates, due to the little experience and uncertainty he feels at the moment.*

Keywords: generation Z, cadets, leaders

1. Introduction

As military members, it has become increasingly necessary to consider generational differences within our ranks. Generational differences contribute to how we communicate, what we value and what motivates us as military members [13]. Commanding and managing people has never been an easy task. In situations where it is a question of commanding a composition of older and more experienced people, the commander can very often experience the “imposter syndrome” (a psychological phenomenon in which people are unable to realize their achievements, attributing only negative traits to themselves. At the same time, they consider others around them to be almost perfect, without considering their shortcomings) [9]. Age differences in a team such as a platoon, company battalion, etc. can lead to complex relationships within it. Sometimes the reason for mistrust of the young commander lies in the processes preceding his organizational role [14].

2. Generational diversity in the Military

Generational diversity in the Military means having people of a wide range of different ages who are working together. In the Military, this diversity includes members from different generations: Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. Each of them have own characteristics in the military sphere. Working with people on different ages brings plenty of mentoring and learning opportunities for the all group. The main responsibility of the Ministry of the Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria is to create environment where everyone feels included and respected – regardless of age or background. Every person brings own perspective and ideas that should be taken into consideration, regardless of age and generation. With a bit of effort and an open-minded attitude, leaders can take advantage of the generational differences in the military to make it better for everyone. Military personnel from all age groups bring unique ideas and life experiences that leadership must appreciate [1].

3. Learning to be a leader

Army doesn't offer art classes in any of its cadets or junior officers. Army addresses creativity as an element of leadership, people must be able to lead creativity in the units they command. Cadets and junior officers shape culture and influence the behaviors of those they are in charge of. By preparing themselves, creating a conducive environment, and harnessing the genius in their teams, they can lead and overcome the problems they face [3].

4. Innovation of training of young military leaders from generation Z in Republic of Bulgaria

The army profession is a unique vocation of experts who are entrusted to defend interest of their nations [8].

People who are preparing to do these jobs are cadets. A cadet is an officer trainee or candidate. The term is frequently used to refer to those training to become an officer in the military, often a person who is a junior trainee. Its meaning may vary between countries which can include youths in voluntary youth organizations [7], [11], [12]. The purpose of cadet training is to develop character and leadership skills and instil a sense of duty and responsibility in the cadet. To benefit from that training, which is conducted in an environment of strict discipline, the cadet needs mental acuity and physical agility [15].

Giving practice and repetition to master the skills is something that cadets will need in their future work. However, rather than training models based on repetition, cadets need to train to failure so they have to be adaptive rather than repetitive [16].

Military training and education covers a great deal but never really incorporates generational experiences and how they shape military's communications, motivation and personal development.

Training is the organized and systematically conducted process of active interaction, where the teacher's leading activity

stimulates and directs the training activity and the trainees' behaviour with a view to achieving certain goals. It is a bilateral process – of teaching and acquiring knowledge, establishing skills and turning them into habits [4], [5].

The preparation and training of cadets for the needs of the armed forces is significantly different from that conducted in civilian higher schools, requiring the simultaneous formation of certain professional and leadership qualities in the future officer.

The higher military schools in the Republic of Bulgaria currently train representatives of generation Z. The name "Z" (the last letter of the Latin alphabet) was given by the American writer and historian William Strauss and consultant Neil Howe in the book "Generations", 1991.

Generation Z is also found in the literature under other names, such as "millennial children", "digital generation", "digital natives", "the different ones", etc [6].

This is the generation in which the deepening socio-economic inequality in Bulgarian society is most significantly projected. Inequality is fuelled by differences in ethnic origin, in the social status and income of parents, by differences in the state of regional economies, by differences in the quality of the education system (private and state, elite and mediocre, linguistic, general education and professional, regional and peripheral schools).

Each new generation comes with a new set of values, learning styles and effective leadership principles. Generation Z are young people born between 1996 and 2010. Cadets, representatives of Generation Z students are technologically dependent, fragile, and unfocused, but also more technologically savvy, socially conscious, creative, and tolerant than Generation Y or Generation X [2].

In 2023, they will complete their education and be appointed to positions in the armed forces. In addition to the theoretical and

practical training received during the training course, it is of particular importance for them to gain confidence in their actions. The complicated epidemiological situation related to the spread of Covid-19 also had a negative effect on the practical training, as their training took place entirely in an electronic environment and the practical habits and skills acquired by them were not fully absorbed.

However, the command (management) of formations whose composition is made up of servicemen, sometimes more than 10-15 years older, represents a great challenge for the young and inexperienced commander. Success on the battlefield is achieved through good training of troops, application of the art of war, excellence in the use of technology, and effective leadership. This, in turn, can only be achieved with timely and purposeful training of future military leaders and commanders in the form of cadets from higher military schools.

After the abolition of conscription military service in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2008 and its replacement by a professional one, young commanders were and continue to be faced with the challenge of commanding formations in which 70% - 75% of the personnel are older and possess greater professional experience than theirs.

The clash between generations has long been commented on in modern literature, and this is practically observed to the greatest extent in the army environment. In this way, there is a need for additional training of the cadets within the framework of their training at the higher military school. As part of their training, cadets are assigned as junior commanders and conduct methodical classes in "Physical Training" and "Structural Training", mostly to colleagues from their training group or to those who are younger than them. But applying this approach is insufficient to build and develop future military leaders capable of confidently commanding and managing military formations in a dynamic

security environment.

One of the ways to improve and increase the command and organizational qualities of the cadets from the higher military schools is to provide an opportunity for more active participation in the educational process. In this sense, during the winter semester of the academic year 2022/2023, a pilot participation of cadets-graduates from the higher military schools as heads or assistant heads of training centers in "Physical training" and "Structural training" classes was held with the cadets and specialists enrolled for training in professional sergeant (senior) colleges. This gave the cadets the opportunity to deepen and improve their knowledge and skills related to planning and conducting classes.

In this way, conditions were created for increasing the methodological and practical training of the future officers, which will directly influence the performance of their functional duties as a junior command staff. The program for junior military leaders was held in the period October 2022 - March 2023 in the professional sergeant (senior) colleges that are part of the composition of the higher military schools. The cadets held one session on "Physical Training" and one session on "Structural Training". After the analysis of the completed pilot training, the following conclusions and recommendations can be drawn:

1. Despite the preliminary training acquired during various internships and exercises, all cadets during the first lesson as platoon commanders experienced uncertainty in their actions. This is mostly due to the anxiety of commanding people your parents' age.
2. A large part of the cadets held more than 2 classes, which, according to them, is of particular importance, since in the month of August 2023 they are to graduate and be assigned positions as platoon commanders.
3. A problem in conducting this training was the high involvement of the cadets in other activities, but nevertheless, the

program was conducted.

4. After participating in conducting 2 (two) or more classes as leaders, among the cadets-graduates there is an aspiration to increase their command-organizational qualities and training, which in turn is an indicator of the effectiveness of the conducted pilot program.

The general assessment of the instructors from the Professional Sergeant (Senior) Colleges and the commanders of cadet battalions (divisions) about the training and the conduct of the classes by the cadets is good, but a lack of confidence and some methodological flaws are noticeable, which is understandable in view of the fact, that for the first time they are conducting private lessons for servicemen they do not know.

5. Conclusions

The platoon is an important constituent of any country's army. The whole platoon's responsibility is on the shoulders of platoon commanders. They assign tasks and organize the sergeants and soldiers under their command [17]. Training and managing military personnel that is older than platoon commander is very difficult on one side and on the other side challenging. The commander must be prepared for

things that he may not have learned in military school. He has to be sure in his actions, to demonstrate determination and confidence. These skills can be improved by running courses with cadets from professional sergeant (senior) colleges. To achieve the best results, military schools will conduct this kind of training with cadets from 3, 4 and 5 year of study.

Program of young military leaders will teach cadets that respect is something that you earned. They will speak with their subordinates with respect. Good manners will truly set them apart from their peers and co-workers, and these acts of courtesy will truly open more doors to them. Everything they will receive by self-discipline. There is no better teacher than failure. If they fail during the training they will present better next time. Tenacity is the key to success. When something gets hard, they have to believe in their selves and tap into their grit to finish what they start.

Training people who are older than their commander is difficult for people who are afraid or feel unprepared. That is why when you give the cadets opportunity to practice, the armed forces will receive prepared commanders, who are not afraid to manage small units.

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