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Land Forces Academy Review
Vol. XXVII, No 2(106), 2022

# USEFUL APPROACHES IN TRAINING AND DEVELOPING THE PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF LAND FORCES TACTICAL OPERATIONAL LEADERS

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**ABSTRACT**

*The professional development of military leaders in accordance with the requirements of global and regional military challenges calls for their continuous education and training that harness the intellectual and practical tools necessary for the success of military action in times of peace, crisis or possible armed conflict, determined over time by the conditions of an unpredictable and unstable world. Regardless of the challenges faced today by NATO and by the military, it is obvious that the leaders of tactical structures must acquire moral and ethical qualities necessary for the leadership of operational military organizations in theatres (areas) of operations characterized by uncertainty and increased risk. This objective of this article is to highlight some aspects related to the tactical military leader's attributes and competences that typify their professional conduct, which allow them to master the art of effective and successful operational leadership in the context of tactical combat structures These abilities are acquired progressively, during training and throughout military university studies as well as afterwards. Given the technological evolution of tactical combat potential and the need to ensure operational resilience through proactive and anticipatory risk management actions, we can argue that the leadership process characterizing this commander is quite different from the one of the past. Our approach is based on connections with some concepts that are considered familiar, due to the fact that, in the future, the leadership performed by the leader of a tactical operational structure will be increasingly complex and, consequently, will require ongoing learning and training.*

**KEYWORDS:** tactical operational structures, tactical-level military leaders, education, training, skills, tactical-level operational leadership, operational success

## 1. Introduction

Currently, in the second decade of the 21st century, nations are once again facing a turbulent, volatile, and complex security environment, and addressing the challenges of our time places new demands on NATO states and military leaders at all levels. The continuous changes and transformations in the Romanian Army have required the training and development of the professional

DOI: 10.2478/raft-2022-0014
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conduct of tactical leaders, who should be adaptable and able to perform their missions in dynamic, unstable, and complex environments.

Today's military needs agile and skilled leaders, capable of effectively exploiting the combat power of the structures they command in the most complex situations generated by the characteristics of the operational environment in which they function.

Ensuring the success of a military action inexorably depends on the existence of strong and effective leaders, capable of anticipating the evolution of subsequent events and of providing appropriate solutions. Such leaders cannot be replaced by high-performance technology or artificial intelligence. Military leaders must quickly adjust to and understand the operational environment in which they function, think critically and creatively to identify innovative solutions and make fair and ethical decisions, communicate critical information in a timely manner, collaborate and work as a team in order to ensure conceptual uniformity and accomplish missions effectively.

Ever since the establishment of Romanian military education institutions, programs tailored for the development of the professional conduct of tactical leaders have been essential. To this end, the beneficial mix combining *education*, *training*, and *practice* has been extremely important in order to achieve and support *agile*, *adaptive,* and *innovative* tactical leaders, who display willingness, boldness, and initiative in dynamic and complex situations, in order to execute missions according to the doctrines and orders, and based on practical experience. In addition, the afore-mentioned processes have been aimed at forming intuitive leaders who possess abilities to act in the absence of missions planned by higher echelons, when orders, doctrines or their own operational experiences are not aligned with actionable situations or when they experience situations in which they have to seize opportunities or counter unforeseen threats (Mallick, 2021).

Military leaders are characterized by several essential traits that include: *adequate intellect, bearing, professional competence, and character*. As leaders and subordinates, as commanders of lower hierarchical leaders and of all task force personnel, they must have the ability and disposition to act decisively according to the intent and purpose of higher hierarchical leaders and in the best interests of the organizations they lead (U.S. Army, ADP 6-22, 2019) (Figure no. 1).

The military leader is a special type of leader who experiences perhaps the greatest influence from the environment in which they operate. This is because of the strict regulations that constrain their freedom of decision and the often huge responsibility that weighs on their shoulders. Unlike other leaders, who lead their subordinates towards peaceful ideals, military leaders lead their people towards victory or defeat, life or death. Hence the need for special qualities in a commander's personality profile, that enable them to quickly make the best decisions and avoid turning action into catastrophic failures with irreparable negative consequences.

At the same time, military leaders are those who, through their training, experience, and seniority, are meant to lead and achieve the necessary synergy within the organizations whose commanders they are. This statement highlights the need for a bond of mutual trust in order to design and carry out actions – very well understood and coordinated in a conducive climate, so that the mission and organizational objectives are achieved at all times, with the possibility of their verification by senior leaders based on pre-established performance indicators.

To this end, education and training programs must be timely and flexible, focusing on the development of leadership

competencies, throughout their entire career, so that the resulting product can meet the challenges of the current and future security environment, and leaders become capable of effectively leading the full spectrum of missions.

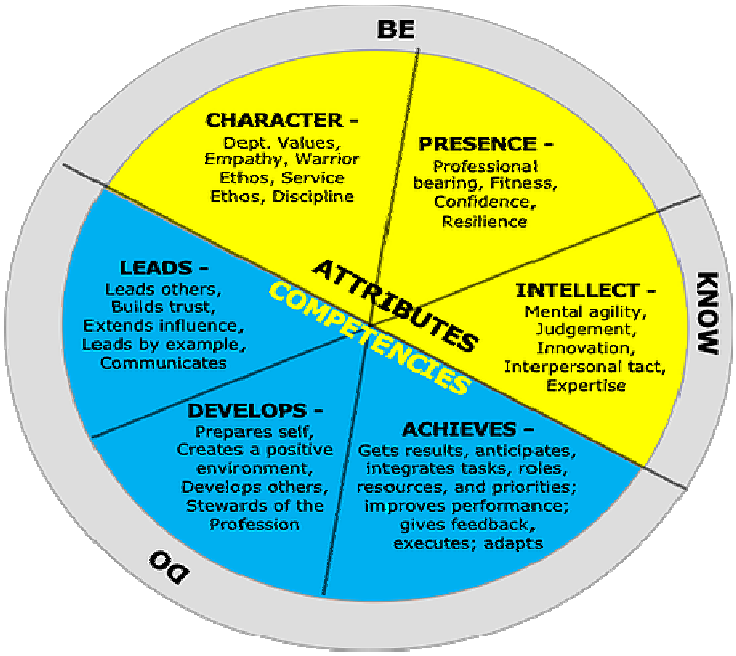



Figure no. 1: *Essential attributes and skills of the military leader*
(Source: Army Rangers, 2020)

In accordance with the requirements established over the years, "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy – a major educational institution of our army (in its various names and organizations) – has provided outstanding commanders who have evolved in their careers, some of them also pursuing higher studies at the War College or at similar institutions in France, Germany, or Italy. They have led thousands of soldiers in the difficult conditions of confrontations specific to the two World Wars. Consequently, in the past, our army had its leaders who, due to their military conduct and leadership, were able to obtain important victories during almost impossible clashes with invading armies, hostile to the Romanian nation.

The training and development of the professional conduct of tactical leaders is achieved through the lifelong synthesis of knowledge, skills, and experiences, gained through training and educational opportunities at institutional, operational, and self-development levels. A key educational component of the training and development of tactical military leaders' professional and leadership performance must continue to focus on their professionalism as well as on their subordinates'. Hence the argument that the Romanian Army has been committed to providing quality education and training since the time of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, in different military institutions that have evolved throughout history to the level we know today.

Therefore, through the design and evolution of educational plans and programs specific to military higher education both in the past and today, it has been possible to train and develop the professional skills of tactical leaders, who have become *honest* and *competent* officers, *determined* to act according to the missions assigned (Henry et al., 2006). As a natural consequence, the ultimate objective of military academic education in the Romanian Land Forces is to train highly

professional military tactical leaders, who obviously provide directions to follow, generate motivations and visions to their subordinate command teams (staffs), in order to prepare and execute missions according to the intentions and orders of their hierarchical commanders.

## 2. Relational Conceptualizations of the Professional Skills of Tactical Leaders

If senior staff leaders are the ones who make the major decisions on the basis on which the three levels of military art (i.e. strategic, operational and tactical) function, tactical leaders (at company, battalion, brigade level) are the ones who must execute orders and make decisions necessary for the preparation and conduct of military actions (proactively and anticipatively), according to their abilities and the (regulated) freedom of action, in order to lead the combat forces, to accomplish the missions assigned, and to achieve operational success. It is essential that these leaders possess personal qualities such as self-awareness, self-confidence, self-control, self-knowledge, self-reflection, resilience and determination, which are fundamental in the decision-making process, ensuring effective and efficient leadership of the subordinate operational structures.

Traditionally, the military places great emphasis on the roles of senior commanders, holding them accountable for all actions, success or failure, as a result of their orders, passed on to subordinate tactical operational military structures. Although a failure may be caused by a senior military leader's error (due to age and/or fatigue, or a systemic problem – which cannot be controlled by a single individual), it is the culture and professional experience that will enable the commander to identify appropriate solutions in order to transform failure into success, drawing on the experience and skills of subordinate commanders at tactical level. Through specific regulations, a senior tactical leader is given the power to influence events and the lives of members of subordinate operational (tactical) structures. Thus, the legal authority of the leader is reinforced by an appropriate professional culture (Cohen & Gooch, 1990).

Experts are united in the belief that military leaders in command of tactical organizations equipped with modern weapons undoubtedly possess more military power than the great captains of history. As operational military commanders advance in rank and responsibility, they no longer directly influence the complex dynamics of the combat. However, they are responsible for knowing the competencies possessed by hierarchically subordinate leaders, who must have those skills necessary to understand operational-tactical (or tactical-only) and logistical situations – the knowledge and experience to plan and act effectively and resiliently in situations of risk and uncertainty, and the skills to make intuitive decisions and lead operational tactical structures boldly and dynamically (Helge, 2021) (Figure no. 2).

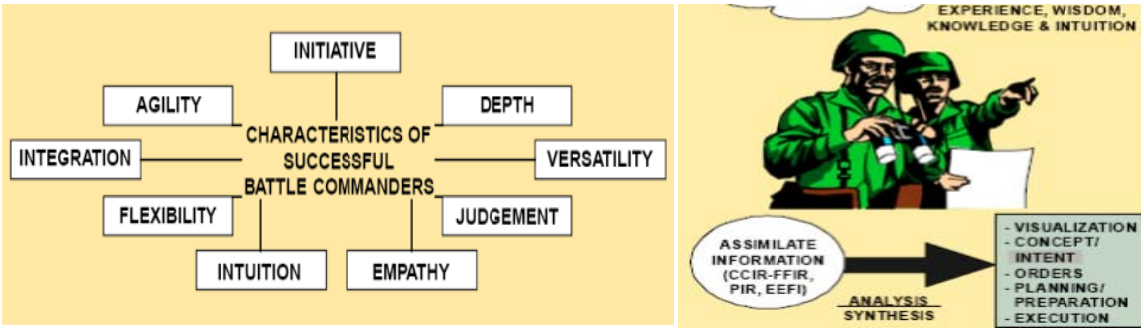



Figure no. 2: *Key traits of successful military tactical leaders*
(Source: Adapted from Mallick , 2020)

Therefore, by virtue of their training, professional experience and military rank, the decision-making process and the leadership as such are of essential importance for the leaders of tactical structures, involving many challenges, but also stress, due to the continuous existence of situations of risk and increased uncertainty in the field of military confrontation. It is obvious that the conduct of combat actions by the forces commanded by the afore-mentioned leaders involves frequently changing confrontation situations, which requires continuously updated information about the possible actions of the adversary's troops in order to make coherent decisions for action, without neglecting, however, the permanent achievement of adequate and resilient logistical support in order to ensure the success of the planned tactical efforts.

The adverse circumstances of modern warfare can cause both tactical leaders and the military they lead to be influenced by (often negative) mental reactions, part of what Carl von Clausewitz called *"the fog of war"* (Howard & Paret, 1989). This can undesirably influence (causing stress with impact on intelligence accuracy) both tactical leaders and their subordinates in various combat situations by creating communication deficiencies, giving unclear orders with undesirable effects in achieving tactical objectives, and undermining the orderly end state in the conduct of operations and the achievement of the expected success.

Against this background, it is clear that in the process of leading the tactical task force, military leaders rely on their subordinates whom they have to know and understand continuously throughout every sequence of the operation. In turn, the subordinates have to act according to the concept and to the relevant and feasible orders issued by the commanders. The result, therefore, is the need for balanced and dynamic leadership carried out by the leaders of the combat structures and continuously adapted to each phase of preparation and conduct of the operation ordered by the higher echelon, avoiding friction and misunderstandings between subordinates at all times (Helge, 2021).

According to Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, an evolutionary comparison is quite suggestive: *"... the modern commander is much more like the general manager of a company... and never like the warlord of the past. He has become the commander of a complex military organization, whose many branches he must supervise and whose success depends on their cooperation, assistance and support"* (Cohen, 1990).

Therefore, based on all elements of their training, experience, competence, intuition and imagination, a commander of a tactical combat structure must rely on their own mental, cognitive, and collaborative skills throughout the period of preparation and conduct of tactical actions, filtering and transforming the raw information at their disposal into information suitable for the effective, efficient, and resilient planning and conduct of operations performed by the combatant forces – supported by adequate logistics at all times (U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, 2017) (Figure no. 3).

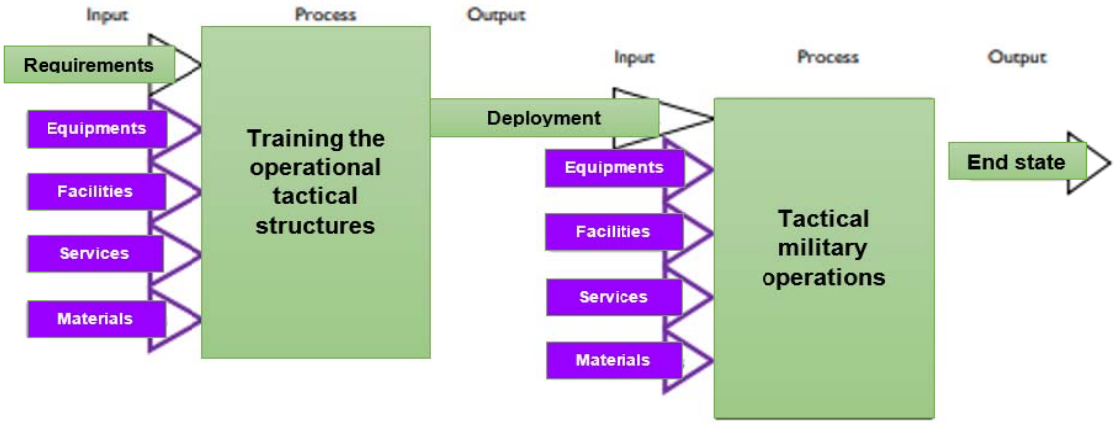



Figure no. 3: *Adequate integration of logistical support in the preparation and successful conduct of tactical operations*
(Source: Adapted from Skoglund, 2012)

In our view, in addition to rigorous, effective and efficient professional training and education of the leaders of tactical organizations and their subordinates, the requirements of modern warfare (as revealed by the conflict in Ukraine) also highlight the need for resilient tactical systems (operational and logistical) with high technological potential, which must be driven by the application of appropriate risk management in order to respond in a timely, adaptable, and regenerative manner to the destructive actions of the enemy with flexible and high-precision forces and means.

## 3. Imperatives of Training and Developing the Professional Conduct of Tactical Leaders

New changes in the world's militaries, such as reform, professionalization, integration of more women into the military, etc., have resulted in the need to adapt and optimize leadership processes to the requirements of today's military organization. In order to meet these new requirements, military leaders and managers need to actively participate in processes that can influence their subordinates socially, i.e. by providing adequate leadership and management, regardless of the context.

A commander nowadays, whether as a leader or a manager, must be as efficient as possible in carrying out missions, i.e. to obtain *"maximum results, at minimum costs"*. Generally speaking, behaviors that are adopted to influence other behaviors are called *"influence tactics"*. They have two fundamental characteristics: they are proactive rather than reactive, and their main purpose is to stimulate or motivate action.

This is why the need for military leadership arises from the first contacts of future and current commanders with the military environment, in order to be able to lead both the people and the military organization appropriately, by including subjects that study the issues concerned and by the participation of military leaders in international missions, the latter having the aim of improving leadership qualities among commanders.

The U.S. military has realized that the importance of its missions largely depends on the quality of its soldiers. The old maxim "Mission first. People always" shows the increased attention they pay to their people. The Army spends a lot of time to ingrain as deeply as possible the subordinate-leader relationship, teamwork and esprit de corps to increase the success rate of missions that might occur. Regarding leadership, the U.S. Army describes its leaders as self-aware and innovative: *"Self-awareness has the potential to help all leaders become more competent*

*and effective. Self-awareness is relevant to contemporary operations that require cultural sensitivity and leader adaptability to inevitable environmental changes"* (FM 6-22 Leader Development, 2015).

In order to continuously meet operational requirements, the tactical leader's training and development through higher education are fundamental objectives for the Romanian Army. To this end, according to the requirements of each stage of evolution and transformation, a *deliberate*, *continuous*, *sequential*, and *progressive* process – based on the traditional and modern values of our army – has been and continues to be carried out, aimed at the continuous professional development of *skilled* and *confident* military leaders, *capable of acting decisively* while leading tactical operational military structures, in accordance with the missions assigned (Leonard et al., 2006).

Based on the provisions of the regulations in force, tactical leaders should focus on a continuous identification of the concrete state of the military organizations they lead, as well as on real, constant visualization of their proper functioning (systemic and sub-systemic), in order to make decisions necessary to fulfill the missions given and achieve operational success (Figure no. 4).

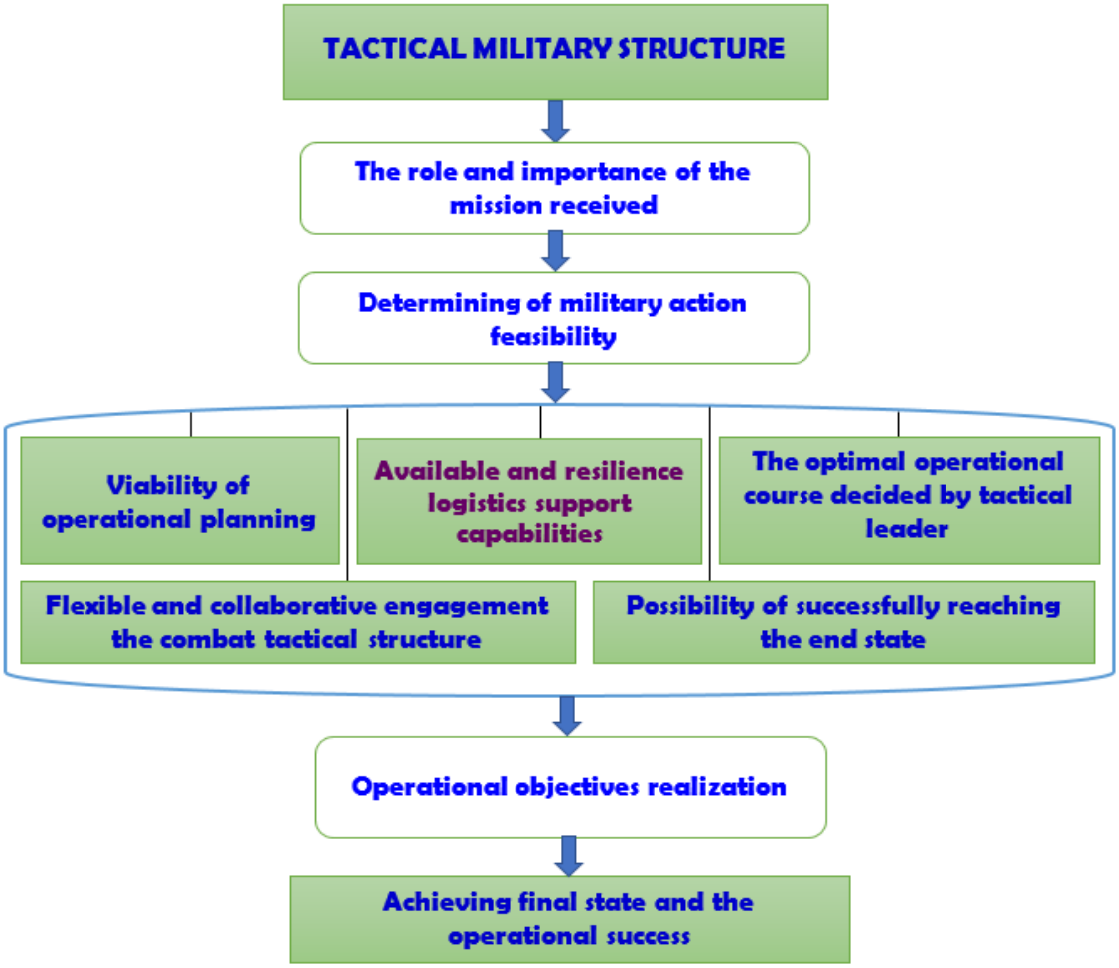



Figure no. 4: *Determinants of success of the operation conducted by the tactical military organization*
(Source: Authors)

The war in Ukraine has revealed the need for major transformations that will take place at all levels of the military art, as well as in the field of operational logistics. In view of the tactical errors manifested by the commanders of the aggressor structures in confrontation with the defense forces of Ukraine, we believe that in the future, emphasis should be placed on the training of military leaders and their subordinates at tactical level, as well as on several factors that had not been taken into account (and as such led to failures) in sequential and large-scale confrontations that occurred in the mentioned conflict, as follows: ● *single command;* ● *very good coordination of subordinate commanders and ensuring full cooperation between them;* ● *preparing troops properly for a new operation, using appropriate forms of action (tactics) to counteract the actions of the opposing forces;* ● *learning from mistakes made during previous tactical operations, in order to make the necessary corrections in future forms of combat;* ● *intelligent tactical actions adequately supported logistically – enabling operational resilience* (Figure no. 5), *with the use of the element of surprise, by employing flexible tactical structures against the enemy's numerous aggressive forces;* ● *changing the tactics used from one operation to another by using all forces, means and tools to the advantage of the combatant operational organizations* (Official Occidental, 2022).

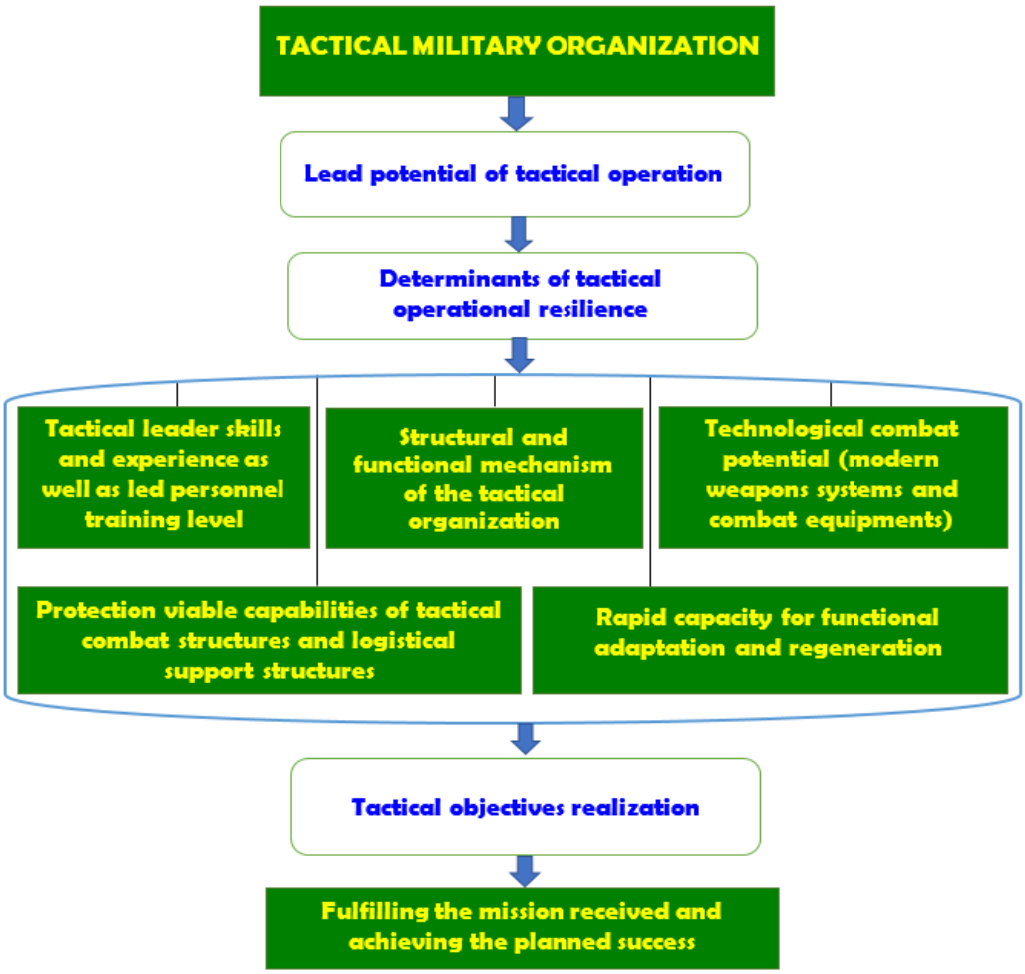



Figure no. 5: *Determinants of the operational resilience of the tactical military structure*
(Source: Authors)

The current challenges generated by the war in Ukraine accurately highlight the response of one or the other of the opposing sides to attacks through actions that have involved more or less trained tactical military leaders and subordinate military personnel who have been using, skillfully or not, combat equipment and weapons systems of varying performance under known conditions of logistical support. Against this backdrop, we believe that a number of lessons for the immediate future of the equipping, training, and education of the military leaders of tactical organizations in our army can be drawn, mainly regarding:

✓ *the continuation of the acquisition (from domestic and international suppliers) of modern means of combat, which would allow the commanders of operational tactical units and sub-units to carry out the missions received from the echelons (operational-tactical; tactical) they are part of, in a timely and successful manner ;*

✓ *the introduction of specific details regarding the use of modern technology and armaments in the planning and conduct of tactical operations (in terms of operational and logistic support) in the appropriate manuals and regulations dealing with the preparation and training of land forces operational units and sub-units, as soon as possible;*

✓ *the use of modern equipment and armaments acquired by the Romanian Army in the preparation and training, at tactical level, of the students attending the courses of the faculties of the Land Forces Academy, as well as analyzing the possibility to adequately exploit their potential in the preparation and conduct of operations of this profile (tactical);*

✓ *the conducting of the necessary training and instruction of the above-mentioned students in providing resilient, proactive, anticipatory and "Just in Time" logistic support to operational tactical structures engaged in various forms of operations (offensive and/or defensive);*

✓ *the enhancement of the preparation and training of the students mentioned in conditions of interoperability and multinationality, using hypothetical data with structures from the (sequential or total) organization and operation of a NATO Battle Group.*

In the context of the new transformations in the conception and application of the laws of modern warfare, tactical leaders in operational structures must possess the ability to understand and analyze the volatile conditions specific to global and regional environments from the point of view of the modernity of the confrontation problem, in order to make rapid and timely decisions, according to the requirements of command, so that any mission can be accomplished in peacetime, in crisis or armed conflict situations, in a joint and multinational context, on national territory or beyond. Under these conditions, the possibilities of defeating an adaptive and unpredictable enemy through asymmetric/hybrid threats, which may also be embedded in the national or nearby population, with actionable capabilities between irregular and conventional, must be considered (Cohen et al., 2020).

Therefore, in order to develop the capability to respond to hybrid and asymmetric threats, leaders must master the art of modern warfare and know the capabilities of high-performance weapon platforms so as to effectively allocate and use limited resources in a systemic approach to the full spectrum of military capabilities.

## 4. Conclusions

The three focus areas – *institutional*, *operational* and *self-development* – are used in designing and implementing the appropriate strategy for the professional development of the tactical leader of the combat organization. They allow the definition and engagement of a continuous cycle of *education*, *training*, *selection*, *experience*, *assessment*, *feedback*, *reinforcement* and *evaluation*.

This process underlines the fact that *learning*, *experience* and *feedback* provide the basis for the professional growth of the commander of a tactical operational organization. Consequently, the training and development of the tactical leader's potential will enhance the military leader's ability to subsequently occupy positions of increased operational responsibility at tactical, operational and strategic levels.

The development of the tactical military leader's professional conduct is achieved through the accumulation of education and related experience throughout their individual career, acquired through opportunities in the institutional, operational, and self-development domains, and supported by peer-to-peer relationships.

The complexity of modern warfare creates confusion and bewilderment in complex operational environments, even for the most competent leaders of tactical operational organizations. Dealing with these requires particular skills on the part of these officers, enabling them to quickly take appropriate decisions for the planning and execution of successful operations by subordinate tactical entities, which must be able to operate in complex, multinational structures within the Alliance, at home or abroad.

Under these conditions, the leaders of the tactical operational structures are those who must collaborate both horizontally and vertically, within the military organizations to which their structures belong (company, battalion, and brigade). Therefore, according to our assessment, both the collaboration and the action synergy created and developed by each tactical leader represent, together with the logistical potential at their disposal, the basic pillars of the growth, maintenance or restoration of the functional resilience of each operational (tactical) structure led in operations planned and ordered by the higher echelon.

Based on the presented arguments, it is obvious that the leaders of tactical combat structures must go through university education in order to understand the operational context (through the implementation of operational details to be fulfilled, received through OPORDs from higher echelons) in order to execute actions and achieve success in any mission received in peacetime, crisis situations or armed conflict, on national territory or in theatres of operations.

Even more so, as the current demographic, socio-economic, and cultural context has led to a decrease in the number of those who choose the military profession, by will and by vocation, there is a need for leaders capable of attracting, developing, and motivating personnel who demonstrate that they possess the essential qualities for commanding military structures.

All in all, in addition to the ability to act and lead forces in military operations, leaders must have the ability to instill military values, communicate and clarify the role of the military in the society and the benefits associated with military service and defense of the country.

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