COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE LEADERSHIP STYLE OF THE BULGARIAN CADETS

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Abstract: *The paper presents the results of the analysis of the longitudinal study of the professional and social components of the leadership style of Bulgarian cadets. The research is conducted in the last three years with the cadets from all years of training in Vassil Levski National Military University during the annual complex tactical field exercise. Situational leadership theory has been used as a basis of the developed model of the cadet's leadership building.*

Keywords: leadership training, professional components, model

Introduction

In the modern realities growth and strengthening of any organization, as well as the formation of its leaders is a difficult and lengthy process.

This greatly applies to the Armed Forces as an institution in the process of its transformation and modernization. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were an increasing number of factors affecting the professional military environment, which each commander must take into account when making management decisions. The increasing involvement of the Bulgarian Armed Forces in peacekeeping operations, the multinational environment, the cultural awareness, the AOR and climate specifics, the modernized weapon systems require the implementation of new approaches in the development of modern military leaders of all ranks within the structures of the Bulgarian Armed Forces.

These changes call for higher requirements to both personal and professional qualities and knowledge and skills of the leaders, who are expected to process various information to act appropriately in highly

stressful situations, combined with lack of time.

These advanced features that are also challenges to the security of each country change the ways in which military leaders express themselves and influence their subordinates.

The increased requirements to the military personnel and their involvement in international missions and multinational combat teams require providing appropriate training to military servicemen, in order to build C2 and leadership skills. It is a fact that effective leadership practice is an essential feature of a commander's management style which is related to the need of its permanent study and optimization.

The demand for specialists possessing high theoretical knowledge, practical skills and professional competence in the field of national security in most cases have been satisfied through the education and training of officers in Vassil Levski National Military University - the main military educational institution in Bulgaria.

The University trains cadets - the future officers of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, as the main training goal is formation of young people as individuals with managerial and leadership skills, with knowledge and capabilities to manage human and material resources in times of peace and crisis.

1. Research and results

The complex and contradictory process of formation of cadets as leaders includes both the influence of the academic staff, teaching civilian and military subjects and the requirements of their platoon leaders and company commanders. These are the main components of the social environment in the military institution, hereinafter referred to as military - learning environment. These elements must work in unity towards the building of professional and social skills of the trainees under the permanent control of the Military University Command.

In this regard and on the basis on the situational leadership theory by P. Harsi and K. Blanchard, a model for cadet leadership development has been created at Vassil Levski National Military University. The main task of the faculty is the formation of students as leaders who are competent and able to release the intellectual potential of their subordinates and to effectively lead small units. According to the author of this paper, leadership development in military environment has two aspects - professional and social.

Cadets enhance their professional skills in the respective military specialty studying military and specialized subjects. They are formed as socially mature and competent young people with appropriate models of behavior, studying humanities and being under the direct influence of their commanders.

In this regard, evaluation criteria of professional and social aspect of leadership style of cadets have been developed, to measure their ability to implement their own leadership style while performing a specific tactical task. Verification of the

level of performance and the actual indicator status of both components of the cadets' leadership style of Vassil Levski National Military University has been carried out through a longitudinal survey study conducted in the last three years in the annual complex tactical exercise "Joint efforts - 2012, 2013, 2014".

The evaluation criteria of cadets' leadership style are as follows:

1. Evaluation indicators for the professional component: dynamics; activity; decision making; responsibility; communication skills; discipline; readiness.
2. Evaluation indicators for the social component: performance; emotional stability; intellectual potential (analytical thinking); striving for perfection; culture of speech; sense of duty, honor and dignity.

One of the main objectives of complex exercises is to test the leadership qualities and enhance the practical skills of cadets, who are assigned as platoon and section leaders in the small units command in real-life situations. At the same time their moral and mental stability is being checked, as well as their endurance and physical ability to adapt quickly to the changing situation and to make appropriate decisions.

The evaluation of the individual indicators in the professional and social aspect of cadets' leadership style is scored from 2 to 6. The indicator scores between 5 (very good) and 6 (excellent) represent the desired final marks. The professional aspect of the cadets' performance was evaluated by tactical assessors (military instructors and specialists), whereas the social component was evaluated by their direct commanders.

All studies involve cadets from the second to fifth year of training at the University, who have been assigned to command (leadership) positions and have performed other functions and have had to meet the specific requirements for their positions. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the indicators of the social and

professional components of cadets' leadership style over the last three years. The analysis aims at defining the actual state of the leadership qualities of the cadets and at mapping the future of educational and training activities. At the same time, the appropriate implementation of different

leadership styles by the commanders and instructors in accordance with their professional competence, experience and potential have had to be proved.

Figure 1 represents the average values of the cadets' professional leadership final grades during the study period.

Figure 1: Average values of the cadets' professional leadership final grades (study period 2012-2014)

The figure shows prevailing scores within the desired range - scores between 5 and 6 which can lead to the conclusion that in the three years the cadets showed very good and excellent levels of performance referring to the professional aspect of their leadership style and relevant to their respective year of training. It reveals the natural course of professional military education which is the gradual upgrading of the training material and of the practical complexity of the case studies and tasks in the field. It is logical that the second and third year cadets receive lower grades than the fourth and fifth year cadets since they have less competence and experience. The most logical conclusion to be made is that upon graduation from the National Military University the future officers and leaders are to have sufficient theoretical knowledge and some practical experience that would help them solve any task professionally and

enhance their competences.

A more detailed analysis of the professional aspect criteria of the cadets' leadership skills would show a number of peculiarities of the performance of the cadets from the different years of training. For example, the second year cadets have difficulties in the decision-making process and they lack the ability to bear the responsibility of their own actions. A relatively big percentage of these trainees have difficulties in establishing communication with their peers and when they have to work as a team. Along with that, the young cadets are disciplined and demonstrate willingness to complete the assigned tasks successfully. The third year cadets' grades are very good in almost all criteria referring to their professional conduct and performance. They are assigned to positions of squad leaders in the tactical field exercises.

The data shows that in their third year of

training the cadets already possess a certain amount of knowledge and skills; what they need is a more frequent feedback from their instructors since they are still not so self-confident and need more support. At the same time, it should be mentioned that these cadets are disciplined, initiative, and eager to participate actively in the solving of certain problems.

The very good grades the tactical assessors give to the performance of the fourth year cadets during the field exercises show that these cadets possess to a certain degree some of the required competences and can cope themselves, rather adequately, with most of the tasks. The lowest grades that these cadets receive from the tactical assessors are for their initiative as a significant criterion of their performance. Even though they already have the self-esteem and professional confidence of fourth-year cadets, some individuals from this group still have difficulties in making fast and adequate decisions and show inconsistency when completing certain tasks.

The excellent grades of the cadet-graduates appear to be a desired and expected result referring to their leadership style and conduct. This is a positive fact since it is just two months after the field exercises when these future young officers are to perform their duties in the units of the Bulgarian Armed Forces as commanders and deputy commanders of platoons. Fifth year cadets have proved to be disciplined, with good communicative and professional skills, capable of performing the tasks correctly and of quickly adapting and integrating in military environment. It is only natural that some of them achieve lower results, but they are within the frames of the desired final state.

These lower results refer to the criteria of making quick and adequate decisions, the confidence in the decision-making process, the search for new tasks and the efficiency

of their performance in different situations.

It should be taken into consideration that various factors, both expected and unexpected, normally affect the performance of all cadets during the field exercises, and the wide range of scores can be explained with the role of the subjectivity in evaluation on the part of the instructors of military and specialized subjects.

In any case, the longitudinal study of the professional aspect of the cadets' leadership style performance can lead to certain conclusions. The academic staff responsible for the professional training of the cadets must be able to flexibly apply different methods of teaching and gaining knowledge and skills, along with the enhancing of the trainees' practical skills. This suggests that instructors and lecturers are familiar with and apply different leadership styles in order to effectively influence on their subordinates, taking into account their individual traits, maturity and the specific situation. The proper implementation of different leadership styles - directive, mentoring, supporting or delegating - that underpin situational leadership would contribute to improving cadets' performance and increasing their professional confidence. And last but not least, flexible and attractive way of lecturing and instruction will boost the interest and commitment of contemporary young generation to the military profession.

A similar comparative analysis of the performance evaluation of the social aspect of cadets' leadership behavior in military learning environment will be presented further on. Fig. 2 shows the overall average for all indicators that illustrate the scope of the social skills the Military University trainees over the years of their training. The data shows a gradual and, at the same time, contradictory development of the social components of the behavior of cadets at the Military University.

Figure 2: Average values of the cadets' social leadership final grades (study period 2012-2014).

The cadets - participants in the 2012 field exercise demonstrated a gradual improvement of their social skills in the process of education at the University. The values of all the indicators of the social aspect ranged from Good (4) to Excellent (6), the latter achieved mainly by the cadet – graduates. A certain fact should not be ignored here, i.e. this component of the cadets' leadership style, is evaluated by their direct commanders, who know their subordinates very well as individuals and as qualities obtained over the years.

The results of the following 2013 field exercise in the same criteria (the social element of leadership behavior) are more or less the same. The estimates of cadets' social competences here are Very good (5), indicating good selection by the commanders of cadets with certain individual qualities and teamwork skills, corresponding to the positions they have been assigned to during the exercise.

The most controversial results were received in 2014, where estimates of the social aspect are Good (4) and Very good (5). This is another proof of the difficulty

and complexity of the process of educating young people in today's dynamic world since these youngsters have ambiguous understanding of social norms and have a not very stable system of values.

It can be concluded that the fundamental elements of the young people's growth and maturity are the formation of moral values and qualities, the maintaining of a rich vocabulary, the awareness of own significance within the military system, and the capabilities of better self-presentation and control of personal conduct. These qualities require continuous and hard work from both cadets and their commanders - educators and instructors.

Upon careful observation and analysis of the results of all the years included in the research, certain peculiarities of the process of social development of the young people can be pointed out.

It is worth focusing on the fact that over the early years of their training cadets seek after self-improvement and winning the others' respect as well as after enriching their own vocabulary. Young cadets have certain knowledge and feel enthusiastic but, along

with this, it is only normal that these cadets be still emotionally unstable and unconfident in their actions.

In the following years of training - third and fourth - the formation of value standards and the development of the cadets' social skills continues. The most frequent difficulties in this period which students encounter are the improvement of their language culture, the good performance, creating the right organization to work fast and mastering the skill to give accurate assessment of a particular situation.

The highest values of the assessments of the social component are completely logically given to the cadet - graduates. Future young officers are aware of their place in the military organization, manifest as radiant personalities and inspire respect from their colleagues. For the graduating cadets it is important to make efforts towards acquiring skills of adequate self-assessment, to seek ways of harmonizing their actions with the common goals and to demonstrate orderliness and organization in their work.

From the analysis of the components of the social aspect of cadets leadership styles and behavior it can be concluded that the process of educating cadets and building their moral values is an extremely responsible one and a special attention must be paid to the first years of cadet training and their performance in the military - learning environment.

Over the whole period of education at the University, all kinds of social norms must be observed and cadets must be constantly motivated to develop and improve their personal qualities.

This, in turn, requires the commanders to work extensively with their subordinates and to implement high-quality, efficient educational methods. Using the commander as a role-model each and every cadet would be able to master the different leadership

styles and to adequately use them in his or her future leadership practice.

Conclusions

The general conclusions from the conducted researches confirm the developed theoretical model and the preliminary expectations for gradual formation in the students with the professional and social components of the leadership during their course of study at the University. In the same time, the results serve for specific recommendations to the organization in the process of the cadet's leadership building.

Professionally it is needed active and persistent work from the students, and from the teachers of military disciplines to increase of the creativity and initiative of cadets, implementation of practical models and case studies in order to build skills for teamwork and quick and correct decisions making. The process of development of social competences requires a united and appropriate educational activities from the commanders and teachers of humanities, good models for building emotionally stable people who are loyal to the others, follow the rules of interpersonal communication and who are confident in their choice of adequate behavior for each situation.

The mastering and applying of various leadership styles of behaviour will guarantee the high quality of education and training of future officers - with professional leadership qualities and socially significant values. It will contribute to enhancing the image of the Army in society as an educational institution with established traditions and values and staff with relevant skills and competencies. In such a way the modern military leader from the structures of the Bulgarian Armed Forces will have flexible styles of behaviour in order to meet the challenges of the dynamic and unpredictable global processes.

References

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