

THE PORTRAIT OF A LEADER - THE ROLE OF THE LEADER IN THE ROMANIAN AIR FORCE DURING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The history of the Romanian Air Force is full of examples regarding the quality of the leaders who worked within this category of forces, and one of the aspects that made this possible was the interest shown by this organization in attracting and training them. In today's context, where the evolution of technology and the dynamics of global security require a new approach to what is desired to be a framework for training and improving leaders, the Air Force is forced to adopt a new approach to the process, one that can keep up with the imposed needs.*

Human resource development is both an individual and organizational function and responsibility. All air force personnel thus have the duty to take advantage of the facilities offered by the military organization to improve their training and thus develop their knowledge and leadership skills.

Keywords: *leadership, professional development, military profession, traits, characteristics, skills and attitudes of a leader, Romanian Air Force.*

1. INTRODUCTION

When we approach a profession, the first aspects we refer to are those related to the work performed, the years of study and training, the diplomas to be obtained, the code of ethics and the status acquired in society. If we refer to a nurse, a policeman, an accountant, an architect, a priest or a soldier, there is only one thing, common to all of them, that will make us truly understand what a profession is, namely that it is a calling, a vocation.[1]

The basic task of the military profession is the armed defense of the society, the territory, the population and the vital interests of the nation. In this sense, the defining mission of the armed forces is the preparation and conduct of war, which includes securing military victory until the political restoration of peace. The combat mission is therefore what determines how forces are organized, equipped and trained. Regardless of its special forms, this unique and specialized service to the nation gives the military profession its own distinctive nature and status.

The military profession is seen as a lifestyle, which goes beyond the framework expressed by the notion of simple occupation, or what you have to do to occupy your time and earn a daily living. The military profession is a way of being, a way of thinking, a way of behaving and a way of growing. In short, it is a way of life, more than a job or lifestyle.

The military also requires an exceptional level of commitment from its members.[2]

Military service, as we stated earlier, is synonymous with sacrifice, involving long periods of separation from family members, frequent movements and displacements, the rigors of intense training and the horrors of combat. A military life is rewarding, but it is also hard, taking both a physical and emotional toll.

There are certainly professionals, from various fields of activity, who would say that they do what they do for various reasons, including the love of what they do, the fact that they can't do anything else, or that they would do it regardless, whether or not it would be remunerated in any way. The military profession must not be limited to the frameworks created by these stereotypes, and that is why it is important to distinguish between being military, from an occupational point of view, as a profession, and military as a profession.

The job of a military officer represents the highest embodiment of the military profession. The moment an individual chooses the military career, to serve in the officer corps, represents the moment he chooses to join a body of leaders who have proudly chosen to serve the nation and dedicate themselves to achieving uplifting ideals.

A leader's maturity develops progressively throughout their career. Lessons learned at the tactical level are applied at the operational level, those learned at the operational level are applied at the strategic level, and the process continues. The accumulation of knowledge, skills and abilities, acquired at each level, represent constructive, basic elements of leadership competence. Competency components have different attributes at each level of leadership manifestation.

As for the roles and responsibilities of leaders, they are positioned throughout the three levels, in such a way that the depth and breadth of vision become personal attributes, which are acquired through experience, training and education. In this sense, the degree of use of competences in conjunction with the level of expertise can be related to the level of manifestation of leadership (Fig. 1).

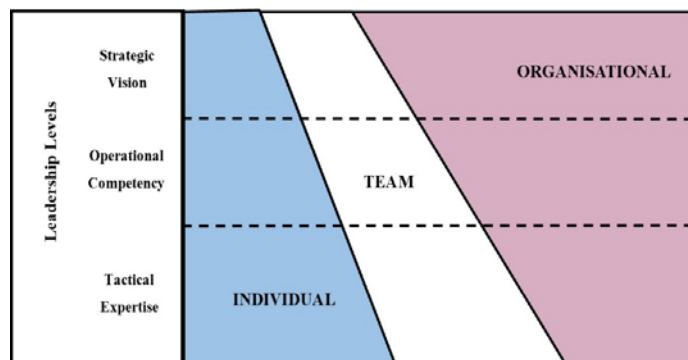


FIG. 1 Correlation of competencies with leadership levels
(adapted from Department of the Army Pamphlet (DAP) 600-80, Executive Leadership, HQ,
Department of the Army, 9 June 1987, p. 4)

It is important to state that these levels can overlap and interact for organizations to achieve their results.[3] At the same time, two aspects must be mentioned: these attributes can be manifested at any level, depending on the position occupied by the leader, and that leadership it is situational and there is no recipe or formula for success.

2. THE ROLE OF THE LEADER DURING THE MILITARY PROFESSION

Roles, in essence, are the natural result of sustained human interaction and the hallmarks associated with such interactions suggest the expected behavioral pattern (eg client, parent, commander, etc.).

Roles are important because they communicate behavioral expectations: the actions necessary to execute an order as they are perceived by the executor but also by the others involved.

In his book, *"Organizational Psychology"*, Edgar H. Schein states the following: *"From the point of view of an organization, the most appropriate way to think about leadership is that in which it is considered as a function exercised within it. The membership of an organization but also the management position, associated with it, must merge with each other to have an efficient organization. It is as much a member's job to help the group achieve its goal as it is the formal leader's job to do so."*[4]

In the spirit of this statement and, corroborated with the ideas supported by the theory of stratified systems,[5] I can conclude that the tasks of leaders are more and more complex as their career tends towards the upper echelons of an organization.

From the point of view of the degree of complexity of the tasks, it increases in relation to the extent to which the level of responsibility entrusted by the occupied function also increases (Fig 2). It is obvious that there is a difference, I say clear, between the type of activities carried out by leaders at the tactical level and those conducted by leaders at the operative or strategic level.

The factors that describe this differentiation are multiple and varied and are related to the complexity, the scope, the level of the commanded unit, the area of control, the vertical and horizontal relationship, the higher hierarchical level, the number of subordinates and the missions received.

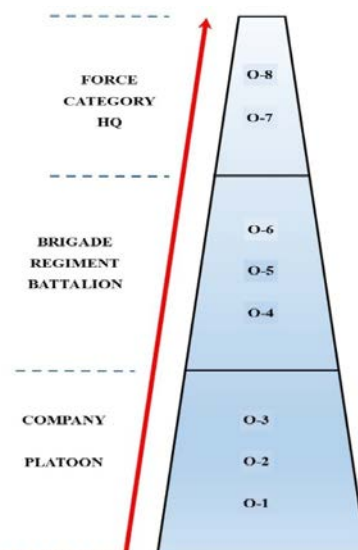


FIG 1 The pyramid of officers' career development [6]

At the lower levels of the military organization, the primary activity of officers is to conduct tasks related to real-time problems and execute missions with a limited time horizon.

Their activity can be described as leading small military structures, at platoon level, with a small number of subordinates, which requires them to make more use of their individual qualities and skills, formed and developed in the initial stage of their career. Along with entering the career and occupying positions at higher levels, the number of subordinates increases, but the degree of direct relationship with them begins to decrease. The command of the battery, battalion, regiment, brigade requires that, due to the large volume of tasks that must be solved and the planning of daily activities, to reduce the time in which direct contact with subordinates can be made.

This aspect does not imply the fact that the use of relational skills with group members is absent, only that this is done in a narrower framework, at the level of the commander's work group. The leadership exercised at this level is limited, in this way, to the subordinates in the headquarters and the members of the general staff, and at the same time an expansion of the network of colleagues/collaborators can be noted.

In other words, military leaders, in relation to the hierarchical level at which they are, lead people or institutions.[6] Leading people means developing individual, team and unit-level capacities and using them to execute the assigned tasks and missions, and leading the institution means developing and maintaining the strategic and professional capabilities of the armed forces and creating the necessary conditions for their operational success.

3. PORTRAIT OF A LEADER – AN IMAGE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Taking into account the previously presented aspects, I tried to define my own, regarding the role played by the air force leader during his career, and for a better perception of the meaning, I described, in the form of an enumeration of traits, characteristics, skills and attitudes, the significance and I emphasized the importance of the role of the leader in the positions held. The leader profiles that I propose are specific and fall within a well-defined time horizon, as can be seen from the graph of the development of leaders during the military career, presented in Fig 3.

A secondary goal of creating this *so called guidance* would be to reinforce the conviction of Air Force leaders that, to be successful, they will need to identify and behave in accordance with the requirements of these roles at all times. This must also be the main reason for understanding the role he plays in the function he holds, when exactly he must act, in accordance with the status of the role, and what are its characteristic elements.

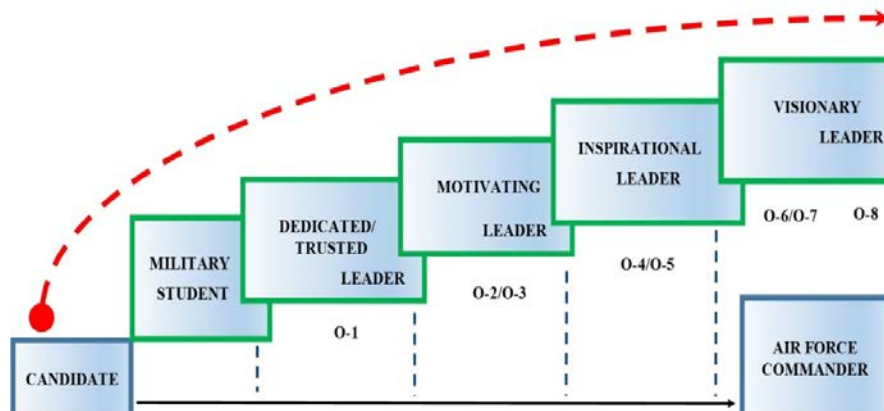


FIG 3 Development of Air Force leaders, throughout the military career [5]

The first steps in the military career can be classified under the title of *Dedicated/Trusted Leader*. The young second lieutenant is the newly formed leader within the academy who understands the relationship he must have with his chosen profession and who lives in accordance with the values of the Air Force, and in the spirit of the oath taken.

Personal values are included in the fundamental values of the Romanian Air Force. He/she is a positive example for all those around him, behavior manifested through truth, ethics, principles but also through impeccable military attire.

He/she has an enthusiastic approach to leadership, with a developed sense of time management and the ability to make plans. Shows a strong sense of duty towards subordinates, understanding the value of taking care of people, investing time to achieve their well-being but also to gain their trust and respect.

He/she is a results-oriented team leader and appreciated for the good decisions he makes, thanks to his abilities to manage risks and hazardous situations. Shows courage and calm in stressful situations, putting the needs of the team above personal needs. Exercises sound, imaginative judgment and demonstrates developed analytical ability in the management of the subunit, using clear rules and procedures in the activity of managing the resources at his disposal. In this sense, he/she quickly develops his professional skills, directly associated with his tasks, specializing, progressively, both from the point of view of knowledge of tactics and from the point of view of knowledge and exploitation of the equipment provided, thus requiring more and more little supervision.

He/she has developed writing and oral communication skills, which he/she constantly improves, improving the chain of command, by practicing two-way communication, being at the same time a good transmitter of orders and a good listener.

From the point of view of the operative art, he/she is able to understand both the nature and purpose of war.

The end of the minimum internship period in the rank and advancement to the rank of lieutenant already implies intense employment and the assumption of new responsibilities. The number of subordinates increases, simultaneously with the level of the echelon, battery/company (similar), representing the subunit at which it will carry out its activity.

As can be seen in the graph presented in Fig 3, there is a period which is common to the two classes of leaders. The transition from one level to another is not sudden, but coincides with the period in which the leader is empowered by his superiors to perform the duties of the functions targeted for recruitment.

Now is the time for the *Motivating Leader* to step into his full rights and put the commander's vision into action, preparing and completing the mission. It is the lieutenant/captain who demonstrates an innovative approach to unit administration and resource management.

Has problem-solving, decision-making and risk-management skills, anticipating demands to some extent and working independently. From a technical-tactical point of view, the level of skill improvement is high, being, in this sense, a model for high standards of performance through personal example, self-discipline and commitment to self-development.

He/she behaves ethically, demonstrating moral responsibility, and is a credible leader, acting in accordance with the requirements imposed by the Air Force's core values. He/she has influence on communication, is a good team trainer and contributes to a large extent to achieving group cohesion.

In this sense, he drives the maximum professional development of subordinates, by effectively delegating tasks, in accordance with the level of training of subordinates, and is an effective instructor, good advisor and mentor for them. He/she understands the science and art of war on a tactical level.

Advancing to the rank of major and simultaneously moving into the category of officers with a higher rank represents, for the vast majority of them, approaching the middle of their military career. It is time for every leader to start thinking about what they are leaving behind.

The experience accumulated in all these years, corroborated with the training and education received, will represent the foundations of the inspirational framework in which the majors and lieutenant colonels will have to fit.

It is time for the *Inspirational Leader* to emerge, the one who instills in all his/hers subordinates the fighting spirit and the will to win. Thus, he/she is a gifted orator, who inspires a vision, shared with that of the commander, having a strong purpose, direction and motivation. Receives the authority and responsibility of commands with enthusiasm, devotion and total commitment to mission preparation and accomplishment. In this sense, he is discerning and acts boldly and prudently, when he makes a decision, being very attentive to the risks. It includes the fundamental values of the Romanian Air Force in its command culture and becomes a moral arbiter for subordinates.

It develops a positive climate of cooperation, based on mutual trust, loyalty and respect, which leads, in unity, to the achievement of the goal and to the strengthening of the feeling of pride of belonging to the group. He/she is an innovative, critical and self-aware thinker, a skilled fighter, effective in leading with tact and confidence.

Completing the military career, from the position of senior colonel or general, is a very important stage, because it is precisely the one that sets the expectations in terms of leadership development. And these must be very large ones, commensurate with the positions occupied. *Visionary Leaders* are now seen as symbols, role models who embody the core values of the organization and set the example that is worthy of following.

At this level, the strategic leader not only serves as a role model for all members of the organization but is also responsible for creating the vision of the organization. The visionary leader shapes the future, keeping the organization's culture intact and maintaining credibility in all endeavors.

He/she is the protector of the values of the military profession and the air forces, whose behavior, actions, decisions and communication are exemplary for all members of this category of forces. He/she is the one who takes his/hers service to the highest standards, showing strength, determination and dignity.

He/she has boldness and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing an action plan. It has created a suitable command and control architecture and develops communication procedures to facilitate the decision-making process, as well as their implementation in military operations.

Shows adaptability and flexibility in the application of operational doctrine to adjust to the aggressive pace of combat in a dynamic operational environment and understands mission requirements, motivating subordinates to act with authority by giving concise and clear orders to facilitate them the actions.

Demonstrates a strategic and anticipatory perspective in terms of surprise, necessary in making certain decisions. It provides information to the entire chain of command to increase the speed of decision-making by superiors or subordinate commanders.

From the point of view of resources, it proves a high capacity to use them, effectively, to ensure the completion of the mission with minimal losses of equipment and personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

These should, in my view, be the outcomes of officer development within the Air Force, which will form the building blocks for shaping character, improving behavior, and honing the skills required of a leader as responsibilities increase throughout a military career. The results, built over time, are both inspirational and aspirational, along with the advancement in the air force hierarchy.

I believe that this *guide* can be used by leaders at all levels, as a tool for designing their own development, but also as inspiration for the development of those they lead. In this direction, it will be possible to establish personal and professional goals, which will help in obtaining such desired ones.

All of this will only be possible if one makes the most of the opportunities that air force education, courses, thematic experiences and personal development activities include.

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