
CHARACTERISTICS THAT A MILITARY LEADER SHOULD POSSESS - AN INTERNATIONAL AIR FORCE SEMESTER CADET OFFICERS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *This study aims to present the perception of young officers, present within the international air force semester program, on what they consider a European-level military leader should be. The general perception of what they consider a military leader to be can be a starting point for designing an individual training/instruction path, which will help them in achieving the desired goal proposed by the international military educational community.*

Keywords: *leadership, International Air Force Semester, cadet officers, initial military education, profesional development, leader characteristics and traits.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the Romanian Air Force is full of examples regarding the quality of leaders who have 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 the current context, in which the evolution of technology and the dynamics of global security require a new approach to what is intended to be a framework for training and improving leaders, the air forces are forced to adapt and adopt a new approach to the process, one that can keep up with the imposed needs.

The success of the operations carried out by the Romanian Air Force depends on the effective integration of human capabilities with the tools, tactics, techniques and procedures that combine to produce the entire spectrum of air power. The first steps in integrating leaders in such operations are defined by obtaining the necessary capabilities, and then by organizing the skill sets necessary to produce these capabilities.

Human resource development is both an individual and organizational function and responsibility. All air force personnel 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.

2. EMILYO's INTERNATIONAL AIR FORCE SEMESTER

EMILYO (European MILitary Young Officers) represents the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) (Fig.1) initiative for the exchange of young officers. ESDC is an EU body embedded in the External Action Service of the European Union that provides training and education at EU level in the field of the Common Security and Defence Policy, which is part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy[1].

This educational approach was inspired by ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport.



FIG. 1 ESDC logo

The aim of the project is to create a common study programme that will be part of the basic education for military officers (a common semester), in order to facilitate and promote long-term student exchanges between different institutions of the European Armed Forces.

The basic idea that was taken into account in the initial start-up process of this project lies in the need to have a common educational path, of initial training and subsequent improvement/development, for officers within the European armed forces. Eligibility for participation in such a programme is given by admission to the academies of different categories of force within all participating countries.

In this way, it was desired to facilitate and promote exchanges of military students, for an initial period of one semester, with the aim of developing in them skills and competences specially designed to be able to be demonstrated, in the future, within the framework of operations carried out in the international environment. Among such skills and competencies, selected as appropriate to be developed in future young officers, are leadership skills, language skills, self-development, and cultural awareness.

The program is running under the direct supervision of an Implementation Group consisting of specialists and which, currently, is developed under several Lines of Development (LoD) - 21, and International Air Force Semester is identified as LoD 12.

This year, a total of 33 cadet officers from 6 EMILYO member countries are participating in the international semester. Their numerical distribution can be seen in fig. 2. As additional information, it should be noted that this is a single military specialization, namely pilots.

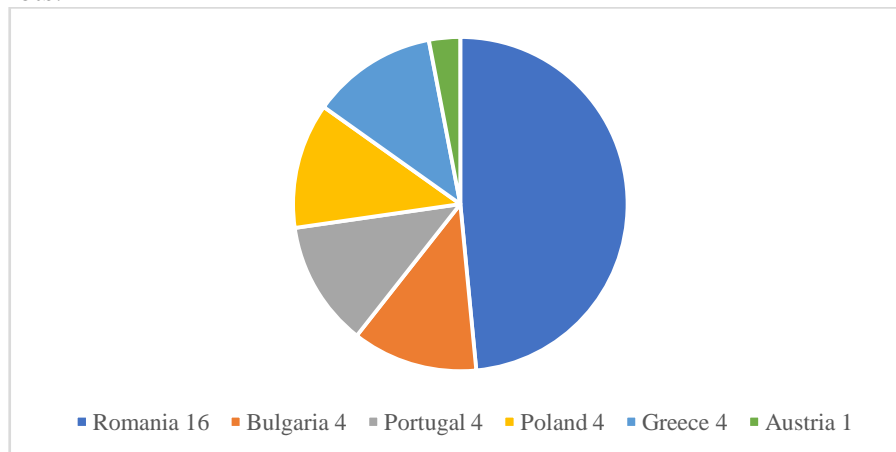


FIG. 2 Origin countries of IAFS cadet officers

3. ATTRIBUTES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD LEADER

The challenge for the Armed Forces in developing leaders will remain to determine precisely what attributes and characteristics they will need to be able to face the modern conflict environment.

In the first volume of the book *The Military Leader in the Romanian Air Force - Theories, Vision, Desire (Liderul militar din Forțele Aeriene Române – Teorii, Viziune, Deziderat)*, I presented how the senior leadership of the US Army proceeded to identify those characteristic elements necessary to identify a human resource development solution[2]. The US Air Force Research Institute (AFRI) based its approach in this regard on a study previously conducted by another corporation, RAND, with research interests in the same field.

Using in this regard the discoveries previously made by the RAND corporation and augmenting them with their own conclusions, the AFRI researchers managed to create a portrait of the leader, based on three sets of characteristics, considered essential by them, as follows: cognitive, interpersonal and personal style. One of the premises taken into account in the development of these three sets of characteristics was the level of leadership manifestation within the military organization.

1. Cognitive characteristics:

- a. Visionary Thinker. This is the leader who thinks critically, strategically, and creatively in equal measure, in order to be able to respond to current and future challenges in equal measure. Visionary leadership is transformative and relies on the power of inspiration.[3]
- b. Polymath. According to the definition in the Miriam-Webster dictionary, polymath[4] refers to a person who possesses vast knowledge in various fields. The erudite leader has a strong desire for self-improvement that leads to lifelong learning deeply rooted in his psychological profile.

2. Interpersonal characteristics:

- a. Team-building and networking. The essence of leadership is represented by the strong relationship that is created between a leader and his followers. However, it is not enough to focus on what we create at the micro level of our own organization, but it is also necessary to think at the macro level, to expand and diversify our connections with other organizations, whether they are from the same category of forces or from other categories of army forces or from similar services in specialization, with which we interact.
- b. Political acumen. The political-military relationship must be one of subordination. This does not mean that a military leader must not understand the political phenomenon. On the contrary, a military leader will need to perfect his ability to understand and apply the art of politics within organizations or leadership structures at higher levels.
- c. Cultural competence. Going hand in hand with political skill, this ability must be the result of a deep understanding of both one's own organization, its culture, and that of others, so that this can be useful when holding effective discussions about various issues of common interest.
- d. Skilled negotiator and facilitator. The modern conflict environment proves to be a continuous challenge to the act of leadership and therefore, from the position of commander in one of the theaters of operations of the future, leaders will be faced with the situation of having to exert their influence on people who are not under their direct authority. Persuasion and the art of influencing others can be considered essential elements of the functioning of negotiation skills.

- e. Emotional resilience. The conflict environment of the future will be one characterized by vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity that will manifest themselves at a higher level, never seen before. In order to face such challenges, from an emotional point of view, leaders will have to train, develop and perfect their adaptive skills at the same time as the pace at which actions are carried out in the operational environment.
3. Characteristics of personal style:
 - a. Ethical. Two things can be best associated with ethical behavior: altruism and self-humility. These are best found in the manifestation of the leader's serviceability, they are cultivated and rooted, by their own will, in their character. As an example of this characteristic, I will also use the words of General Montgomery Meigs: "Good generals are not worried about themselves when making the hard decisions." [5]
 - b. Strategic communication. Speaking and writing, although temporally separated by a short period, can be said to develop simultaneously over time. Perfecting these two skills is done with dedication to reading, motivation for listening, and practical exercise in the art of communication.
 - c. Mentor. A dedicated leader is one who is worried and concerned about the future of the organization. A mentor is one who is skilled enough to help and advise his team members to develop and perform collaboratively to increase efficiency in fulfilling the organization's mission.
 - d. Resource manager. In order to effectively support the operational strategy, an efficient or productive leader is characterized by a good capacity for managing resources.

Thus, from the combination of these 11 characteristics, one can imagine a leader developed in the three directions of action suggested by the aforementioned study, who, from a cognitive point of view, is concerned with a constant and permanent improvement of the knowledge base in order to be able to make the most of creative and critical thinking skills in formulating the strategic vision. From the teamwork point of view, the presented leader demonstrates a strong desire for relationships, both within the core group and outside it, a fine understanding of the political phenomenon with applicability in the process of organizational understanding through the art of influencing others.

The last aspect of team involvement is proven by the strength with which he can stabilize himself emotionally in conditions of constant challenges. From the character point of view, this leader is one of high morality and modesty and with a strong manifestation of helpfulness. The altruism he demonstrates is expressed in the desire to prepare those he works with in making the transition to a new future for the organization, an aspect instrumented through sophisticated communication and active listening. The resources he uses are varied and prove effective in the actions taken.

The image described above is the one that I considered to be the most appropriate for relating the results obtained from the study mentioned in the title of the article.

4. CHARACTERISTICS THAT A MILITARY LEADER SHOULD POSSESS

Research purpose. The study started from the assumption that young cadet officers have formulated an idealized mental image of what it means to be a good leader. I chose, as a participant group, the cadet officers participating at the international semester, with the intention of seeing whether a coherent portrait of a leader can be identified at the level of a group of future officers coming from different countries and cultures.

Following what was stated previously, I was able to formulate the question that was the basis for starting the research effort.

Objectives and preliminary hypotheses. The objectives proposed, for the proper conduct of the study, were the following:

O₁. *Identifying the characteristics that a leader within the armed forces should display, from the perspective of future officers, currently attending, as cadet officers, the international semester courses at the "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy;*

O₂. *Comparison of the results obtained with the elements described in the theoretical framework, previously presented.*

Hypotheses are constructs that reflect the generality, specificity, determinability, falsifiability, testability, predictability, communicability, reproducibility and utility of plausible explanations that are to be verified through observational facts.

There can be two approaches to deducing working hypotheses: deduction from theory and direct experience. Since the theoretical basis regarding leaders in the Romanian Army is limited, I have resorted to personal experience in developing the following working hypothesis:

H₁. *At the group level, regardless of nationality, the number of characteristics identified will be very large and will be expressed by the impossibility of identifying an eloquent portrait of a leader.*

H₂. *The theoretical elements described above will be found among those obtained from data collection.*

The research universe. For the study *Characteristics that a military leader should possess - an International Air Force Semester cadet officers perspective*, it was limited, as I mentioned earlier, to a number of 33 cadet officer, participants in the IAFS.

Research method. The investigation method used to carry out this study is that of selective survey research. For this purpose, we used as a research instrument the questionnaire, built on the basis of a single question, common to all participants, regardless of nationality:

Q₁ *What are the characteristics that a military leader should possess from the point of view of the cadet officer participating in IAFS?*

The open-ended request was formulated in such a way as to provide the respondents with the opportunity, based on the training practiced up to that point, their own preparation and the education received up to that point, to be able to formulate opinions, make judgments and express points of view, supported by arguments, regarding the formulated request. I directly administered the questionnaire/opinion poll to the cadet officers, in an organized manner, in the classroom. The instruction regarding the response method was given prior to handing it over, while honesty in providing answers was requested. The advantages of applying this instrument reflected the acceptance and desire for communication (openness towards it) of the young military personnel, as well as the quality and quantity of information provided (some exposing complex issues, others having a greater emotional charge). In this sense, the answers provided by the officer trainees constituted, both in terms of quantity and diversification, an appropriate basis for drawing conclusions.

Data processing and interpretation. The data were collected and interpreted from a statistical point of view, while also tracking the degree of consensus or number of repetitions in the case of identifying the same characteristic in multiple subjects.

After studying the results obtained, based on the application of the questionnaire, I found the following:

- At first count, the characteristics extracted from the group consultation led to the enunciation of a total number of 461 elements, this being due to the number of answers

given by each respondent. The number of answers collected from each individual varied from a minimum of 9 to a maximum of 20. After accounting for the number of repetitions, 135 elements remained consisting of skills, character traits and values which, in the respondents' understanding, can constitute descriptive parts of the portrait of a military leader.

- For a more precise portrayal, I continued with the identification of those elements collected that proved synonymy or expressed the same thing. This aspect was also helped by the additional justifications that the respondents brought to each element presented, this being also an initial request, formulated in the questionnaire. This resulted in a number of 66 elements. As an example of the synonymies and additional explanations encountered, I present the one of tenacity-dedication-patience-determination-perseveration-hard worker.

- At the constitutive level of the entire population of subjects, we considered as relevant for creating a portrait of the leader only those elements that are found in a weight of at least 50%. The cumulative result obtained is made up of 10 representative characteristics, with a relative frequency between 6.17 and 3.66 percent, as presented in the table below.

Table 1. Absolute and relative frequencies for identified characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY
		%
COMMUNICATION	27	6.17
ADAPTABILITY/FLEXIBILITY	24	5.49
INTEGRITY/HONESTY	22	5.03
CONFIDENCE	21	4.8
DISCIPLINE	21	4.8
COURAGE	18	4.11
VISIONARY	17	3.89
EMPATHY	17	3.89
RESPONSIBILITY	16	3.66
TENACITY	16	3.66

- Regarding the second objective proposed for this study, the characteristics presented as theoretically suitable to be associated with a successful leader are found in the multitude of characteristics collected, either as they were presented or in the form of their characteristic elements. The results obtained are presented below, in tabular form:

Table 2. Cognitive characteristics

THEORETICAL CHARACTERISTICS -COGNITIVE-		IDENTIFIED CHARACTERISTICS	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY
VISIONARY THINKER	→	VISIONARY	17
	→	INTELLIGENCE	6
	→	STRATEGIC THINKER	9
POLYMATH	→	CRITICAL THINKER	9
	→	COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS LEARNING	4
	→	KNOWLEDGE	4

Table 2. Interpersonal style characteristics

THEORETICAL CHARACTERISTICS -INTERPERSONAL STYLE-		IDENTIFIED CHARACTERISTICS	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY
TEAM-BUILDING AND NETWORKING	→	TEAM ORIENTED MINDSET	6
POLITICAL ACUMEN	→	DIPLOMATIC	3
CULTURAL COMPETENCE	→	CULTURAL AWARENESS	2
SKILLED NEGOTIATOR AND FACILITATOR	→	COLABORATIVE	2
EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE	→	RESILIENCE	14
	→	PHYSICAL AND MENTAL STAMINA	7

Table 3. Personal style characteristics

THEORETICAL CHARACTERISTICS -PERSONAL STYLE-		IDENTIFIED CHARACTERISTICS	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	→	COMMUNICATION	27
ETHICAL	→	ETHICALY JUDGEMENTAL/MORAL	9
MENTOR	→	MENTOR	3
RESOURCE MANAGER	→	PROFESSIONAL	4

Analysis of the research study results. Within this analysis, my focus was to identify those elements that describe the degree of confirmation/refutation of the working hypotheses.

As can be seen from the data presented, the portrait of a leader that can be created using the collected data is very different from the one presented in the theoretical framework. This is mainly due to a very large and varied number of characteristics collected. The only characteristics selected to create a representative image for the group level and that are found in the theoretical framework are those of visionary ability, emotional resilience and strategic communication. In fact, communication is the characteristic that was chosen by the largest number of respondents. In this way, the first research hypothesis is confirmed.

Although the portrait created was different, through the multitude of elements collected, the theoretical framework presented previously is found in the data collected, which makes me consider the second hypothesis to be confirmed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The training of future European leaders is an approach that works and is in a process of continuous expansion. There is a constant focus on the elements that need to be improved, and leadership competence is one of these. It can thus be considered that a first step has been taken, namely that of reaching a consensus on what a successful military leader should look like, at least in terms of the qualities and personality traits that characterize such a personality.

If one knows where one needs to go and what the starting point is, then it will be very easy to design the path to follow to get there.

The only aspect that remains to be done is to identify, on the one hand, the educational means necessary for modeling, and on the other hand, to establish what young people aspiring to the status of military leader have to do.

The task and responsibility of reaching the proposed goal is a common one and will not be able to be fulfilled unless all parties involved perform at their best.

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