

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE AIR FORCE - A CURRICULAR PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL THEORY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CADET OFFICER'S LEADER COMPETENCY

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**Abstract:** *Effectiveness has been and will continue to be one of the basic conditions for achieving success in an organization. From the military perspective, one of the aspects related to effectiveness in the military organization is reflected in the results obtained due to the training of human resources. In the case of officers, good personal development is reflected throughout the entire military career, in the way they lead their subordinates.*

*The institutionalized training framework for officers represents the starting point in the training and subsequent development of the competencies expected to be displayed by them throughout their career. That of leadership is the first of the four aimed at being implemented in the behavior of leaders.*

**Keywords:** *leadership, transformational and transactional theory, education, leader competencies, leadership development, Romanian Air Force.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental missions of the military organization is to ensure national safety and security, within the national defense system, together with its other constituent elements. The success of this endeavor depends on many elements and human resources, more precisely their training, is one such factor.

The institutionalized framework in which personnel within the military organization are trained and improved throughout their career is regulated in such a way that, through educational tools, a continuous improvement of those competencies imposed by the military organization to be demonstrated by its members can be achieved.

By members of the military organization, for the purposes of this material, I will refer to officers within the Romanian Air Force, even if those presented by me can constitute elements with a high degree of generality so that they can be applied within any category of the armed forces.

## 2. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL

In the leadership studies, the transformational approach is considered one of the most popular and current approaches to leadership, having been at the center of much research since the early 1980s. The essential characteristic of this approach is the special attention paid to the charismatic and affective elements found in leadership.

In the spirit suggested by its name, transformational leadership is a process that create inner changes to people, transforms them in a manner which is directly correlated to their personalities, character and long-term goals.

Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that leads followers to adopt a higher level of motivation and to achieve in this regard, more than what is usually expected of them, being a process that often incorporates elements of charisma and vision.

Burns, in 1978, was the first to make a distinction between the two types of leadership, as different from each other. In his opinion, *transactional leadership refers to the majority of leadership models that focus on the exchanges that take place between leaders and their followers*. [1] The exchange dimension of transactional leadership is very common and can be observed, at many levels, in almost all types of organizations.

Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership, which is also identified as a process, can be described as the interaction by which at least two persons engages and creates connections with each other. This results in developing a quantity of higher motivation at the same time with the raise of the level of morality, in both the leader and the follower.

Burns points to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as a classic example of transformational leadership. Gandhi raised the hopes and demands of millions of people and, in the process, was himself changed.[1]

Transformational theory is also related to another theory, that of the charismatic leader, which is a sophisticated approach to trait theory, focused on the transcendent qualities of extraordinary leaders.[2] It is considered, in this way, that charismatic leaders are those who act in accordance with certain high moral beliefs, have a strong sense of influencing others, use dramatic methods to articulate goals, model desired attitudes and behaviors, appeal to the high ideals of subordinates and have the ability to impel them to action.[1] Mitchell, Green and Wood believe that transformational leaders display specific behaviors, compatible with many of these characteristic traits.[3]

Transformational leadership is concerned with improving followers' work performance and developing them to their full potential.[4] People who practice transformational leadership often draw on a strong internal set of values and ideals and “*are effective in motivating followers to act in ways that support the greater good, which is more important than serving their own interests*”.[5]

The general hypothesis that transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than is expected of them was also one of the main ideas of Bass's studies in leadership.[6] His findings were the basics who reinforced that belief, and were materialized through the following aspects:

(a) by creating the need for followers to understand the importance and value of specified, idealized goals;

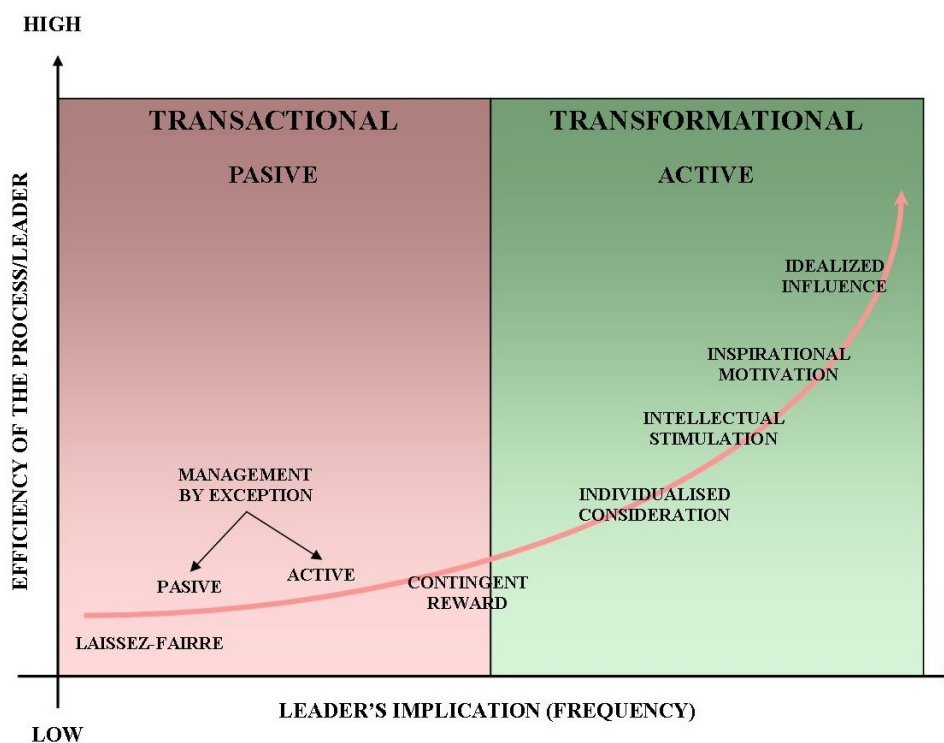
(b) by directing subordinate to followers to see beyond their own interest and focus on that of the organization;

(c) by changing followers in the sense of adhering to the immediately superior needs of one's own organizational level.

### **3. CURRICULAR PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL THEORY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CADET OFFICER'S LEADER COMPETENCY**

The dynamics of the transformation process are highlighted by Bass in his model of transformational and transactional leadership.[6]

The transformational and transactional leadership models incorporate seven different factors, as illustrated in Fig. 1.



**FIG. 1** Full Range Leadership Development model

Source: Adapted from Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., *Improving Organizational Effectiveness Through Transformational Leadership*, SAGE Publications Inc., 1994 apud Northouse, P. G., *Leadership - Theory and practice, Seventh Edition*, SAGE Publications, 2016, p. 168.

The best clarification of the elements, presented in the model above, was provided by Avolio, in his book, *Full Leadership Development: Building the Vital Forces in Organizations*, edited in 1999.

Factor 1, as shown in Fig. 1, is located on the graph in the position of maximum effectiveness and involvement on the part of the leader. It describes leaders who act as strong role models for followers, who identify with them and strongly want to imitate them.[7] Idealized influence can also be seen as a process, a way in which followers are helped by leaders to deal, in a more than positive manner, with difficult situations encountered during the performance of current tasks at work.[8] The optimism that characterizes this type of leader plays an important role in this process. This is also one of the things that leads to the creation of a relationship based on special respect combined with a sense of trust born of a deep understanding of the vision conveyed. Personal example in doing things is essential for modeling ethical behavior. The standards to which the leader performs are very high, which leads to the strengthening of the belief that they are doing the right thing. For these reasons, this factor is considered to be the emotional component of leadership.[9]

An example from the military organization can be that of a young second lieutenant who, being at the beginning of his career and in search of ideals in everything he undertakes, identifies in the commander of his own squadron the embodiment of all the elements sought. His actions, a father figure, are elements that have the highest success rate in shaping the young officer. This is the moment when the desire for change can be instilled in him, by adopting the behavior displayed by the commander.

Personality traits, such as the desire to dominate/influence others, a great self-confidence but also a strong set of moral values will have to be cultivated by integrating, in the academy training program, elements that lead to increased responsibility. Ethics is particularly important, and this is, at the moment, one of the fundamental disciplines that are covered in higher military education.[10]

The second factor, if we are looking down below, on the scale of efficiency and implication, is known as inspirational motivation. As the name suggest, this factor depicts a leader who is very good at sharing organizational vision to followers. Motivation, for this leader, represent the perfect tool for communicating high expectations to the followers, aspect which in practice can be recognized in the use of symbols or other meanings for focusing the group members in achieving the organizational goal.

Team spirit is enhanced with this type of leadership. Fulfilling functional duties, in the military system, is one of the basic requirements of the job description. This is the document that specifies what an individual has to do and especially what is the standard that is expected of him to be achieved.

An educational program is based, among other things, on the definition of certain objectives, planned to be achieved at certain performance standards. The military student's overcoming of these standards can be achieved due to the desire instilled in him to surpass himself by the platoon commander, the teaching staff, the mentor or tutor of the group to which he is a part. The common vision must be represented by the proposed goal of becoming an officer of excellence of the military organization, and this can only be achieved through permanent contact. Team spirit must be maintained at all times, throughout the military student's academic career.

Factor 3, intellectual stimulation, includes leadership that stimulates followers to be creative and innovative by challenging their own beliefs and values as well as those of the leader and the organization. An example of this type of leadership is a platoon commander who promotes the individual efforts of subordinates to develop unique ways to solve problems that have caused the training process to slow down. In academia, intellectual stimulation must be constantly promoted among students through participation in innovative activities, possibly included in disciplines that can support this approach. A good example in this regard can be the discipline of Tactics, where the element of creativity is fundamental in planning combat actions.

Factor 4 of transformational leadership is known as individualized consideration. This factor is representative for the leaders who are comfortable within a supportive climate, created by them. This climate was born from the need of knowing all of their followers by personality and needs. The proper way for leaders, to maintain such a climate, is by constantly provide followers with constant counseling and coaching sessions. The result of this actions should be a constant grow from the followers, and this can be done through personal challenges delegated from leaders. A good example for this case is the one of a platoon size commander who spends his time treating each subordinate in a unique, personalized way.

In the case of the military academy, the special role of individual counseling activity is the one that will have to be exemplified by direct commanders or tutors within the study programs. The special attention they pay to listening and solving at the same time the shared needs of the military students will be reflected, over time, thanks to their personal example, in their behavior.

Factor 5, contingent reward, is the first of the two factors of transactional leadership. This is the point, on the scale, where followers start to demand rewards and where the action is no longer a volitional way for them.

The follower's effort, in achieving the organizational objectives, is now traded for benefits, under an agreement, and the leader's role in this transaction is to find the proper approach for negotiation. An example of this type of transaction is a sub-unit commander negotiating with subordinates about the tasks they have to perform in order to recognize their merits through additional monetary rewards.

In a positive sense, future air force officers will have to learn to master the art of negotiation. This element can be developed through the skills acquired through communication courses in conjunction with the practical work carried out as a graduate student. The graduate student is the one who is responsible for leading and guiding the activity of a group of students from the younger years. The art of negotiation will thus be honed through their actions of persuasion and motivation, for the involvement of those junior colleagues in the execution of tasks, not through the promise of being remunerated with a certain amount of money, which they could not do anyway, but by identifying intrinsic motivating factors, such as the values or symbols to which they adhered.

Factor 6 is called management by exception. It is the type of leadership that involves corrective criticism, negative feedback, and negative reinforcement. Management by exception can take two forms: active and passive. An example of active management by exception can be illustrated by the leadership of a commander who monitors daily how subordinates approach assigned tasks. He quickly corrects soldiers who are late in carrying out orders received in the prescribed manner.

A leader who uses the passive form intervenes only if standards have not been met or problems have arisen. An example of passive management by exception is illustrated by the leadership of a subunit commander who gives a subordinate a poor performance evaluation without ever talking about it in person or about his previous performance on the job. In this case, communication and performance-focused counseling are the elements that will need to be mastered in order to avoid reaching such unproductive situations. Providing feedback is essential in achieving organizational performance and interpersonal communication is what favors creating the conditions for achieving it.

As a partial conclusion, it is obvious that transformational leadership has, as its finality of actions, a result that exceeds, as an effect, what can be achieved through transactional leadership. The achievements obtained through transactional leadership are predictable and do not have any performance element, but are just simple achievements of the standards in force. On the other hand, the application of transformational leadership materializes, from a performance point of view, in results far above the usual standards.

Transactional leadership differs from transformational leadership in that the transactional leader does not individualize the needs of followers nor does he focus on their personal development. Kuhnert analyse this difference and conclude by the idea of that transactional leaders exchange things of value with followers in order to advance both their own agenda and that of their followers.[5]

Factor 7 represents the absence of leadership. The name *laissez-faire* comes and reinforces the description of the type of leader who abdicates responsibility, delays decisions, does not provide feedback and makes little or no effort to help followers meet their needs. There is no interaction with followers or attempts to help them develop. An example of a *laissez-faire* leader can be considered that of an air base commander who does not convene periodic meetings with subordinate group/squadron commanders, does not have a vision or long-term performance plan for the unit, acts detached and has minimal physical contact with subordinates.

The theoretical elements advanced through this theory will prove insufficient to help an individual identify the level of training he possesses in leadership competence.

It is not enough to possess the minimum knowledge; it is also necessary to know the degree of excellence in which you master it.

This aspect was thought and performed, in the form of a measurement instrument of transformational leadership, by Bass, who created, and later developed, a questionnaire called the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). This questionnaire has become, over time, the most commonly used instrument worldwide.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

As I have presented in the lines above, the transformation process of a leader begins at school, when those specific knowledge, skills and habits for the formation of leadership competencies are defined and are finalized throughout the entire career, either through education or experience. What is important, in my opinion, is how you set off on this adventure. Hence the conclusion that the way you set off is fundamental and the methods by which this is achieved will depend on the mastery of those who are part of the party that takes care of achieving this.

Training programs must be designed in such a way that their purpose coincides with the desiderata proposed by the graduate model. The theory supports the idea that transformational leadership is far beyond transactional leadership and the military organization must adopt a way of preparing its human resources by emphasizing, more than it currently does, the development of human resources from the perspective of using transformational skills. This can be achieved by reviewing and rethinking the educational contents so that they can support the effort made in this regard.

The elements that need to be emphasized and that were presented previously would, in my opinion, be well implemented within some disciplines, as basic knowledge and skills, and supplemented with practical activities for sedimentation and deepening in terms of the use and application of skills. In this way, it can be stated that the proposed goal can be achieved, the one of training and subsequently developing the air force officer capable of building trust, acting with integrity, inspiring others, encouraging innovative thinking, coaching people, rewarding achievement, monitoring mistakes, fighting fires without avoiding involvement. Such an example of a leader will be able to display leadership that proves to be productive for the military organization by generating extra effort, being efficient and generating satisfaction among their subordinates.

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