

Nowoczesne Systemy Zarządzania
Zeszyt 15 (2020), nr 3 (lipiec-wrzesień)
ISSN 1896-9380, s. 29-37
DOI: 10.37055/nasz/132939

Modern Management Systems
Volume 15 (2020), No. 3 (July-September)
ISSN 1896-9380, pp. 29-37
DOI: 10.37055/nasz/132939



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Uniformed Leaders in Crisis Situations

Umundurowani liderzy w sytuacjach kryzysowych

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Abstract. The article concerns the operation of human teams in critical situations on the contemporary battlefield. Soldiers acting together during combat operations gain confidence in each other and are able to see the strengths and weaknesses of their commander and themselves. Nothing unites the human team as much as living together in crisis situations, where human life and health depend on proper cooperation and exchange of information. It is the Commander who is responsible for his subordinates. The competences of the leader contribute to how efficiently this team will deal with emerging threats.

Keywords: leader, competence, crisis situations, battlefield

Abstrakt. Artykuł dotyczy działania zespołów ludzkich w sytuacjach krytycznych na współczesnym polu walki. Żołnierze, działając wspólnie podczas działań bojowych, nabierają do siebie zaufania, są w stanie dostrzec zarówno atuty, jak i słabsze strony swojego dowódcy oraz własne. Nic tak nie cementuje zespołu ludzkiego jak wspólne przeżywanie sytuacji kryzysowych, w których od prawidłowej współpracy i wymiany informacji zależy życie oraz zdrowie ludzkie. To na barkach dowódcy spoczywa odpowiedzialność za jego podwładnych. Kompetencje, jakie posiada lider, przyczyniają się do tego, jak sprawnie zespół ten poradzi sobie z pojawiającymi się zagrożeniami.

Słowa kluczowe: lider, kompetencje, sytuacje kryzysowe, pole walki

Battlefield leadership at all levels is an element of combat power. It is difficult to measure, but nonetheless is present and a decisive contributor to victory in battle. This pamphlet is dedicated to that dimension of combat power

GEN Frederick M. Franks, Jr.
(*Leadership and Command on the Battlefield*, 1992, p. 7).

Introduction

The modern battlefield is characterized by constant variability of the environment and the facts affecting it. The purpose of the paper is to show examples of determinants that influence human behavior on the battlefield. The aim of the research shown in the article was to distinguish the competences of leaders, which can positively affect the effectiveness of soldiers on the battlefield. With well-functioning leaders, is there a possibility to effectively influence the reduction of their hostile action. Only a few of them are listed below.

The following article consists of five parts: the first deals with the key competences of commanders, the second describes the behavior of leaders in difficult situations, the third shows the role of trust as a basis for the proper functioning of teams, the fourth is the concept of military cohesion, and the last is a summary.

Key competences of the commander

All knows that the Army depends on the quality of its leaders, in both peace and war time, to ensure its resources are managed efficiently and it achieves its military objectives. Good leadership is fundamental to win the battle. Leadership is like an art which can be developed by those who aspire to command and lead people into battle. It can be developed through experience, by the application of leadership skills and lessons learnt from past experiences (*Junior Leadership on the Battlefield*, 1994, p. V).

As emphasized by numerous manuals for military leaders it is military commander who has the responsibility to understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess his forces during the operations process. Failure to abide by any one of these responsibilities may lead to a disruption in operations, waste resources or even unnecessary loss of life. By analyzing past armed conflicts, commanders who did not adhere to these basic concepts placed their units in a position where the expected victory often turned into an unexpected defeat (Herbek, 2015, p. 1). So as indicated, people assigned to commanding positions must demonstrate a number of competences thanks to which they will be able to control all the above-mentioned duties.

To paraphrase Clausewitz, during the war everything can be perceived as simple, but even the simple things are difficult. While conducting the commander's combat activities military leaders must be presence not only by their physical appearance, but also by the clear and concise way they communicate their orders and intent to their subordinates. At each echelon of command this dimension of leadership is one of the critical factors in determining the success or failure of the entire unit (*Leadership and Command on the Battlefield*, 1992, p. 19).

Officers by their behavior should give an example to follow. In one of the most important battles of Monte Cassino, during the Second World War, officers of the French Espedimentary Corps gave such example. The officers were fighting side by side with the soldiers, knowing that they would win favor of their subordinates. One of the captains commented on the decision to fight with his men like this: "After all, my company is beating for the first time, how could I not fight with them?" After the victorious battle, the command recorded in his notes: "The young officers led their troops magnificently. In our North African troops, the fighting spirit depends entirely on their officers. They follow them blindly. So, the officers have to set an example, inspire their people." This example perfectly outlines the role of officers on the battlefield. You cannot send people into battle by looking at them from a safe distance. Officers must take the responsibility of their people (Molendowski, 2010).

The military commander should be both physically and intellectually fit. It is on his shoulders that he will often conduct reconnaissance, check his subordinates and equipment, act in fatigue for hours. Despite these burdens, he must work smoothly. Inadequate physical preparation can lead to the appearance of muscle pain, difficulty concentrating, dizziness, palpitations, vomiting, frequent urination, or measles. Mental symptoms can be anxiety, difficulty to concentrate, difficulty sleeping including the appearance of nightmares, feeling isolated, remorse, sadness or crying. Aware of this, the commander should be prepared to delegate power to his subordinates. Only in this way the team will be able to function properly for an extended period of time.

Taking care of the atmosphere in the team is another task for the commander, without this people will not be able to attach to the tasks given to them. The well-being of soldiers is a fair delegation of tasks. Violation of this rule will cause the appearance of conflicts in the team and this will exceptionally disrupt the proper functioning of the team. As a result, it can lead to a loss of trust among its members, and this is a quick path to misfortune.

Leaders play a key role in combat operations, of which fear is an integral part. It is natural to say that each soldier on the battlefield will experience fear in some form or other, and in varying degrees. It is also medically proven evidence that individuals may charge forward to eliminate the source of fear while at the other end of the spectrum others will remain paralyzed or flee. First, the key to combating fear is to control it and this will largely be influenced by how well the individual has been trained and prepared for the battle. Countering fear will embrace many factors and certainly involves camaraderie, team spirit and leadership as well. One of the reasons why the soldier can stand up and fight is the fear of letting down his mates or the team. Next examples that assist in controlling fear are a high standard of personal discipline and confidence in the team and in you as the leader. Sound, aggressive battle drills which generate instinctive reaction, and keeping your soldiers informed will remove many doubts. Doubts, a lack of confidence in the system, and rumors may rapidly generate fear. It is important to note that fear is not restricted

only to the new soldier but can slowly affect the veteran over some period of time. Finally, fear can be contagious for other combat participants. It can spread fast from an individual to a group and only well-prepared leader can handle it by quick decisive action and personal example. His confidence in what the team is doing will dispel fear otherwise his lack of confidence will not only have an immediate adverse effect but will quickly erode his position as the leader (*Junior Leadership on the Battlefield*, 1994, p. 5). There are ways to overcome fear in the battle, one of them is a sense of the rightness of the cause for which he is sacrificed. People's behavior in life-threatening situations will also depend on their knowledge and experience. The more he learns from similar situations in the past, the better he will be able to know what is dangerous to him and what he does not have to fear. This will allow him to focus on the important things.

When preparing subordinates for the implementation of tasks as part of combat missions, their superior should take care of the proper development of their competences. In this case, we can talk about the efficiency curve. Depending on the level of the subordinate and their skills, the leader's support varies in each of the four phases. In the first phase, we are dealing with a person for whom everything is new and complicated. Therefore, the leader should use a directive style in it, consisting of clear commands, closely monitoring the behavior of the subordinate. Once he has acquired the basic skills, he moves to the coaching style, in which, in addition to many commands, leader also provide support. The next stage is the support phase where there is no constant instruction but more support. When the subordinate reaches this level, it will be possible to move to the last stage, which is the phase of delegating tasks. At this stage, we can already speak of the superior's trust in the subordinate and his skills. The subordinate is already able to carry out tasks on his own without the support of the superior (Blanchard, Zigarmi, Zigarmi, 2008, pp. 66-69).

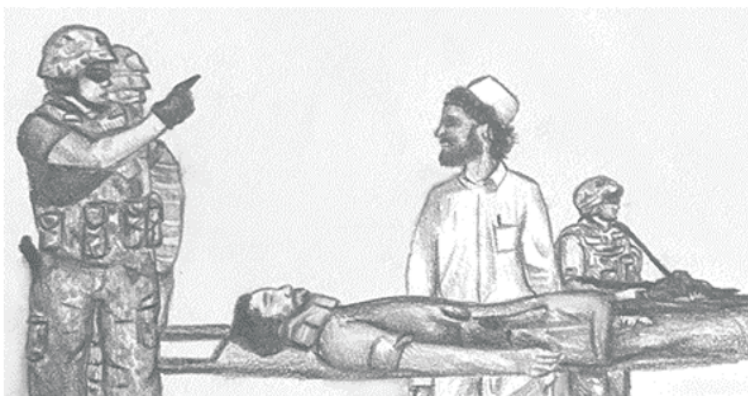


Fig. 1. Managing in difficult situations

Source: Own study made by Marta Chrobot

Developing the right competences is also based on getting to know your own personality, developing our strengths and reducing weaknesses. It can be assumed that if commanders do not want to work on themselves to develop the necessary skills, they will not be able to positively influence the development of their subordinates, and the military organization will be stagnant. A commander acting as an example for others is for his subordinates an example to be followed. The commander should also attach great importance to the development of his subordinates because it is thanks to them that he will be able to achieve the intended goal on the battlefield. Therefore, caring for their level of training, knowledge, skills and habits will benefit the entire team in the future (Macháčková, Hodný, Zezula, 2017, p. 193).

Leader's behaviour in difficult situations

The idea of leadership presented below can be useful especially in difficult-crisis situations. Based on research conducted on veterans of military foreign missions¹ and self-observations, the idea of leadership emerges, which reflects the expectations of military practitioners for a person called to influence other soldiers. No matter what the personal qualities of a leader, one inescapable requirement leader must hold is to be fully competent. Without proper competence the team cannot operate. The idea consists of the following elements:

- The leader cannot show that he is afraid or not in control of the situation. Breaking this rule will cause a breakdown in the morale of his people. It is intended to be the master of the situation.
- Leaders are obliged to set a personal example on various levels, both private and professional life in military service. Leaders are to prioritise the needs of their subordinates and put them above their own interests. To go into battle at the head of the team and not hide in safe shelters is their motto.
- A true leader feels responsible for everything that happens around him. It works professionally, is proactive and can inspire subordinates to rise to their heights while carrying out tasks.
- The overarching goal for the leader is to achieve the goal pursued by the team, making effective use of available forces and resources.
- The leader can use the available range of competences, thanks to which he will efficiently lead the subordinate human team on the battlefield. The key competences for soldiers are flexibility, resistance to stress, communicativeness, consistency in action, determination to achieve the goal, motivational skills, ability to negotiate, delegation of tasks, decisive, planning and strategic thinking skills.

¹ Research conducted in 2020 by the author of the article on veterans of foreign military missions in Polish Armed Forces and representatives of other NATO members.

- Openness to information is the basis for properly preparing for an upcoming threat. The leader is open to suggestions from his subordinates, empathetic and capable of solving emerging problems in the team.
- The leader has a value system. At the head of the human team, the leader is honored: honor, caring for the welfare of the homeland, loyalty, duty, respect, selflessness, honesty, courage, responsibility, justice.
- A leader can make a subordinate feel part of an elite organization and be proud of it. This will ensure that they are carried on the wings of pride and will be able to make above-average achievements.

J. Welch, who has been managing personnel at General Electric for forty years of his professional career with excellent results, has a different perspective on coping with crisis situations. He emphasizes that each of these types of situations is different and cannot be acted in the same way in all of them. However, there are five assumptions you can be sure about how the crisis will evolve. Firstly, you should assume that the problem you are facing is more serious than it seems. Many managers waste a lot of time right at the start of the crisis, denying that something has gone wrong. You should accept this as soon as possible and realize that the problem will become more complicated. Secondly, it should be assumed that there are no secrets in the world and that sooner or later everyone will know the whole truth. A common mistake of managers is to try to hide that something has gone wrong. It is much better to reveal it before someone else does it for us. In this case, the leader will lose even more in the eyes of external recipients. Thirdly, you should realize that the environment will represent the situation your team is facing in a more unfavorable way than it is. However, it is the members of your own team that will be the most difficult audience during the crisis. In both cases, care should be taken that these recipients are presented with the real situation on an ongoing basis. Fourthly, it is natural that the processes are subject to permanent changes, and this concerns the personnel participating in them. Almost every crisis ends with bloodshed as they do not dissolve into thin air. They require corrective actions in the scope of current processes or the introduction of new ones, which often have a negative impact on the personnel involved in them. Fifth, assume your team will survive the crisis and the lessons learned from the crisis will make it even stronger and more resilient (Welch, Welch, 2015, pp. 174-176).

To overcome the crises that appear in our lives, we should not focus on our weaknesses. This type of approach means that we do not use what is best in us. The main effort should be placed on our strengths. Mastering the Pareto principle will make us devote most of our energy and time to topics that have brought us success in action so far. This principle says that twenty percent of the activities we perform are responsible for eighty percent of the results (Harris, 2015, pp. 157-158). If this is the case, why waste your time focusing on something ineffective? Focusing on our key competences will allow us to achieve satisfactory results, which will also help us improve the effectiveness of our team.

Developing trust in the team as the basis for the proper functioning of the team

The concept of trust between the members of the participating group is inevitably correlated with the risk that occurs in difficult situations. In everyday language, the term risk is used to describe all kinds of threats and dangers. It can also be used in a more precise sense in relation to a specific category of threats. Risk arises from our actions, the choices we make or the decisions we make. We create threats ourselves, acting in a certain way, we make them real and dangerous for us. It is no different in the case of the risk related to participation in foreign military missions. In this case, it is an extreme type of risk, the consequences of which may be the health and life of people. However, this is the result of the decisions of the soldiers themselves who made the decision to participate in them. Of course, not everything depends on them, such as the firing of the base, an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attack or other threats, but they themselves took the first step to get there. The risk does not exist on its own, we take it, and we must face it. On the other hand, if the threat is independent of our actions, it comes from outside, then we will talk about the danger. Regardless of what we do or do not do, we will still be injured or killed by a terrorist attack or a bomb blast. Dangers are anticipated passively, hoping only to get out of them unscathed (Sztompka, 2007, pp. 81-82). This is where trust comes in. It is a special type of bond and mutual relations between a group of soldiers participating in combat operations. Each of its members hopes that their colleagues are trustworthy and that they can be counted on in an emergency. Setting out on a joint patrol, we trust that each of its participants is properly prepared and will fulfill the hopes placed in them. The great role of the commander, who should know his subordinates and puts emphasis much earlier on the development of their key competences. However, it should be remembered that the trust between the commander and his soldiers must have a two-pole course. You cannot trust someone without making sure that this person trusts you. And this is the result of a long-term process and interpersonal relationships of these people, which arises because of joint training, exercises, or other daily activities.

Military team cohesion

There are many reasons that a person, in these contexts soldier, joins a military organization. But no matter the reason, that person should strive to make a positive difference to the organization and its members. The cohesion among soldiers that comes from positively influencing others is the foundation of trust. And gaining it can be boiled down to three fundamentals: competence, caring, and communication. First and foremost, a member of the organization needs to be competent.

However it does not mean he needs to be the best. It does mean that he has to be mentally, physically, and emotionally able to perform the tasks that are required of him in his position. If other soldier of the organization constantly has to help him or fix his mistakes then he will not be able to succeed. Military leader needs to be competent in understanding problems in a compressed amount of time and also organizing and presenting ideas. The role of the leader is to observe his subordinates in order to find their weaknesses and strengths. Then, through appropriate tools, correct them for the needs of the team. Caring is the next pillar and it can be broken down into three separate levels: self, others, and the organization. Each group member should take care of himself so as not to burden others. A soldier must take care of his development of the necessary competences that will contribute to improving the efficiency of his team. And being part of the team, it is natural that he must also care for its good. It is impossible to act on your own as part of a team. Taking care of the organization is acting towards achieving the intended goal. An example for others should come from the leader; he needs to positively represent the organization. He should take into account what is best for the organization and not necessarily for the individual otherwise the organization will stagnate and fail. The third feature is communication. As it is commonly known, how many people are there will be so many perspectives, potential problems and solutions as well. For this reason, leaders must remain open to all possibilities. This openness starts with respect of both sides. Communication is also used to motivate people and demonstrate caring (Gift, 2020). All this builds team cohesion.

Summary

For centuries, armies around the world have been undergoing a constant process of change, adapting to the demands they face as they create new challenges on the battlefields. Managing personnel in the army, and during the implementation of combat tasks, poses many challenges for commanders. Due to the ongoing technological changes and the introduction of modern types of weapons, these challenges become more and more complicated and dangerous for all participants of combat operations. Contemporary leaders must meet these requirements, and this can happen thanks to the right competences that will allow leaders to effectively manage their subordinate staff, so that they are able to come out unscathed from any crisis. It is advisable to identify the competencies that may be needed during their operation in critical situations. Of course, their set will vary depending on the level of command. Then, it will be possible to develop optimal training methods for each type of competency. In this way, it will be possible to prepare future military commanders to carry out difficult combat tasks.

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