

EFFICIENCY AND TOXICITY IN THE EXERCISE OF TACTICAL MILITARY LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The theory and practice of leadership highlights, in the context of modern organizations, intra and inter-structural interferences and conditioning that lead to success or failure in achieving the assumed objectives. Social organizations of a military nature, in their specific actions of peace, crisis or war, have specific functional parameters determined and sustained by the efficacy or toxicity (harmfulness) of leadership exercised on levels and structures. The procedural incidents are both situational and personal in nature, which are related to the personality of the leaders.

KEYWORDS: *leadership, military leadership, toxic leadership, military organization, efficient leadership model.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M12*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, the missions entrusted to the army have become very complex. Operations in a challenging and unknown environment, constantly changing, tactical, operative and strategic forces, belonging to several countries, but which act to carry out joint missions, have become a normal practice. Therefore, in this complex environment, commanders need to develop effective interaction and collaboration with working groups, made up of both military and civilians who take part in the command process.

In order to increase missions' success, commanders need to understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of the subunit they are leading, and at the same time the level that can be achieved in terms of its effectiveness. Moreover, knowing the factors that can affect the success of the team and its members helps to increase efficiency, select the best staff, improve the structure in terms of organization, increase the team's speed in solving the tasks and optimize the operational decision making process in all the contexts in which the subunit operates. The effectiveness of military action is inextricably linked to the effectiveness of leadership, the leader's mistakenness (Hackman, 2005) being questionable.

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2. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ISSUES OF THE STUDY

The traditional approach of purely positive, idealistic leadership has been shown to be counterproductive and contradictory to the obvious reality in analyzes and assessments of leadership exercised in various situational contexts. Practice shows that some leaders, even successful leaders, have counterproductive, dysfunctional and stressful behaviors that are major disruptive factors for the organization or its members. The lack of realism, ethics, vision, and courage in conducting leadership has always had serious repercussions on the evolution and performance of an organization. And military history abounds in defeats attributable exclusively to the leader.

The specialty literature on toxic leadership has as starting point the work: "Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad", published by Marcia Lynn Whicker in 1996. Developments in the concept range highlight the variety of approaches and ongoing concern for rigorous unbinding of issues and capturing defining aspects on the typology of toxic leaders and their psychological and behavioral characteristics (Popa, 2012). The leadership toxicity obviously has an impact on the effectiveness of leadership, but it is not limited to it and includes in its sphere all the destructive behaviors of the leader that are causing major prejudice to those under his command and to the organization. In addition to efficiency, the motivation and satisfaction of subordinates is affected. Relevant, as a reference from a conceptual point of view, are both the destructive objectives and actions of the leader (Krasikova, 2011), through which the organizational objectives, the organizational climate and the psychological comfort of the subordinates are affected.

The typology of toxic leaders has a strong scientific development and a varied materialization (Williams, 2005, Einarsen et al., 2007). It is plausible to have combined forms with defining prominent features associated with specific manifestations of other types. Investigation of toxic leadership has led to the identification of the psychological and behavioral characteristics of toxic leaders, embodied in carefully elaborated and comprehensive lists (Williams, 2005, Lipman-Blumen, 2005) or well-grounded scales (Schmidt, 2008; Fors et al., 2011). We consider it useful to address management toxicity by reporting, depending on the situation, to the organization's objectives, to the subordinates' expectations or to both. Toxic leadership cannot be exclusively credited on the leader, it is necessary to introduce all the inherent variables into the equation. We have in mind the characteristics of the subordinates and the factors favoring the organizational environment.

The issue of toxic leadership in the army is being approached sustainably and systematically over the past decade, investigating the impact of toxic leadership in the military environment (Bullis and Reed, 2009), its perception (Little, 2009), the manifestation of toxic behaviors (Fors et al., 2011), the correlation between toxic leadership and emotional stress, trust and motivation (Pfister, 2011). Particularly relevant is the conceptual, methodological and operational clarification presented in the papers "Toxic Leadership in the Military Profession", drafted by Colonel John E. Box in 2012 and "Toxic Leadership in the US Army" from 2015, belonging to Colonel Denise F. Williams, both conducted under the aegis of the US Army War College. The Romanian literature lacks systematic studies, and in the military field the concerns are of a didactic nature.

Therefore, the issue of leadership toxicity is being assumed, investigated, nuanced, and systematically customized. We consider it useful to investigate concurrently the effectiveness and toxicity of leadership, which create favorable premises for the correct identification of status and functional parameters of social organizations in general and of military structures in particular. We formulate the plausible hypothesis on the coexistence and interrelation of the defining aspects for success and effectiveness with those generating failure and toxicity.

3. METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS

To investigate the issue, we adopted the qualitative method, applied in stages. Initially we made the diagnosis of leadership, and then we identified ways the toxic leadership is manifested. For the first step we used as a tool a questionnaire based on the effective command model (Command Team Effectiveness - CTEF 2.0, 2010) adopted at NATO level to measure the effectiveness of the subunits. This model can be used by commanders at all levels, instructors or assessors to improve the evaluation process or to collect information for future research. Essentially, the model has a complex architecture that includes four main categories (conditions, processes, results and feedback) structured on components, aspects and features. In the economy of our study, the "conditions" category is relevant, which includes the following components: mission, organization, group members, task, leader, and group.

The efficient management model has links between its components, indicating that these components depend on each other, the "conditions" affecting the "processes", and the latter influencing the "results". Feedback is the development, adjustment and organizational learning process, which more or less follow the way the team develops. The feedback process contains the following concepts: "model adjustment process", which addresses performance management based on team development requirements and processes, and "model adjustment conditions" that theorize that changes are required in the underlying structure of conditions in terms of personnel, organization, missions and requirements. At the same time, the "organizational learning process" theorizes that the evaluation of all the components of efficacy is necessary for the success or failure of the mission.

The questionnaire, structured on 15 items and developed to measure the effectiveness of the team with the efficient management model, was applied in two different situations. In the first situation, it was applied to a number of 72 soldiers from different subunits within a tactical unit with outstanding results in missions in theaters of operation. Applying this instrument to experienced military staff in national and international exercises, it was possible to carry out the initial assessment of the act of command. In the second situation, it was applied to a number of 46 military staff (officers, non-commissioned military officers and civilian contract staff of both sexes, ages 35 to 55) from the composition of a battalion-level command at an early stage of force generation.

In the second step we adopted as a diagnostic tool an OPINION QUESTIONNAIRE, with which we identified the causes that generate a certain conflict. The problem is sensitive because most of the respondents tend to protect themselves without recognizing the existence of toxic leadership in their work place. The questionnaire was conceived in three parts. The first group of questions concerns the tasks of the staff, the relations in the organization, the way of leadership and the appreciation of the collective and individual activity, each of the questions having three questions with three possible answers ranging from 1 to 3. The obtained values fall between minimum 12 and maximum 36 points. We therefore notice three situations: a) If the obtained values are in the range of 12-20, the organizational climate is improper: the tasks are not clear, well defined, in accordance with the job requirements, there are no clear procedures and rules of communication between the departments / there are tensions, the boss is not a good organizer, he does not know what the subordinates have to do, there are "preferred or favored" subordinates in the distribution of tasks, and the evaluation of the subordinates is not a correct, objective one. b) If the values obtained are in the range 20-28, the organizational climate is one that leads to normality but does not generate comfort to the employees. Everyone knows what he has to do, the job is done, but the interpersonal relationships are distant, formal. c) If the values range between 28 and 36, the organizational climate is ideal or close to that. Team co-existence, motivation, fairness, and good professional results bring satisfaction within the team. The presence of a positive leadership style is evident.

The second group of questions addresses the leadership style, the leadership qualities of the boss and their impact on subordinates, each of the three questions with three possible answers ranging

from 1 to 3; the values obtained are between minimum 12 and maximum 36. We also notice three situations: a) If the values are between 12-20, the leadership style is authoritarian, difficult. Lack of empathy of the boss, arrogance with subordinates causes tension and increases stress. It is easy to see that positive results cannot be generated professionally, and when they exist, they are not appreciated accordingly. b) If the values obtained are in the range 20-28, the team leadership is one that does not excel, but provides a normal climate for carrying out the activities. c) If the values are between 28-36 we have the environment in which we would all like to work. The leader has the imperative qualities of leadership style, vision, courage, realism and ethics, essential requirements of successful leadership. The leader has the ability to achieve outstanding results with the staff that he leads. The final part is a challenge for the interviewee to describe the main problems that arise in the team in which they work, which are related to the organizational climate factors they have previously assessed, even if they occur very rarely or accidentally, what he believes their causes are and what solutions he proposes to solve them.

The questionnaire was distributed to 46 military staff (officers, non-commissioned military officers and civilian contract staff of both sexes, ages 35 to 55) from the composition of a battalion-level command at an early stage of force generation.

4. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

In the questionnaire applied in the first stage, the answers were different from case to case, the experience and place in the organization of each military having an influence. Both categories of staff surveyed attribute high scores regarding the contextual perception of the lack of accuracy (76%), the presence of operational stress (76% in military operations and 66% in the training polygons), the complexity of the operational environment (86%), the leadership qualities, motivation and trust, the clarity of tasks and so on.

Differentiation of the questions by the category of interviewed personnel reflects, on the one hand, the level of training and the differentiated experience acquired in the subunit which they are part of. Evaluating the answers to the first items, one can say that the contextual perception is favorable and well-founded from an organizational perspective, because both the NCOs and the contracted military have had missions with a high degree of uncertainty, especially in theaters of operations, with a very high occupational stress and very high degree of danger. The clarity of objectives and the complexity of well-perceived tasks are grounded in explaining the tasks in detail, although the objectives of the organization are transmitted at a low level, which can be based on the fact that respondents are less involved in setting and operationalizing the objectives. At the same time, both non-commissioned and contracted military have a high percentage of confidence in their knowledge and ability to solve their workloads, meaning that the effort-performance relationship will always be largely satisfied.

There are very few people who cannot perform missions under stress and unexpected situations at a very high level. Offering rewards is an important motivating factor that has very good results. There is also personal satisfaction when they carry out the given missions.

Clarity in the command process is another aspect that differentiates the two categories of staff interviewed. If non-commissioned officers have set this criterion at a very high and high level, contract-based soldiers go largely up to the average level, as information sent by commanders through group commanders or team leaders may sometimes be ambiguous.

The leader's contribution to the process of command is differentiated. Although the two categories of staff responded almost identically, the commanders' skills and knowledge were visible in a very high percentage, consistent with what is happening in the field, this battalion successfully fulfilling all missions, both on national territory and in theaters of operations, it is obvious that the last category of staff does not always succeed in meeting the objectives of the organization or they do

not have a clear picture of the objectives of the subunit. This is especially evident among young military, with little experience in the G.I. environment.

90% of the respondents appreciated that the decision-making process is carried out best in all situations where commanders can be found, and planning is present in the act of command. In terms of motivation, money rewards are the main motivating factor that makes its presence felt, especially among contract-based military personnel. Both categories of soldiers did not experience any adjustment problems. By definition, the soldiers are characterized by a very high adaptive capacity. Contrary to expectations, the military perceived that there was a middle-level cohesion within the group, but sufficient for the organization to function properly. Mutual trust is particularly high, so subunits can successfully carry out their missions. This was especially evident in international missions.

Analyzing the answers of the two categories of interviewed personnel, it can be said that the success achieved in the accomplishment of the missions has a strong explanation that resides in the quality of the state and functional parameters of the military structure. Thus, it has been observed that this organization is working on a very well-established system, and its effectiveness is reflected in the professional way in which the battalion fulfills its missions.

In the second unit, still uncooperative, the results were the expectations of the higher echelons, with scores below the level admitted to almost all items. It was agreed to continue investigations to identify ways to soften the toxicity.

In the second stage the results revealed, as expected, the existence of major disorders, generating failure, lack of success. Thus, in the first group of questions 31 respondents accumulated averages ranging from 16 to 20 points, 10 questioned responders ranging between 20 and 28 points, and only 5 slightly surpassed the average of 28 points. The conclusion was that the overwhelming majority, 67%, is dissatisfied with the organizational climate at the level of the staff of the unit, 21% indulge themselves in the situation, probably dominated by the instinct of self-defense, and only 12% said they were satisfied. The latter are certainly in the category of "favored by the leadership".

The results obtained in the second group are not very different from those of the first, with the following situation: 33 ranged between 15 and 20 points, 10 averaged between 20 and 28 points, while only 3 registered between 28 and 32 points. Regarding the qualities of the leadership style, we find that 71% are completely dissatisfied, the same percentage of 21% remains neutral, and surprisingly, it drops to 6% the percentage of those who agree with the qualities of the leader. Consequently, we conclude that even if the latter are satisfied with the organizational climate, they are disturbed by the arrogance, megalomania, malice and hardness of their leader.

As expected, after interpreting the results of the two groups of questions and processing the answers made in the final part of the interviews, most of the problems faced by the staff are those related to the disguise of the leaders' behavior, the obsession of their own interests, the leaders' lack of respect, the serious emotional astonishment of the subordinates, the incorrect assessment of the work of the staff and of the contribution to the accomplishment of the tasks, the subjectivity and the artificial creation of a continuous state of conflict and stress. These are all symptoms of the existence of toxic leadership.

We find in this situation a negative aspect of obvious toxicity that falls within both the sphere of abusive management and especially in the category of factors that are related to the excessive self promotion, in the context of the lack of cohesion and functional homogeneity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Identifying the negative effects of toxic leadership is critical to the success of efforts to improve the performance of the organization's management. The approach involves two dimensions, theoretical and applicative, and involves the carrying out of surveys, researches and specialized studies, as well as the education of the military personnel, regardless of the degree and function, as well as of the

civilian staff, regarding the toxic leader's characteristics. At the same time, it is necessary to specify the most appropriate measures for the prevention of crises and conflicts that the toxic leader can generate at the level of the subunits / units he leads.

If we accept the paradoxical nature of military leadership, the analysis of the toxic leadership features also highlights many desirable qualities for any model military leader. Thus, unlike the democratic-participative leadership features that can favor incompetence, failure, sufficiency and absenteeism, many of the inflexible leadership features, of course, below the toxicity limit, if intelligently applied to situations and the professional environment, can give an added value to the military leader, leading to the fulfillment of the mission under the best conditions. Otherwise, it determines the installation of a toxic environment, inappropriate for achieving long-term intentional results.

Exercising management through threats, imprecise orders, argued only by raising the tone, by invoking sanctions and punishments loses ground in favor of competitive and integrative leadership, characterized by the achievement of full staff collaboration that fully meets the long-term development requirements of the military organization.

Guided step by step, valued when using correct methods of exercising the leadership, vigilantly warned when they show toxic behavior, treated with respect and trust, supported in their attempt to "cure", toxic leaders have great chances to become true, providential leaders, able to make decisions and achieve outstanding results.

Threats can, of course, have a short-term effect. In the long run, however, the development plans of the military organization require the consolidation of subunits / units in composition, the achievement of their cohesion and functionality, the integration of effort and action capacity. All these requirements can be simply illusory desires in the absence of human resources prepared and motivated for performance under the leadership of leaders able to motivate staff, perform and assume decisions - visionary, courageous and realistic and, last but not least, ethical!

The main positive outcome of the toxicity sublimation process in an optimized and efficient leadership style is that the entire organization, not just the leader and its subordinate staff, have huge gains in terms of cohesion, performance, efficiency, stability and professional satisfaction and, last but not least, from the point of view of mutual respect and self-respect.

The most appropriate solution would be for the superiors of the toxic leader to be themselves an example to follow, through their way of leading in the spirit of the true values of military life. The trust and respect given to the subordinates, the honest exercise of the specific duties of the management functions and taking the responsibility for their own decisions contribute decisively to the fight against the toxic leadership phenomenon.

Certainly, if the results obtained through a toxic leadership, regardless of their quality, would no longer be rewarded by the system and by the superiors, then perhaps the toxic leadership will have less and less followers. Although the military environment is characterized by the exercise of effective and rational leadership, the limitation of the area of manifestation of toxic leadership is nevertheless very difficult because this phenomenon is little studied and the theoretical notions of its identification and combat are almost nonexistent, very little known and much less applied.

An in-depth study on this issue, based on relevant opinion surveys and statistics, including information on the type, number and causes of disciplinary deviations, as well as the circumstances of their production! - could help identify optimal solutions to combat toxic leadership. And this could prove to be the first step of a major step towards the normalization of working relations, the increase of professional satisfaction and the stabilization of staff on positions, the improvement of morale and internal cohesion at the level of military teams and structures, as well as to increase the attractiveness of the military profession and to improve the image of the army in society.

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