



*The 6<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference*  
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT  
IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY”**  
**Braşov, December 02-03, 2011**



## **AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP**

**Cpt. Cder. Cristian-Daniel Păcuraru**

The 71<sup>st</sup> Air Flotilla / Câmpia Turzii/ România

### **Abstract:**

The opportunity to command is a tremendous honor and responsibility and unquestionably will be one of the most significant roles in Air Force career. The command is a special trust. The legal and moral responsibilities of the commanders exceed those of any other leader of similar position or authority. Nowhere else does a boss have responsibility for how the subordinates live and what they do after work. The very nature of the command is unique to the military, there is no civilian equivalent for this level of trust, authority and responsibility.

The essence of command is leadership, and the self example will set the standard for the entire organization. The institution looks to the commander to make sure that the mission succeeds, that the people receive the proper training and care and that the value survives. For this reason, the command is reserved for those individuals exhibiting only the highest levels of integrity, selflessness and excellence.

*Key words: command, leadership, integrity, selflessness, mission, people.*

### **1. The Air Force leadership concept**

Leadership as a concept could be translated as the art of leading and not just management. Why? Maybe because leadership, as a study subject, is more a guide to help us to understand, apply and go through the process of management.

People want direction. They want to be given challenging tasks, training in how to accomplish them and the resources necessary to do them well. Effective leaders strive to create an environment of trust and understanding that encourages their subordinates to seize the initiative and act.

Military leadership is defined as "the art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for organizational success to accomplish missions effectively." In general, junior leaders exercise their influence directly, while senior leaders must employ both direct and indirect influencing methods. Although this definition is an abstraction, closer examination helps discover some important aspects of military leadership. Influence can be direct (i.e., personal contact) or indirect (i.e., sending orders down the chain of command, regulations, standing operating procedures).

The Air Force concept of leadership highlights two fundamental elements of leadership:

- The people who accomplish the mission;
- The mission, objective, or task to be accomplished.

These two basic elements are embedded in the definition of leadership: "Leadership is the art and science of influencing people to accomplish the assigned mission".

*The 6<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference*  
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE 21st CENTURY”**

Leadership is influencing people – by providing purpose, direction and motivation – while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.

A true leader is not satisfied with only knowing how to do what will get the organization through today, they must also be concerned about what it will need tomorrow. True leaders seek out opportunities; they are always looking for ways to increase their professional skill and knowledge.

**The mission** is paramount and everything else must be subordinated to this objective. Performing its mission is the primary task of a military organization. The primary responsibility of the leader is to lead people to carry out the unit’s mission successfully. The former USAF Chief of Staff General Curtis Lemay emphasized “No matter how well you apply the art of leadership, no matter how strong your unit or how high the morale of your men, if your leadership is not directed completely toward the mission, your leadership has failed.”

**The people** are those who perform the mission. The personnel are the heart of the organization and without their support a unit will fail. The leader must never forget the importance of the unit’s personnel and his responsibilities that include the care and support of the unit’s personnel. A good leader has continually ensured that the needs of the people in their unit are met promptly and properly.

The two fundamental elements of the leadership concept – mission and people - are actually two very complicated elements. Successful leaders who understand this complex concept have exhibited certain characteristics or traits.

## **2. Situational leadership theory**

A way to analyze different types of leaders is in terms of power held and how to use it is the Situational Leadership. The Situational Leadership Theory was developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. In accordance with this model the leadership can be adapted to the skills and job maturity of the individual commander and there is no single "best" style of leadership. The essence of the model is that leaders should support their followers based on the followers' needs and capabilities. By doing this, followers will develop their skills, and over time will become more skilled, mature and independent. The model consists of 4 leadership styles and 4 maturity levels.

Leadership styles are divided in two contrasting categories: autocratic and permissive or directive and supportive. By combining the two styles we obtain the four categories of management arrangements.

Directive behavior means: one-way communication, spelling out the follower’s role, telling what to do, when to do it, where to do it, closely supervising performance.

Supportive behavior means: two-way communication, listening, interaction, providing support/encouragement, involving the follower in decision making.

Low directive or low supportive behavior does not mean a complete void of the behavior. A leader can provide high directive behavior without being perceived as callous, cold or insensitive.

## ***AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP***

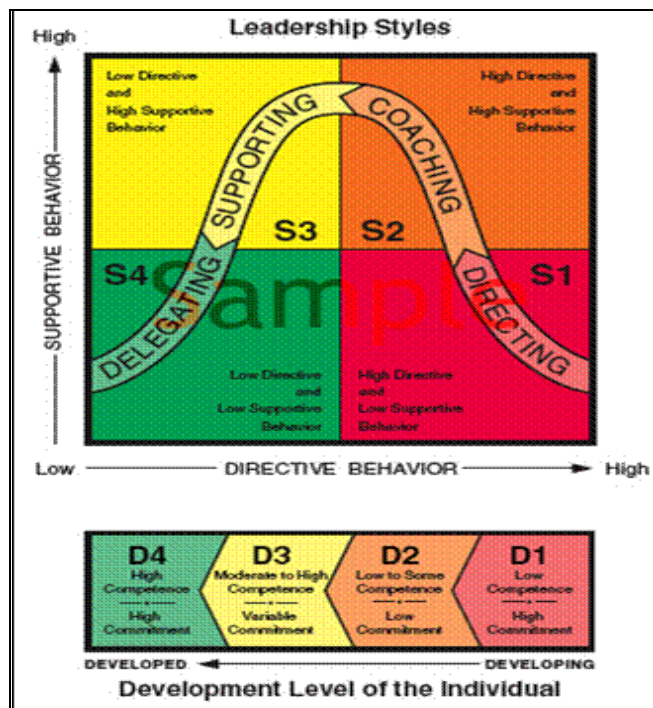


Fig.1 Situational leadership

There are four leadership styles (but there is no one best leadership style):

- **Directing:** used for people who have low competence and high commitment. These style assumptions are: one-way communication, the leader provides who, what, where, when and how, the leader makes the decision. The style is high directive, low supportive and closely supervised.
- **Coaching:** used for people who have some competence and some commitment. These style assumptions are: great deal of leader direction, he listens to ideas and suggestions, attempts to hear and use the follower inputs, but the leader still makes all the final decision, two-way communication. The style is still high directive but also high supportive.
- **Supporting:** used for people who have high competence and variable commitment. These style assumptions are: followers have competence to accomplish the task, location of day-to-day problem-solving and decision making shifts from leader to follower, leader provides recognition, listens actively, facilitates team problem-solving and decision making. The style is high supportive and low directive.
- **Delegating:** used for people who have high competence and high commitment. These style assumptions are: leader and followers identify problems together, decision making process totally dedicated to the followers, the subordinate has control over who, what, how and when something is done. The leader's style is low directive and low supportive.

Diagnosis of the followers' development level is based on competence and commitment.

Competence is defined as a function of gained knowledge and skill through education, training or experience.

Commitment is defined as a measure of a person's confidence (self-assuredness) and motivation (interest/enthusiasm).

*The 6<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference*  
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE 21st CENTURY”**

### **3. Leadership Traits, Principles, Situation**

#### **3.1. Leadership Traits**

Effective leaders have certain distinguishing characteristics which are the foundation for their approach to the leadership situation. The list of a leader's desirable qualities is virtually endless.

While many characteristics are expected of all members of the military profession, there are six traits which are vital to Air Force leaders.

**Integrity** is represented by commitment to the highest personal and professional standards. A set of values must be established by the leaders and adhering to those values. A leader must be fair and honest. *Integrity* is the basis of trust, and trust is the unbreakable bond that unifies leaders with their followers and commanders with their units. Integrity encompasses many characteristics indispensable to Air Force leader: courage, honesty, responsibility, accountability, justice, openness, self-respect, honor.

**Loyalty** includes a three-dimensional trait, faithfulness to superiors, peers, and subordinates. A high level of loyalty must be displayed by the leaders which expect that members of their unit to be loyal. From the top down loyalty is even more necessary and much less prevalent.

**Commitment** represents complete devotion to duty. A leader must demonstrate total dedication to the Air Force, and the unit. The hallmark's military leader is total dedication service.

**Energy** of leader can be showed as their enthusiasm and drive to take the initiative. Leader's preparation needs to include physical and mental conditioning. Once a decision was made, the leader must have the perseverance and stamina to stay on course until the job was completed.

**Decisiveness** includes the willingness to accept responsibility and is the willingness to act. To make any decision the leader must have the self-confidence. If things go right or things go wrong leaders are always accountable.

**Selflessness** includes sacrificing personal requirements for a greater cause and the courage to face and overcome difficulties. Air Force leaders cannot place their own comfort or convenience before the mission or the people. Willingness to sacrifice is intrinsic to military service. Selflessness requires courage and strength of character to confront a tough situation head-on rather than avoiding it.

Force development takes individual capabilities and, through education, training, and experience, produces skilled, knowledgeable, and competent leader who can apply the best tools, techniques, and procedures to produce a required operational capability. Air Force prepare people for leadership by optimizing experiences and skills and by developing capabilities to meet any challenges.

#### **3.2. Leadership Principles**

Leadership principles are guidelines or rules that have been tested and proven over the years by successful leaders. The most important of these principles are:

**Know your job.** People will follow a competent person who has the knowledge needed to complete the mission successfully. The Air Force leader should have a broad view of the unit's mission, and must make sure all members of the unit understand how their jobs relate to mission accomplishment.

## ***AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP***

**Know yourself.** For successful leadership it is important to know your own strengths and weaknesses. The leader must identify their own strengths and recognize their personal capabilities and limitations.

**Set the example.** Leader must set the standard for the unit and people will emulate their standards of personal conduct and appearance. Air Force leaders must be positive examples of professional conduct, appearance, and physical conditioning.

**Care for people.** Take care of the people. Find out what their requirements are and be sensitive to human needs. The leader can earn people's confidence, respect, and loyalty when people believe that they are cared for as well as circumstances permit.

**Communicate.** Information is the best link between wise leadership and purposeful action and should flow continuously throughout the organization.

**Educate.** Air Force personnel should be properly trained to do their jobs. In the Air Force formal training is based on personal experience at the unit level, practice and informal training.

**Equip.** Leader's responsibilities include identifying needs, securing funds and ensure that the unit is equipped properly.

**Motivate.** The greatest challenge for successful leadership is motivating subordinates to achieve the high standards set for them. The leader must build a cohesive organization to accomplish the mission. The most powerful form of lasting motivation is self-motivation.

**Accept your responsibility.** The leader is responsible for performing the unit's mission. Any unwillingness to accept responsibility for failure destroys your credibility as a leader and breaks the bond of respect and loyalty.

**Develop teamwork.** The leader must build a cohesive team from a collection of individual performers which works together to accomplish the mission. The team must work in harmony and the leader should create and maintain an atmosphere of teamwork to meet mission demands.

The leader must to demonstrate his performance in thorough knowledge of his own job and ability to train his subordinates in their duties and thereafter to supervise and evaluate their work.

The crowning of successful leadership comes when people are willing to put the unit's mission before all else.

### **3.3. The Leadership Situation**

Leadership has been defined as the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission. Management is the manner in which resources are used to achieve objectives. The Air Force needs people who can lead people and manage things.

Each leadership situation should be approached by paying careful attention to the four primary factors: the mission, the people, the leader and the environment.

#### **The Mission**

The leader must define the mission and set priorities for its various components. More missions have been defined by higher headquarters and the leader should transform the direction into goals with which people will relate. When total effort is needed from everyone it is very important to improve the individual involvement. The goals must be challenging but need to know that unrealistic goals can frustrate even the most dedicated people. Standards of job performance to make sure that goals are met must be consistent with the mission and defined clearly for every individual.

*The 6<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference*  
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE 21st CENTURY”**

**The People**

The leader must be sensitive to people. To determine the appropriate leadership action to take in a given situation, the leader needs to understand the people who perform the mission.

The capability has two principal elements: training and experience.

**Training.** A leader should assess the level of the unit’s training. People joined the Air Force to be part of a team with an important mission. They cannot do it without proper training.

**Experience.** The levels of experience vary widely. A leader should learn each individual’s experience and ability to perform in various situations. An important aspect when the leader chooses the style is knowing the experience or knowledge level of the unit’s personnel.

**The Leader**

Successful military leaders adapt their leadership style to meet the mission demands, and use an approach which capitalizes on their strengths.

In addition to capitalizing on leader’s strengths and minimizing leader’s weaknesses, leader’s style of leadership must correspond to the people’s job knowledge.

The leader must stay informed of the group’s progress, the leader is still ultimately responsible for the mission. There is no perfect leadership style.

**The Environment**

Leaders should carefully consider the environment in which they work. Leadership methods which worked in one situation with one group may not work with the same group in a different environment.

The leader must alter their leadership behavior, as necessary, to accommodate changes in the environment of the given mission.

**4. Conclusion**

Leadership is the art and science of influencing and directing people to accomplish an assigned mission. The Air Force’s concept of leadership has two elements - the mission and the people who must perform it. Several basic traits are common to successful leaders. Effective leaders are also aware of the principles of leadership.

Every leadership situation has four key factors: the mission, the people, the leader, and the environment. Careful consideration of these factors enables the leader to select the proper approach to each situation. There is no single leadership style which is appropriate in every situation; therefore, effective leaders learn to use the correct approach as dictated by the circumstances.

The Air Force depends on positive, effective leaders at all levels to perform the mission. Leadership is not the private domain or responsibility of senior officers. It is a responsibility for which every Air Force person must prepare.

Nobody was born a leader. Leaders are educated, trained, and made, as in every other profession. To ensure a strong, ready Air Force, the leader must always remain dedicated to this process.

**References:**

*Leadership and Force Development, U. S. Air Force Doctrine Document, 2006;*  
*U.S. Air Force Leadership Doc. AFP-3549, 1985.*