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## **COMMAND OF A LIMITED RESOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS BASED ENVIRONMENT**

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**Abstract:**

**“Let’s take the resources that we have and prioritize, manage and focus our energy on just doing things that count – on real results” – Phil BREDESEN [1]**

Managing an organization is a challenging task. Management skills within a private company are measured in money and employees’ effectiveness. There are many ways to analyze how that company is doing its business, how resources are used and how efficient they return results.

Managing a military organization is a different business, on terms of resources, efficiency, costs and results. How to train military managers and leaders, how to use their skills and check their abilities, is a challenge itself.

*Key words: Manager, leader, military organization, resources, efficiency, results, challenge.*

### **1. Introduction**

It is natural and easy for people to talk about leaders, managers, skills, prerequisites, role, responsibilities and duties, as it is to talk about the weather. Main reason for their smartness is that people were born to manage and lead, as they could do in their childhood.

Behind the story there is some truth, laid in the fact that, indeed, some people were born leaders. The complete truth is that all the others study hard and learn how to lead and manage and, even so, they need years and years of experience to pretend they have all necessary skills to take an organization to upper floors.

### **2. Ship’s environment**

When people talk about ships, their mind takes them to the middle of nowhere, with sunny weather, quiet environment and the most beautiful sunset. And it is partially true. What they don’t think of are the people onboard, making each trip a safe return.

The ship itself is an environment of physical space, emotions, relationships, tasks, duties and responsibilities, just like a metal body, specially designed to travel on rough seas, as it travels on calm seas, where the crew is the heart, the head, the arms and the legs, and the ship is to its members, at the same time a home, a workplace, a teambuilding and a training ground.

Working with 200 crew members on such a limited space and for a longer time, in the middle of the sea and away from the beloved, is a very demanding, but still such a wonderful job. Crew members, raging on age from 19 to over 50 years old, are pieces of a

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very complex puzzle, on which everyone has its own role, small from the individual point of view, but important to generate the perfect puzzle.

As any military organization, there is a specific chain of command onboard ship that consists of officers and senior petty officers, with strict and clear rules.

Besides the official chain of command, there is another mix of informal leaders, respected petty officers with no command positions and some trying-to-be-respected petty officers, as well as senior and respected sailors. The human nature of crew members places them into smaller, interest oriented groups which include, as a general rule, different ranking petty officers and, sometimes, even senior sailors.

Within this complex environment, there are two main issues ship's command must deal with: leadership and resources management.

### **3. Human resources**

Ship's complement is structured into a pyramid shape, having the commanding officer and executive officer on top, followed by different size groups, ranging from 10 up to 70 crew members, each of them led by an officer, on a 2 to 3 top-to-down level of command.

When an officer is assigned onboard a warship, no matter the position he is appointed to, he knows there are some challenges he should face.

There is always the eagerness to prove own capacity, ability and skills to command a group of people. There is also the natural tendency to impress your boss, as well your subordinates, on the marvelous things you are able to do. You can impose your ideas, your words become action and you see results, and this makes you feel great and, the upper you go in the chain of command, the greater you feel.

On the other hand, to get to do all these things, you need to be the restless apprentice, to learn how to listen and when to talk, to learn to be empathic but also to ignore, to be kind but also strict, as many other may-not-seem-important skills.

For the command team, working with such a variety of people is the most challenging of all tasks, as all should have the same direction and the same pace on achieving designated organizational goals.

Thus, officers must develop a special relationship with their subordinates, in terms of professional and, maybe the most important, a long term relationship of personal trust.

There is an important feature that, besides the professional training and responsibilities, makes a difference between officers and the other members of the crew: the time spent on the same position.

The officers graduate military school having in mind their upward military career, which could end at the rank of Admiral and a large organization to command. As a result, they spend less time in the same place and change many positions, as they advance during their career, getting more people under their command and bigger responsibilities.

On the other hand, petty officers have generally technical responsibilities, with a limited room for evolution and, as a consequence, they spend more time on the same position. They have to carry out repetitive tasks, which have no or minor changes, during their years of service onboard.

Under these circumstances, there is sometimes a severance between officers and petty officers, generated especially by behavior differences: the task-oriented attitude of the officers and the ease-oriented attitude of the petty officers, which if it is not properly managed, could generate tensions and disputes among crew members onboard.

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## **4. Human resources management**

From the command's perspective, the crew must be efficient, motivated and willing to contribute to accomplish ship's tasks. Command team, as the top level management onboard, must deal concurrently with the officers, petty officers and sailors onboard.

There are many issues to consider, when we approach this matter. As already presented, officers spend less time on the same position, which might cover one to three years, while petty officers might spend from one to up to 10 years onboard the same ship and, sometimes, on the same position.

Onboard ships, most positions for petty officers and sailors are filled in and there are very few gaps, which has a double effect: on one hand, you have a stable and experienced crew and, therefore, you should have the prerequisites to accomplish your tasks. On the other hand, there could be some long-lasting informal petty officers who might try to make their life easier, in terms of professional frankness.

As human resources managers, the command team must foresee future missions and must keep track of all personnel, to maintain key positions filled at all times. There is an unwritten rule that says that commanding officer focus is on next one to two years, executive officer on six months to one year, and their immediate subordinates within the next six months, while the lowest command level focuses on next month.

Besides the crew's future pay role, there must be a continuous attention paid to the day by day organizational issues. Among other things, command team should be among people to notice their behavior, attitude, mood and willingness to perform.

There are cases when command team has little or no room for decision, as they might be imposed from their superiors. Therefore, commanding a unit is not only managing own resources in accordance with the missions, but also deal with extra tasks, within the same time and using members of his crew. One of the most challenging issues is to be impartial, to be frank and to share out the tasks, on a balanced manner, without inducing supplementary tension among crew members.

Some of the things to be considered are presented in the next paragraph.

## **5. Things to consider**

Ideally, ship's crew is a stable, mission oriented, willing to perform and to obtain the best results, under any circumstances; in reality, things are different from the perfect case, on diverse degrees.

The continually change of officers makes petty officers encounter many bosses during their service, with own command skills, routine, demands and problem-solving ways, to which they must go along. The higher the position, the higher is the impact over the crew members.

In most cases, a change of command at any level implies changes in attitude, in the way rules apply, problems are solved, people are treated and environment is shaped. Also, due to the fact that officers spend less time onboard, you cannot "scout" and bring people you'd prefer onboard.

Some officers have as target to maintain the morale and motivation, while the best approach is to increase them, as little as possible. This is easier to achieve than one could imagine, implies minor physical and intellectual effort, but a lot of internal motivation and willingness to care.

As an example, one could be task oriented and do anything to solve the problem, with no consideration for his people; other could accomplish the tasks, carrying about his

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people; one could understand that sometimes things just happen and no one could be blamed for, or other could always find a guilty person and apply the top penalty.

Even if you are very task oriented, you cannot do it otherwise but with the people you lead. Tasks are issued and carried out by the whole crew on a top-down basis, while the motivation is born and raised at the individual level. You must be father, mother, priest, psychologist and friend, to induce in people a sense of personal closeness and to build trust, without impeding you in taking all disciplinary measures, when you should do so.

Some superiors are sometimes reluctant to give incentives to the people they command, due to internal or external reasons: they don't know how to do it, they are afraid to look as human beings and lose their power over subordinates or they just don't feel like doing it; on the other hand, externally, they don't have enough courage to assume the whole package of command in front of their superiors, including incentives.

You cannot always ask people to do things, without making them feel respected. They must see their work is cared about, that you don't just use them, that they are part of the team you belong to. If they are happy, they work harder and better and you are happy.

You can't lie and take advantage of their work, as if you had done it all by yourself, because one day, the lies will turn against you.

You must treat them equally, but you must be distinctive in your approach. Knowing peoples' personal problems is not interference within their personal life, but a way to understand them, their behavior and, maybe, use an advice or a way to help them solve their difficulties.

While treating them individually, a great attention must be paid to the small groups people belong to. There is a great threat to leave them loose, as they have their own interests and might compete to each other, on making their life easier onboard. If the groups have an easy life, command team lives a nightmare.

You need to find informal leaders, as they have a weight on moving things among the crew members. On a small ship, this task is quite easy, while onboard large ships, this might take a while, as you could find a very "negative vocal" petty officer as a right target, but the real informal leader is directing from the shadow.

This is the reason command team should always focus on the whole organization, as people but also as leading skills, to be informed, to appraise or to correct attitudes or behaviors, including to the subordinated officers. To do so, command team must make time and mingle with the crew, additionally to the daily formal meetings or activities.

Managers should trust their subordinates' skills, but they must always be alert, to sense things that might work better or even go worse. It is a very well known example when one smart and willing-to-work member of the organization is overwhelmed by his superior, because he does a good and timely work, while other people just wait for the working hours to finish.

Also, there are usually departments which are better managed and work more efficient, and some other departments which need improvement. You must comprehend this and you must treat departments differently; let the better one do its job, with no significant involvement, while for the other ones must be kept a close eye on them.

Another fact is that, due to mentioned conditions, compromises must be made; not all tasks could be performed at highest standards and, therefore, you must balance the urgency, the standards, the importance and people involved and do the best to achieve the best, under the given circumstances.

The rewarding system within the military has not many options; even so, individuals can make the difference between units with a good morale, with a respected-

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by-people hierarchy instead a respected-by-necessity one, with a calm and decent environment, in which you really love to work.

And this is not an achievement to you. It is a success of the organization, no matter the size, under your leadership, created to remain and to extend to the years to come, even after your time to move arrives.

### **6. Conclusion**

Within a military organization, even if it has its specific rules, people lead people and, therefore, all management and leadership theories do apply. It is therefore only up to individuals, to accept to learn and to use the available tools.

### **References:**

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