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MENTORSHIP - AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE MILITARY LEADER

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Abstract:

The present study deals with mentoring as a special type of "peak" or "apogetic", as well as anticipatory and innovative learning. The military mentor facilitates the knowledge transfer from mentor to their subordinates, i.e. their disciples. We emphasize the need for mentoring in the military organization, both on board military ships and ashore, in order to shape the deep plan of personality development of students and military subordinates, so as to build excellence.

Key words: mentoring, military leader, apogetic learning, formal mentoring programmes, interpersonal relationship, attitudes.

1. Argument

Operational context of the military leadership can be very complex: ambiguous situations in themselves, having unpredictable consequences, risk, uncertainty, limited access to critical information. Military actions involved in peacekeeping or life saving or fighting against terrorism involve a very short time extend for decision making, incomplete information and consequences of the most serious effects, although decisions made by military leaders are often vital for human lives.

Under these conditions, the type of leadership differs significantly from the leadership management in peace conditions, where the environment is predictable, structured according to rules and procedures, which can be easily controlled.

Thus, new challenges require to be solved by military leaders: on the one hand, motivating the subordinates, so as not to abandon the mission, and go on facing dangers, and on the other hand, their effective capacity to manage hazardous and unexpected incidents, to assume the risk of solving wrong actions, to face isolation, stress, and workload.

That is why the operational context requires strong character traits, intelligence, ability to act quickly and wisely, team spirit, strong will, motivation for success, both in terms of stress and pressure, and in situations of relative structuring, when decisions should be made after thorough analysis.

Under these conditions, the vision of the military leader meets the following characteristics: strength, direction and action within the cohesive professional group of subordinates, thus, enhancing emotional, situational, and cultural awareness. The military leader assumes the role to coordinate, negotiate, motivate, integrate, create favorable circumstances in which the most responsible subordinates show their capabilities, so as to fulfill the mission objectives successfully.

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Training, skills development and training necessary to exercise military leadership both at individual and group level, constitute a necessity, not rarely vital.

2. The Military Leader, a mentor?

The concept of mentoring is lost in the mists of time, having its origins into Ancient Greece, imagined literary by the epic poem "Odyssey", being promoted, after 1970, in the USA, in the context of training, hence his description as "an innovation in the American management." (Odiorne, 1985).

Defining Mentoring has proven not to be so easy to achieve as it may seem at first glance: in Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentoring), we learn that: "Mentorship is a personal developmental relationship in the which the more experienced or more knowledgeable person to guide the less experienced helps or less knowledgeable person. The person in receipt of mentorship may be referred to as the *protégé* (male), a *protégée* (female), year apprentice or, in recent years, a *mentee*."

We continue to quote, from the same source, a definition by Bozeman, B., Feeney, MK, (October, 2007): "Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, a person who is between perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)".

Research on mentoring in civilian organizations, especially in business, have highlighted a number of benefits both in job performance, and in the personality shaping of employees: high skills, high productivity, satisfaction with the work done, loyalty to the employing company, attitudes to build excellence in the profession, a better manageability of careers. This determined the military organization to formulate and adapt to their needs formal mentoring programmes for military students and young officers at the beginning of their military careers.

The idea of training, development and education of relevant psychosocial skills, which are useful in the naval military leadership, is widely accepted in academic environment, being already applied through a set of actions both at the curriculum level, through the development of transverse and longitudinal disciplines, and in the practice – action level.

Consultation and tutoring classes allotted to students, by all teachers, weekly, aim to build a partnership relationship with military students, to provide models for study and life.

Military students have military tutors. The company and battalion commanders share their professional military experience. Those students who, in their final academic years, perform very well in learning and training, can become platoon commanders and share their experience with their younger colleagues.

Assigning mentors in formal mentoring programmes implies predetermined selection of mentors according to the military procedures, which are task-oriented, and promote the military organization values and the development of skills consistent with the model graduate of the Navy.

Formal mentoring programmes involve interpersonal relationships based on training and support in setting common goals, on the junior students socializing with others in the military organizational culture and higher education institution of the Navy. They have limited duration in time, during the years of study, depending on the achievement of objectives that can be assessed, and measured.

These are relationships that involve direct psychological involvement, face to face, for maximum visibility but relatively low emotional intensity.

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Often, formal mentoring programmes in the military organization can be associated to the coaching, counseling or tutoring programmes.

The specialty literature presents a number of models that structure interpersonal relationships related to mentoring. In 2004, Cindy Buell, compiled a set of patterns for mentorship:

- the "clone" type model in which the mentor imposes a transformation pattern similar to himself, trying to "produce a duplicate copy of him or her self."

- the model of "growth", similar to family relationships, characterized by "a parent figure, creating a safe, open environment in the which mentee can both learn and try things for him-or herself."

- the "friendship" model (peer mentoring), which is met when the two partners have almost the same ages, "rather than being involved in a hierarchical relationship."

- the model of "apprenticeship" which involves "less personal or social aspects ... and the professional relationship in the sole focus."

We believe that these patterns described by the author are only indicative, in practice there are no pure models; we can even imagine an eclectic model to distinguish the features of each of the above, in different proportions, depending on the personality types of the involved.

In 1995, Aubrey, B., Cohen, P., analyzing the most effective ways of action used by mentors from business, published a study, from which we quote:

- *Accompanying*: making a commitment in a caring way, which involves taking part in the learning process side-by-side with the learner.

- *Sowing*: mentors has often confronted with the difficulty of preparing the learner before he or she is ready to change. Sowing is necessary when you know that what you say may not be understood or even acceptable to learners at first but will make sense and have value to the mentee when the situation requires it.

- *Catalyzing*: when change reaches a critical level of pressure, learning can escalate. Here the mentor chooses to plunge the learner right into change, provoking a different way of thinking, a change in identity or a re-ordering of values.

- *Showing*: this is making something understandable, or using your own example to demonstrate a skill or activity. You show what you are talking about, you show by your own behavior.

- *Harvesting*: here the mentor focuses on "picking the ripe fruit": it is usually used to create awareness of what was learned by experience and to draw conclusions. The key questions here are: "What have you learned?", "How useful is it?".

As shown in the above analyzes, formal and informal mentoring are often mistaken for what they are not, they seem to be non - discriminative, expanding far beyond their definition.

This review of an assisted mentoring program for military students offers the opportunity for comments on informal, spontaneous, traditional mentoring.

Certainly, many of us have had the chance to meet invaluable people in our field of interest, people who have decisively influenced our lives and careers, people who we carry in our heart as models, and who inspire us in times of crisis, helping us to build excellence.

It is an example of what informal mentoring means, focused on relationships lived with great emotional intensity, as a result of informal interactions established between a young and a senior disciple of the domain or organization.

There are different types of relationships: some have an insidious onset, others are spontaneous or mutually initiated or initiated mostly by an experienced mentor, based on trust, mutual valorization, situations open to the expression of ideas and creativity, encouraging the development of psychosocial and vocational development.

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The relationship mentor - student is, by nature, a creative initiative in the area of human relations, focusing on learning, progress, career and performance. Professional prestige associated with empathy, guidance and protection are the main attributes of the mentor.

Summarizing the roles of the mentor, B.Frey and R.Noller (cited. Nicola, 2004) describe:

- the mentor carries out this task along with other responsibilities;
- the mentor serves as a "channel of wisdom";
- the mentor is a continuous source of guidance up to the moment when the disciple "takes off" as an independent personality.

The authors demonstrate that an educational environment, certain features of the mentor and the disciple, gender and time factors, all contribute to the achievement of two major functions of the mentoring process: making a successful career and psychosocial development.

Literature is not generous enough with the research on mentoring in the Romanian military, so much the less on the personality traits of a military leader as mentor, or leadership styles by analogy with interaction styles of the type mentor - student. Therefore, we intend to tackle this issue from the perspective of social psychology, able to provide a wide range of responses.

We agree with the systemic - psychosocial approach on the complex issue of military leadership and informal mentoring, placing them within the broader phenomenon of social influence. We refer to the social-positive, formal influence through which the military leader, and the mentor, determine changes in the attitudes and behavior of interaction partners.

Psychosocial mechanisms for achieving military leader and mentor informal influence are extremely complex and subtle, the action being carried out at the cognitive, affective, motivational subsystem. We are able to better understand the dynamics of this influence as we try to define attitudes as predispositions to respond in a certain way to a class of objects, actions and social situations.

Also, attitudes, as the "interface" between personality and socio-professional are the safe place for values, knowledge, assimilated cultural traditions, motivations, personal experiences, which are structured as a vector generating a general predisposition, relatively stable and consistent for a certain behavior, adaptive in relation to objective reality, in peacetime, crisis or war.

Mentoring is usually attributed to teachers who can show empathy, energy and confidence, with a desire to equally train young gifted students, the young motivated disciples, or confused students, but interested in achieving a successful career.

In essence, mentoring is a particular case of learning, with rich psychosocial, ethical, aesthetic, economic, and personality connotations, as well as historical connotations. In the process of mentoring, interaction is performed at a high level, so it can be equated to peak learning, as innovative, proactive learning, as opposed to passive, learning.

Mentoring is an active, participatory learning, in which the transfer of knowledge from mentor to disciple is achieved by working together, sharing perceptions, representations, problem solving experience, imaginative approach, ideals, universal human values. This type of learning reaches the deep plan of personality development, modeling it.

The study of teaching skills (Nicola, 2004, p.42) has identified two personality traits of teachers who work within this structure of teaching skills: empathy (psychological transposition) and helping orientation (formative availability).

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However, both empathic implementation, and formative availability are two clusters, two important personality factors that describe the informal mentor, which argues for similarities in the personality structure of a military leader and mentor, creating the explicit framework for explicit manifestation of their activities.

This why the teacher – the mentor model or the model of the military leader – the mentor has an intrinsic motivational incentive function in the personal and vocational self-realization.

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