

LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS AND COMBAT SCENARIOS

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ABSTRACT

Situations of risk and uncertainty are characterized by dynamic and unpredictable contexts in which the group and the leader must be able to adapt to new situations, to balance the scales and to cope with their own stress reactions and this means empowering the emotional intelligence of leaders and members of the staff. In this context of risk and uncertainty, leaders are considered most effective if they act promptly and decisively without projecting their own stress on their subordinates. Our case study is based on a military operation in which participated a detachment of instructors whose mission was extremely complex as it involved: the participation in the process of building up and operationalizing a new army force, the training of the tank battalion and the mechanized battalion of the national army and also the inspection and the maintenance of the technical equipment of the two battalions. Achieving efficiency in crisis management is determined by strong communication skills and that means to explain things properly and to show empathy and interest in others beliefs and feelings.

KEYWORDS: *communication, crisis, duty, emotional intelligence military leadership, uncertainty, risk, teamwork.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty is an essential notion in science, technology and other fields involving measurement, estimation or prediction. It is characterized by variability, unpredictability, which can be expressed by various measures. Proper management of uncertainty is essential in order to obtain accurate measurements, reliable assessments and to improve the performance of processes and products. By following standardized procedures and methods and by using quality instruments and equipment, it is possible to manage uncertainty appropriately and minimize the risks associated with it (Fields, 2012).

Besides managerial competencies, the crisis management realised through teamwork must involve emotional intelligence competencies of the staff and also high intellectual competencies.

Managing periods of risk and uncertainty is a difficult activity that means setting up an elaborate action plan, as a result of several cognitive and affective processes aimed at identifying three important aspects: the type and the nature of the crisis, the subjects who can contribute to extinguishing the crisis through the ability to cooperate and respect each other and the last, perhaps the most important, the strategies and tactics for managing the crisis which must subsume monitoring, constant evaluation and active listening, leaving the ego aside and aiming the cohesion of one's team.

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2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The military leader under conditions of risk

Crisis management requires systematic decision making and the establishing of a team to implement these decisions with the ability to make new decisions in order to achieve the desired results in the shortest possible time (Tuz, 1996).

Mitroff defines crisis management as being "a series of internal connections or supervision of crises which can represent a peril for the main processes, workers and managers as well as for the external environment of the organization" (Bozgeyik, 2008, p.30).

It is necessary to detect the problem at the time the crisis is encountered, determine the most practical opportunities, and verify the usefulness of the resolution to shape the final decision and monitor the following milestones, such as the implementation of the solution (Tutar, 2007).

Crisis management requires quick and effective decision-making and immediate correction of deviations. In crisis management, it is significant that the organization acts promptly and decisively against any event that threatens the existence of and damages the activities of the organization (Akdemir, 1997).

As Cener (2007) demonstrated, the objectives of crisis management can be stated as follows:

- Identifying the crisis types that could affect decision-makers and informing them about the crisis process;
- Enabling managers to identify and assess the crisis;
- Providing managers several techniques for creating crisis resolution plans;
- Equipping managers with the skills needed for optimal crisis management (Fener & Cevik, 2015).

According to the 2018 ISO:31000 standard on risk management, created by the International Organization for Standardization, a number of eleven requirements have been established for leaders involved in risk management, namely:

- a) Aligning with the strategies and targets of the organization;
Leaders need to identify the overall strategies and objectives of the organization and to align the risk management approaches to them. In doing so, the leader can assess more accurately the likelihood of risk and the culture of the organization so as to create a stable and integrated risk strategy.
- b) Ensuring the alignment with management and risk culture;
An organization's risk culture is set at a strategic level, but it is the responsibility of the leadership to disseminate this to everyone in the organization. This ensures that the approach to risk is fully aligned at every level and that risk management processes are carried out accordingly, in line with the organization's objectives.
- c) Defining and approving the risk management policies;
The leadership must define the risk management policy and ensure that it is applied throughout the organization. Without involvement and understanding at all levels, the risk management process can be undermined and cannot provide a strong enough structure to mitigate risks.
- d) Distribution of resources for risk management;
Depending on the level of perceived risk likelihood, the leader is able to use a comprehensive risk management strategy to appropriately allocate resources where needed. Understanding where most resources are needed helps mitigate ongoing risks. Lower-level risks may require greater resources because their likelihood of occurrence is higher.

- e) Allocation of responsibility, accountability and authority at the appropriate levels;
Risk management only works if there is accountability across the organization - it cannot be the responsibility of just one person. The leadership needs to align the risk management strategy and identify who should take responsibility for each risk area, ensuring that these individuals are accountable for regular reporting on their part of the risk management process.
- f) Recognizing and addressing contractual obligations and voluntary commitments;
Risk involves external parties and influencers as well as internal processes and stakeholders. It is the duty of the leadership to ensure that any contractual obligations are assessed and met within the risk management system.
- g) Establishing risk criteria, likelihood, and tolerance, as well as ensuring its understanding and disclosure;
The leader must ensure that the implemented risk management strategy is clearly and comprehensively communicated to all staff. This includes risk likelihood and tolerance, while ensuring the understanding of these concepts in the context of day-to-day risk management within individual roles.
- h) Including risk management performance indicators as performance indicators for the whole organization;
For risk management to be effective, it must be an integrated part of an organization. As such, the leader responsible for risk management reporting must be able to represent risk performance indicators in relation to their impact on the overall performance, objectives and strategies of the organization. This includes managing lower-level risk managers within departments to provide an overview of the impact on the organization as a whole.
- i) Communicating the importance of risk management with regards to the organization and key stakeholders;
The leadership should develop and implement a risk management communication plan that includes internal staff and any relevant external stakeholders.
- j) Promoting systematic risk monitoring;
A risk management strategy is only effective if it is implemented, monitored and regularly reviewed. This allows management to identify knowledge gaps or problem areas of risk that need further attention – as well as to illustrate where the risk management process is successful.
- k) Ongoing review of the effectiveness of the risk management framework and processes;
As an organization grows, its risk strategy will need to be redefined. The same is true for political, environmental and economic influences on a sector or organization. If these factors change, it is likely that the risk register will require revision. At every stage of change, management should review the adequacy of the ISO 31000 framework and ensure that the processes established are relevant, proactive and clear (ISO 31000 – Risk management, 2018).

2.2 Leadership under uncertainty

It has been affirmed that what distinguishes military leadership from leadership in general is not leadership per se, but its context (Hannah & Sowden, 2012). The context in which military leaders operate is often referred to as dangerous or extreme. Sweeney and Matthews (2011) define dangerous contexts as "Extremely dynamic and unpredictable environments in which leaders and members of the group must routinely engage in actions that endanger their physical well-being, and psychological well-being to meet the objectives of the organization. In such situations, leaders and subordinates recognize that failure to fulfil their tasks and meet the organization's objectives has a potential for catastrophic consequences not only for their organization, but also for the people he serves".

Drawing on the requirements of leadership, Hannah and Sowden (2013) argues that leaders in extreme contexts need to manage four contextual dimensions:

- a) **Timeliness** – the content of successful leadership can vary throughout the stages of preparation, response and recovery from an extreme situation, and leaders must also manage changes from a stable situation to an extreme situation and vice-versa;
- b) **The magnitude and likelihood of consequences** – for a context to be considered extreme, individuals must perceive the consequences of a threat as being possible, and as the likelihood of the threatening consequences increases, the need for capable leaders increases as well;
- c) **Proximity** – a leader's impact on subordinates can vary depending on the physical distance between them as well as the leader's need to balance proximity to subordinates both to maintain authority and to be responsive to questions;
- d) **Kind of threat** – different threats (physical, psychological or material) give rise to different responses, such as post-traumatic stress, the relevance of mortality or responses based on self-esteem which, in turn, require different answers from leadership.

What distinguishes leadership in dangerous contexts from leadership in other contexts are the unique psychological, social, and organizational requirements that arise as a result of group members' threat perception. In terms of organizational requirements, dangerous contexts require organizations to have a strong and clearly articulated culture that defines an identity for the members of the organization, and that unites and synchronizes the efforts of members around a purpose and vision. It has been found that common organizational core values in hazardous contexts are service, courage, duty, integrity, and honor (Sweeney & Matthews, 2011).

In his paper, Bartone (2006) identified six primary factors of stress in modern military operations: isolation (separation from family), ambiguity (such as unclear mission, confusion in command structure), helplessness (constraints due to security and operational concerns), boredom (alienation), danger (threat) and workload. While perhaps the initial thought leads to tension, danger, and ambiguity when it comes to the military context, one should not overlook the effect that boredom can have on military personnel serving in international operations. Military operations can involve long periods when there is no meaningful work to be done and simply sitting idle. Lack of meaningful work or constructive activities leads to stress and places high demands on leaders to maintain morale and motivation.

Building on other characteristics that have proven important in dangerous contexts, leadership in extreme environments depends more on trust and loyalty than leadership in more normal environments (Kolditz, 2007). Building on other characteristics that have proven important in dangerous contexts, leadership in extreme environments depends more on trust and loyalty than leadership in more normal environments. It can be argued that after involvement in critical incidents, subordinates tend to feel more vulnerable and are more likely to scrutinize their leader, making trust indispensable in this type of context. Hamby (2002) states that trust is non-negotiable in extreme contexts. If there is not enough trust, this type of context can contribute to group members rebelling against a weak leader.

In this kind of context, leaders need to be flexible and adapt to rapidly changing conditions. A strong focus on the external situation is favorable, which at the same time means little or no focus on one's own emotions during the intense response phase (Kolditz, 2007). Leaders need to be perceived as genuine (honest), approachable and good communicators. Their decisions must be based not only on their Intellectual competencies ('IQ') and Managerial competencies ('MQ') but also on their Emotional intelligence competencies ('EQ') as it is stated by Dulewicz et al. (2005)

after analysing the relationship between emotional intelligence, leadership and job performance of officers and ratings within the Royal Navy. The results of the study showed that IQ, EQ and MQ were all related to overall performance and to officer leadership appraisal, but not ratings leadership appraisal. EQ represented a greater beneficence to overall performance, to officer leadership appraisal and to all three leadership styles.

3. OPERATION "INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE"

The Romanian military participated in operation "International Security Assistance Force" in the Afghanistan theatre of operations with Afghan Army Training Detachments:

- Detachment "Ana Training"
- Date: June 2003 – April 2014
- Structure: detachment of instructors

Missions:

- Participation in the process of building up and operationalizing the new Afghan army
- Training the tank battalion and the mechanized battalion of the Afghan National Army
- Inspecting and maintaining the technical equipment of the two battalions

Specific activities carried out as required by the mission:

- Training of 400 Afghan soldiers from 2 Mechanized Battalion, 3 Tank Battalion and 5 Logistics Battalion of 3 Rapid Intervention Brigade/Central Corps;
- organization and conduct of courses for the training of specialists in the repair of weapons and combat equipment;
- repair of 55 tanks;
- supporting American instructors in the adoption of portable weapons adjustment procedures;
- providing a stockpile of spare parts for infantry weapons by using those captured from insurgents.

Location: Kabul.

Participation: the detachment has undergone changes in its personnel, having between 25 and 48 soldiers; since 2011, the ANA TRAINING Detachment has operated in Afghanistan having of four units:

1. Afghan National Army NCO School Instructor Unit
2. Specialized Function Training Battalion Instructor Unit
3. Afghan National Army Instructors Unit
4. Afghan Tank School Instructor Unit

In this context, the Romanian military was also in a new location, a war zone, with foreign Afghan army personnel, a long distance from home, and a long period of 6-9 months away from the family. In these conditions the military leader played a key role.

3.1. Case Study

In order to observe the rigors of risk and uncertainty presented above let us look at the research carried out by a group of Dutch researchers in 2015-2016, they analyzed the behavior of a platoon deployed in Afghanistan.

Their specific mission was to safely transport NATO military officials to and from their meetings with local military, government officials and other security professionals. During deployment, the platoon commander, a lieutenant, was responsible for planning and coordinating missions. The platoon commander deputy, next in command, acts as a binder between the platoon commander and the platoon, consisting of four sergeants and 13 soldiers and corporals.

They perform three different duties: drivers, top and door-gunners and guardian angels. The drivers prepare the vehicles and sit behind the wheel while waiting for NATO officials. The gunners operate the weapons on board the vehicles and together with the drivers provide patrolling during the drive. The guardian angels escort officials to and from vehicles to their meetings and secure the grounds. Each vehicle has a commander, and a medical vehicle accompanies the patrol each time it leaves camp. During missions, all the above are under the direction of the platoon commander, while outside of missions, only the platoon itself is his or her responsibility.

Most members of the platoon worked together for around two years in Holland as a scout platoon; however, for various reasons, the platoon composition changed shortly before departure: two sergeants and a few less experienced soldiers were added specifically for this mission.

The young lieutenant was presented by his commanding officer as having high potential in the army; however, once he arrived in Afghanistan, things were quite different.

Before the end of the mission, he was replaced and one of his soldiers was repatriated to the Netherlands.

Regarding the first dimension of the framework developed by Reicher et al. (2016, pp. 71–87) – namely the leader and subordinates acting as one - the interview data revealed a strong tendency to place the platoon commander outside the group rather than as part of their group: *"I feel like the platoon commander and the deputy platoon commander participate, but not really. That's how I feel!"*.

On a personal level, the platoon soldiers also reported a certain distance: "Our platoon commander does not have social discussions with us. Since I arrived here, he has not once asked me what I am up to" (Reicher et al., 2016, pp. 71-87). One of the corporals details the feeling of distance: "We are soldiers, he is a jeans-officer". "Jeans-officer" is a term used among soldiers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to label young officers as inexperienced. One NCO says: "If you claim, with only six years' seniority, that you know it all, then you're a big cheat, really. It's a life-threatening mistake." In addition, the platoon judged him to be too stressed: "Our commander always shows his own stress, that's not good". When asked for further clarification, it was explained that a Scout should not display stress, especially if they are the group leader. Another soldier said "We know what we have to do, each of us is just doing our job. As long as things are going well, he (the commander) has nothing to do".

These quotes indicate that although the platoon commander is tolerated, he is not considered an essential element in platoon performance.

Following the four dimensions outlined by Reicher et al., a leader must act on behalf of his or her subordinates.

The platoon, and especially the NCOs, believed that the platoon commander was mainly pursuing his own career. "He uses the platoon to show off to his own superiors". It was alleged that the platoon commander took on additional tasks, such as taking photographs for the intelligence section and giving tours to senior officials, without regard for the safety of his subordinates (Jansen & Delahaij, 2020, p. 666).

The third dimension outlined by Reicher et al. (2016) is collective self-realization. Within this dimension, the most serious grievance was that the platoon commander did not make sufficient use of the knowledge and experience within the platoon, nor that from a previous deployment.

The commander was said to have refused support from the previous deployment and wanted to do everything himself: "He was busy buying a house and therefore missed the opportunity to visit Afghanistan beforehand". Furthermore, some members conveyed that they felt the commander was not able to "engage them in the situation and the mission". The same respondent also suggested the platoon commander ruled over things and gave orders, rather than sharing "the reason behind a particular order".

Lastly, encompassing the other three dimensions, the fourth dimension presented by Reicher et al. is identity entrepreneurship. This theory prescribes that leaders must define a group and its values. This applies not only to the outside world, but also to the mobilization of the group itself.

The platoon felt that the leader had none of these qualities and although some men showed understanding for the leadership position in the organization "is approached and criticized every time we do something against the rules", the final judgment of the platoon was negative (Reicher et al., 2016, pp. 80-82).

In many respects, the commander was considered to be more out-group than in-group. He was trained at the elite military academy and was therefore considered part of the officer corps rather than a genuine scout. He was suspected of acting in his own interests rather than for the platoon, and did not listen sufficiently to the existing expertise within the platoon. In other words, the platoon commander was unable to meet the needs of subordinates within the platoon to form and reinforce their group identity. It was collectively agreed that he was not prototypical and therefore failed to be a leader within the group, let alone an identity entrepreneur.

This negative judgement only increases as the commander fails to show favourability within the group.

Thus, based on the four dimensions presented by Reicher et al., the findings seem to show that lack of leader acceptance should be attributed to an unsuccessful leader. However, being replaced during an assignment is quite unusual (Vogelaar & Dalenberg, 2012).

Consequently, simply classifying the platoon commander as an inadequate leader is not sufficient to understand the social dynamics within the group that led to his replacement.

Additional factors expressed by respondents that were perceived as a threat to the platoon's social identity and that could explain the negative spiral of dynamics within the group were identified. These factors appeared to be contextual rather than personal, meaning that they could not be attributed either personally to the platoon commander or to the platoon, but nevertheless appeared to have a decisive impact on the course of events.

The three factors that have been found to be most influential in counteracting crises are: team composition, training time and task uncertainty.

Firstly, in terms of team composition, NCOs, corporals and privates alike expressed that they felt a lack of unity, mainly attributing this to the way the platoon was assembled and how it responded to moments of crisis.

A corporal reported: "The team is different than usual. We have to work with all new and inexperienced soldiers, whereas normally we only work with experienced men". Other soldiers in the sub-unit also felt that the situation was unusual. Soldier 1: "It's quite strange. There is a sergeant leaving. And then three others leave". Based on these comments and the fact that the platoon was organized, at least in part, in an ad hoc manner, it seems reasonable to assume that the undermining of the leader's authority also arose because of the composition of the team.

Secondly, the collective training time was felt to be limited.

One soldier explained that the platoon trained in individual training institutes. Drivers and door-gunners trained in Germany, while guardian angels in Hilversum, in the Netherlands. The training period was only between August and November. From those months the platoon had a limited amount of time to train together. This assessment was confirmed by other members of the platoon. Obtaining the appropriate driving licenses and updating technical knowledge were considered more important than investing time in team cohesion. These technical trainings are usually job specific rather than being a training opportunity for the whole platoon.

In the third place, the platoon members felt that the type of mission was not consistent with their identity as scouts. The challenges for this mission were considered straightforward, with the mission categorized as low risk. Jansen and Delahaij (2020) coded this mission as task uncertainty because the platoon felt they were not performing the tasks for which they were trained. One respondent illustrated this clearly: *"We are actually a search platoon, but we do simple force protection"*. Others agreed: *"We have had exercises with elements of scouting that have been more interesting"*.

These three contextual factors pose structural risks to the acceptance of leadership. They suggest that this research platoon felt that they were placed in a position where, because of their mission, they could not live up to what they considered to be typical of their group. They had to perform relatively unfamiliar tasks, with a fairly new team, in different circumstances than they had been trained for, and felt a lack of prep time. Glennon (2016) confirms the importance of contextual factors and links institutional practices to underlying frustrations.

These contextual factors also suggest that there was a mismatch between training and job tasks. The platoon commander himself was unable to live up to the image of military leadership that he and his superiors developed of leaders during and after military training.

Moreover, this in-group dynamic has not been moderated by active social identity entrepreneurship on the part of platoon commander. Stets and Burke (2000) explain that through self-categorization, individuals emphasize perceived similarities between themselves and other group members, while emphasizing differences between themselves and out-group members.

In this case, we see that the platoon commander was increasingly seen as an outsider. Eventually, this caused the social dynamics of the group to turn against him. This situation could be explained using an additional theoretical framework, namely the "black sheep effect" as described by Pinto et al. (2010).

Here, the combined influence of threats to the identity and distinctiveness of the scout platoon (e.g., new members who were not considered integrated and a task that was not consistent with their scout identity) and the lieutenant's behavior as deviant from group norms (e.g., "not acting like one of us," no small talk, ignoring regulations, displaying stress) may have led to increased scrutiny of the platoon commander's behavior.

This assessment was, among other things, characterized by a disproportionate focus on the platoon commander's behavior, which was seen as undermining the group's identity as a scout (for example, not using the group experience and accepting any task).

Effective crisis management requires strong leadership, clear communication and a well-coordinated response plan. By following this plan, a leader can help minimize the impact of a crisis and ensure that the organization is able to recover quickly and effectively.

As important as formal training is for developing good leaders, so is the development of effective leadership, which needs to be practiced in everyday actions. Good leadership, therefore, is not just about learning general leadership principles, it is about doing the right things, big and small, dozens of times every day, for military and civilian personnel and their superiors. In this way, good leadership becomes a habit that is hard to break.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the study we have developed a plan for managing periods of risk and uncertainty, as follows:

1. Identifying the crisis: The first step for a leader in crisis management is to identify the crisis. It is important to understand the scope, scale and nature of the crisis and its potential impact on the organization.
2. Establishing a crisis management team: The next step is to establish a crisis management team or activate it if it has been established previously. This team should include key stakeholders, subject matter experts and decision-makers who can work together to develop a comprehensive response plan.
3. Developing a response plan: Once the crisis management team has been established, the leader should work with the team to develop a response plan. This plan should include clear objectives, strategies and tactics for managing the crisis.
4. Communicating effectively: Effective communication is essential in crisis management. The leader should establish clear communication channels and protocols and ensure that all stakeholders are informed and kept informed of the situation.
5. Implementing the plan: Once the response plan has been developed, the leader should work with the crisis management team to implement it. This may involve making difficult decisions, allocating resources and coordinating with external partners and stakeholders.
6. Monitoring and evaluating: Throughout the crisis, it is important for the leader to monitor the situation and evaluate the effectiveness of the response plan. Adjustments may be needed as new information emerges or the situation changes.
7. Identifying the learnings: Once the crisis has been resolved, it is important for the leader to conduct a thorough review of the response plan and the overall crisis management process. This will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the organization is better prepared for future crises.

So, what are the correct things that good leaders turn into daily habits? These include the following timeless practices:

- Treating people with dignity and respect at all times.
- Gaining and building the trust of soldiers, civilians, colleagues, families, leaders and the public.
- Setting the highest standards and holding yourself and all subordinates accountable for maintaining them.
- Communicating horizontally and vertically in an open, transparent and continuous manner.
- Mentoring, evaluating and assessing sub-unit members honestly and fairly.
- Maintaining balance by devoting time to family and community.
- Approaching responsibilities with enthusiasm and optimism.

Good leadership is often built by practicing each of these actions until they become habits that the military and civilians will come to expect.

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