BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

WAYS OF DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN FUTURE OFFICERS

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doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22823495

Abstract. This article analyzes pedagogical and practical ways of developing leadership competencies among future officers. Leadership in military education is considered not merely as the ability to give orders and manage a unit, but as an integrated set of skills including responsible decision-making, team coordination, effective communication, self-control in stressful situations, and personal example. The study highlights the importance of problem-based situations, practical training, teamwork, military simulations, reflection, and individual development programs in preparing future officers for leadership roles. Particular attention is given to assessing leadership competency through not only theoretical knowledge but also practical behavior, professional responsibility, and decision-making performance.
Keywords: future officer, leadership, competency, military education, professional training, decision-making, team management.

Introduction. The growing complexity of modern military service is expanding the professional and personal demands placed on an officer's personality. Tactical and technical knowledge alone is not sufficient for the effective command of a military unit. An officer must correctly assess a situation, make decisions under time constraints, ensure cohesion among subordinates, maintain psychological stability in complex circumstances, and feel responsible for the consequences of his own decisions. For this reason, developing the leadership competencies of future officers is becoming an important component of professional training within the military education system. The process of forming leadership should not be confined to specialized disciplines alone but must be carried out through the content, organizational forms, and practical activities of the entire educational process [1; 2].

For a future officer, the concept of leadership carries a broader meaning than ordinary management activity. A genuine military leader must not merely convey tasks to team members but must be able to unite their efforts around a common goal, demonstrate personal responsibility, and show initiative when necessary. Such competencies do not form naturally by themselves; they can be developed through purposeful pedagogical influence, practical training, collective assignments, and teaching methods brought closer to real professional situations. In this respect, orienting the training process of future officers in higher military educational institutions toward the consistent formation of leadership competencies is one of the pressing pedagogical tasks of today.

Research methodology. The study employed systemic, competency-based, activity-oriented, and person-centered approaches. The competency-based approach makes it possible to assess not only the future officer's theoretical knowledge but also his ability to apply this knowledge in practical situations. The activity-oriented approach is based on forming leadership qualities directly through the process of action. Furthermore, within military education, a cadet's independent thinking, display of initiative, and assumption of responsibility before the group are regarded as important outcomes of person-centered education.

Results. The results of the study show that one of the most effective ways of developing leadership competencies in future officers is to reorient the educational process from simple knowledge transmission toward active professional activity. If a cadet has no opportunity to make independent

decisions in various situations, it is difficult to develop his leadership potential fully. For this reason, the use of problem-based situations in training is of considerable importance. Tasks such as completing an assignment within a limited time, distributing duties among group members, responding to an unexpected situation, or making a final decision under conditions of conflicting opinions develop the cadet's initiative and sense of responsibility. In such training, the instructor does not act as the provider of a ready-made solution, but participates as a pedagogue who organizes and analyzes the activity.

Group activity also possesses particular pedagogical potential in developing leadership competencies. Since military service is based on collective activity, a future officer must learn to take into account the capacities of other individuals alongside his own. By giving cadets the opportunity to take turns performing the leadership function in group assignments, conditions can be created for testing different leadership styles: one cadet may act as planner, another as coordinator, and another as the one who monitors execution. At the end of the training session, together with the outcome of the group's activity, the errors made in the leadership process, the quality of communication, the distribution of tasks, and the effectiveness of decisions are discussed. In this way, leadership ceases to be a merely theoretical concept and becomes a competency mastered through practical experience [1; 2; 3].

Another important way of developing leadership in future officers is the modeling of military-professional situations. In simulation exercises, cadets encounter situations close to real service conditions and are required to make independent decisions. The advantage of this approach is that the cadet observes the consequences of his decision during the practical activity itself. For example, an incorrect distribution of tasks may affect the overall work of the team, unclear communication may lead to a task being carried out incorrectly, or insufficient analysis of the situation may result in a wrong decision. During the subsequent reflection process, the cadet not only identifies the error but also comes to understand how to act in a similar situation in the future [4; 5].

Developing decision-making ability, an important component of leadership competency, likewise requires a distinct methodological approach. In military activity, decisions are often made under conditions of incomplete information. It is therefore more beneficial in the educational process to create opportunities for the cadet to analyze a situation based on information of varying completeness, rather than simply providing him with all the data in advance. In this process, the cadet distinguishes among the available data, identifies priority tasks, evaluates possible outcomes, and justifies his decision. The instructor, for his part, analyzes not merely whether the decision was "correct" or "incorrect," but also the thought process that led to it. This method helps develop analytical and strategic thinking in future officers.

Discussion. The matter of personal example also occupies an important place in forming leadership competencies in future officers. In the military educational environment, cadets observe not only the instructional material but also the professional conduct of their instructors and commanders. Qualities such as fair treatment, adherence to discipline, respect for time, a responsible approach to assignments, and composure in complex situations directly become a means of pedagogical influence. For this reason, the pedagogue who teaches leadership must himself possess a high level of professional and communicative competence. Rather than imposing on the cadet the theoretical requirement to "become a leader," demonstrating a practical example of leadership yields more effective results [6; 7].

Using the mechanism of reflection also yields important results in developing leadership. After each practical exercise, the cadet should analyze his own activity, determine which of his decisions proved effective, in which situation he encountered difficulty, and what needs to change

in the future. Such an approach builds self-assessment skills and internal motivation for professional growth. In assessing leadership qualities in particular, it is advisable not to rely solely on the instructor's opinion but also to draw on self-assessment and the views of peers. As a result, the cadet begins to recognize more clearly his own strengths and the aspects requiring further development [8].

It is also necessary, in the process of developing leadership competencies, to maintain a balance between military-disciplinary requirements and initiative. Military education is based on strict order and discipline, but this must not restrict the cadet's capacity for independent thinking. On the contrary, providing the opportunity to show initiative within the bounds of discipline, to propose solutions appropriate to a situation, and to justify one's own decisions enhances the professional maturity of a future officer. In such an environment, the cadet is formed not merely as an executor of orders, but as a future military specialist bearing independent responsibility.

Assessing leadership competency also requires the use of complex criteria. Theoretical test results alone cannot fully represent a future officer's leadership potential. Indicators such as the speed and soundness of decision-making, the ability to organize a team, communicative culture, initiative, responsibility, resilience to stress, the management of conflict situations, and the ability to analyze one's own activity can all be assessed together. Conducting regular monitoring on the basis of these criteria makes it possible to determine the individual developmental dynamics of each cadet.

Conclusion. The development of leadership competencies in future officers should be regarded not as a merely supplementary direction of military education, but as an important component of professional training. A modern officer is required to possess, alongside military knowledge and skills, the abilities of independent thinking, rapid situational assessment, responsible decision-making, team management, effective communication, and setting a personal example. For this reason, the formation of leadership competency must be carried out in close connection with all stages of education.

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