

EDUCATING MILITARY LEADERS ON FUTURE CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Each member state of North Atlantic Alliance is responsible for the quality of its human capital. Furthermore, by assuming membership status in the Alliance, it becomes accountable for the level of professionalism that it provides. Recruiting and selecting military leaders who operate professionally within NATO is one of the most relevant aspects in the contemporary security context. The pandemic context, military conflicts, and the instability of diplomatic relationships between states are some of the real-world problems that are challenging not only Military Forces but also for military higher education institutions. These institutions are addressed to equip graduates with previously unsolicited competences. The graduates must represent not only the officers of the Alliance but also the future leaders who will perform in a complex operational environment. By focusing on the characteristics of the contemporary security environment and identifying traits that are emerging in the future, this article aims to frame meta-competences supporting curricula to shape military future leaders.

Keywords: NATO; leaders; meta-competences; higher education; security environment

General context or the “Big picture” of the future

Contemporary social, economic, political, and security contexts are diverse and challenging. Changing the mindset of the new generation, the evolution of technology, military conflicts, climate problems, and approaching nonconvergent directions in leading states provides arguments for current research. Challenges such as struggle for influence or dominance, military conflicts, interests in accessing resources, or tensioned relationships among different actors can have significant consequences including loss of life and destruction of infrastructure.

In respect to the aforementioned ideas, the mentality of future’s military leaders has to correlate the resolution of crises and the achievement of victories in military confrontations with the level of technological development. Moreover, the hybrid military confrontations ask for high capacity for analysis and critical thinking. In this context, we believe that educating leaders is imperative duty in all NATO countries.

At the same time, we believe that one of the main factors guiding higher military education is international security environment, we also believe this factor represents a key concept for conceiving educational programs for future military leaders. This relation between military educational field and the features of the security environment can be observed in Figure 1. This represents a framework adopted in a previous study (Nicoară, Pătrașcu 2023) and supports the connection among all the elements involved in higher military education.

In a global world, where legal boundaries are respected less, the security environment becomes challenging for military leaders.

Methodology and research directions

Starting from the identified problem of the need to update the key competences required for future military leaders and readapt the specific curricula for the military higher education institutions, the present paper will approach the following issues:

- briefly outline the features of the current security environment;
- name the particularities of a military leader;
- clarify concepts such as competences and meta-competences;
- identify the core of meta-competences needed by the future leader;
- operationalization of meta-competences in the military field.

By going through these steps, the main objective set for this scientific path, namely *to identify the core of meta-competences for a future NATO military leader*, will be achieved.

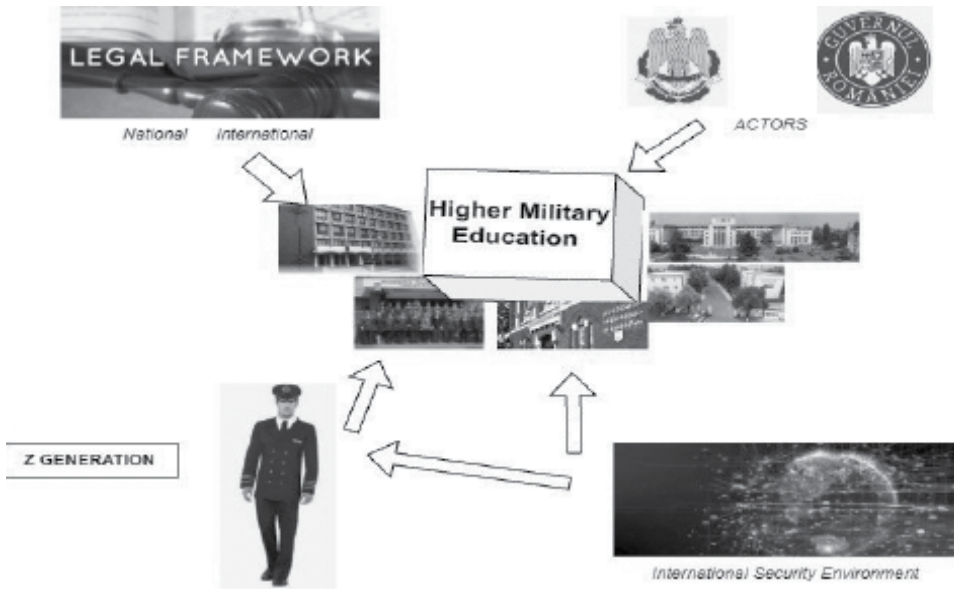


Figure 1. Analysis Model of Romanian Military Higher Education (source: G. Nicoară; P. Pătraşcu 2023)

The methodology is focused on the adaptation to interdisciplinary research. The analyses consider conceptual elements from distinct fields of study: military sciences, education, and psychology. Deduction and abstraction were being the main methods of the cognitive-structured course of the present process.

Requirements for future military leaders

Looking through the lens of the future, we understand the need to rethink the desirable behaviors of military leader. We mention a sum of arguments for the need to reassess military leading behavior in NATO and leader's abilities:

- A military commander has to lead both within and beyond the borders of one's state. This task requires professional adaptation to an international environment which differs in terms of social, cultural, political, and leading procedures. Alongside the need for communication using a common language, skills are required for interacting with professionals from different armed forces, and furthermore, for leading culturally diverse military units.
- Demonstrating the ability to adapt to an increasingly diverse range of crises situation (such as pandemics, earthquakes, and cyber-attacks). While professional behavior was traditionally developed incrementally, using known procedures and directed towards clear objectives, future perspectives compel us

to find solutions for newly emerging situations, often different from those to which we have been taught to react. At such moments, the leader dictates the approach adopted for crisis solutions.

- Proliferation of conflicts worldwide and diversification of nature. The scale of the conflict, the reason for its outbreak, intensity, number of persons involved, the types of capabilities or military equipment used, military confrontations type, and the solutions adopted require contextual customization.

- Real-time adaptation to technological advancements. Responses to crises or armed conflicts directly depend not only on the ability of leaders to exploit technology but also on troop's capacity to use it. The evolutionary leaps in technology as well as the exponential growth in technological variety demand adaptation in terms of knowledge, understanding, and utilization.

- Membership in a politico-military alliance necessitates the acquisition of an ability to understand the politico-strategic environment. Translating political decisions of formulating arguments to advise the politico-strategic level is the responsibility of future military leaders.

- The expansion of military conflicts into civilian space requires a good understanding of both domains as well as tools for harmonizing relations between them. There have been numerous civil crises in which armed forces have been called upon to intervene.

Alongside the aforementioned aspects, we draw attention to the fact that the professional environment of the military leader extends in at least three directions: the current activity in peacetime, duties and responsibilities in crises, and actions in the event of military conflict. Therefore, the training of military leaders should consider the professional environments described in these scenarios.

All in all, a military leader has to be capable to:

- lead both national and international units;
- behave not only in his /her country but also in an international environment;
- act proactively in a large variety of situations;
- understand the politico-strategic level;
- find solutions for both civil and military crises.

Course of action – a common core of meta-competences for future military leaders

The main reason we are interested in competencies is because they represent the main vehicle to develop curricula in higher education. (Albareda-

Tiana et al. 2018). Moreover, the main objective of conceiving academic programs for future officers is to establish a leader model in the form of competencies, with the ultimate goal of aligning the curricula with the requirements of the professional field. In line with the aforementioned observations, higher military educational systems are focused on developing and utilizing competencies, both in normal situations and in crisis or armed conflict scenarios. The set of competencies developed in higher military institutions serves as a foundation for future professional behavior, with leaders expected to adapt their behavior to each particular context.

Furthermore, analyzing the present security environment and considering the requirements of the future, there is an urgent need for personalized training aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in learning. Another objective of the educational programs is to foster the development of this competency, which involves rethinking the importance of ongoing preparation and personal development throughout one's entire professional life.

In this regard, one approach that can be embraced by higher military institutions to support the endeavor training, development and specialized training of future leaders for this challenging professional environment is a metacognitive approach in educational programs.

What would be the main reason to entail such an approach?

First of all, meta-competences are all-embracing competencies that are relevant to a wide range of work settings and that facilitate adaptation and flexibility on the part of the organization (Teeuwen 2019). Secondly, they are generic and cross-sectional (Cheetham și Chivers 1996) and they represent the foundation for other competencies. Meta-competencies are considered to be higher-order skills, with the development of learning capacity being directly linked to them.

By linking the characteristics of the security context with the requirements of military leaders for performance in action, it is possible to enhance overall security. This can be achieved by harmonizing the main characteristics of the security environment with the need for a military leader. In this context, we believe that a course of action for higher educational military institutions can consist of guiding curricula and academic contents in a common direction represented by an established end-state name, a common core of meta-competences. Through this, leaders should be equipped with the ability to adapt to various and previously unseen operational contexts so that the decisions made lead to the achievement of established objectives. One of the models identified in the specialized literature that addresses this need to ensure the potential

to generate contextual competencies suitable for a reconfigured future is that proposed by (Miclea 2021). This model consists of a set of four meta-competences: self-discipline, design thinking, entrepreneurship, and self-control.

By implementing these core competencies in the military field, the following observations can be made:

- Self-discipline entails the internalized capacity to adhere to self-imposed or established deadlines. Its implication is that promoting such behavior results both in timely goal achievement and leading subordinates through the power of one's example.

- Applying entrepreneurship in the military domain involves the ability to discover new opportunities that lead to high-performing decisions and their proper exploitation.

- The future operational environment cannot be approached procedurally, following a series of predefined steps. Creativity and the ability to innovate or identify valid problem-solving possibilities are defined for the military leader of the future.

- Design thinking combines science (knowledge) with personal art. Currently, information and science are a click away. In this context, future military leaders must leverage knowledge to create contextual and viable solutions.

The future military leader will establish their professional behavior through the mastery of the aforementioned meta-competencies, as depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Meta-competence pillars for educating future leaders (source: authors)

Conclusions

In this research, we tried to explore aspects of future military leader' educational path. We focused on the challenges of the security environment and we analyzed the specialized literature in order to formulate a potential solution.

Contemporary society and security context are challenging. The transition from a predictable society to an environment characterized by artificial intelligence and a general state of uncertainty driven by regional conflicts requires a reevaluation of the compatibility between the military leader model and the educational path.

Higher military institutions are addressed to find feasible courses of action for the education of future military leaders capable to perform on an unpredictable battlefield. Moreover, these institutions must be involved in a comprehensive process with a balanced inclusion of scientific content and stakeholder interests. Therefore, the teaching agenda should be changed and the focus has to be on providing problem-solving skill to future leaders to avoid reducing the educational process to a specific outcome.

NOTES

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