



PROFESSIONAL ROLES OF THE BASIC OFFICER COURSE GRADUATES AT THE ARMY LEVEL

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Abstract: *The importance of the professional skills concerning the evolution of the educational systems, within the projection of training programs, has become essential. An objective analysis of the platoon commanders' status and their attached professional roles is required in order to identify and define their basic specific skills. Only after establishing the specific expected behaviour of the platoon commanders, the projection of their professional skills is possible.*

Keywords: *Professional training; status; professional role; skill.*

Introduction

No society has a well-defined structure, but it embodies "an organised aggregate of smaller organised groups"¹. Therefore, each person cooperates in the social life in accordance with the status, roles and by default one's position.

In order to understand the functionality of the military system, as a subsystem of the social system, we need to consider, for start that we are dealing with micro-structures or totalities to which personalities adhere and consequently, we need to start by analysing the place for each military personnel in the social framework. In the clarification of this step, a particular importance is given to **the notions of status and role**, situated at the intersection between sociology – as single science – and the social psychology. Reporting ourselves to the proposed definitions by Jean Stoetzel, we understand that the two notions are well-delimited, but yet complementary: "if we take as a middle of our personal observation, the place which its status and role is determined, then its status is the whole assembly of behaviours which he should expect legally from others, with its role being the assembly of behaviours to which the others expect legally"².

¹ R. Linton, *Fundamentul cultural al personalității*, Bucharest, Științifică Publishing House, 1968, p. 96.

² Jean Stoetzel, *Psychologie sociale*, Flammarion, 1963, p. 178.

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Ralf Linton together with Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) draw the attention over the differentiation between the statuses for the individual who did not especially choose them, and the ones provided by society, meaning **the ascribed statuses** and **the achieved statuses** which were chosen by him, which are determined by qualities over which the person has a direct control.

Therefore, if we detailed, among the achieved statuses, there are the ones regarding the geographical or biological conditions (nationality, origin, sex, etc.). It is by default deductible that people cannot, in the first place, choose their sex, ethnicity, religion, and even social class. Yet, detailing the achieved statuses, we can say that some other statuses can be added here such as the professional statuses (teacher, officer, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers, etc.) matrimonial statuses (husband, wife, etc) and others. So it is observable that every human has more social statuses which total the so-called set of statuses of the individual. Father, son, officer, orthodox, friend, Romanian, etc. are statuses that can be performed by the same person.

In 1966 E.K. Wilson classified the professional statuses in:

- **Formal statuses** (according to the organization's flowchart);
- **Informal statuses** (achieved based upon the psychological features of the individual).

Therefore, among all forms under which we can find and analyse the statuses of a person in the modern society, we consider that the one which defines the occupational individual evolution seems



to be **the professional status**.

If by status, we understand the place of the individual within a social network, **the role** shows us a behavioural pattern in accordance with a certain status, or in other words, the transposition into practice of duties and specific rights concerning a position occupied in society. In this way, **the terminology** was used for the first time in the work "The Study of Man" (1936), by Ralph Linton. Initially, Ralph Linton defined the role as representing the total amount of actions and reactions of a certain individual which occupies a socially determined position (status) legally expected by the other members of the social structure. Additionally, Newcomb considers, in order to prevent a possible confusion, **the difference between the played and the prescribed role**, in other words, between the role (aspect referring to the conduct imposed by the status) and the role conduct (way in which the individual actually interprets his/her role, meaning the effective behaviour).

In line with the statuses, social roles can also be dictated (attributions and achievements, acquiesces). The report between the status and the role is a complex one. In correlation with the social statuses, each individual is attached to a series of social roles at a specific time, which can interact more or less.

The reports are expressed as some patterns where individuals engulf their actions. Similar to an actor, the individual transforms himself into a social character who acknowledges his/her conducts or attitudes projected by society. The normative obligations attached to each role determine the role expectations which have as effect the reduction of the interaction uncertainty between individuals. The role performance can vary according to the person's performing obligations or activities which make possible self-expression, and indirectly, professional achievement. The role implication must not be confused with the identification. The role removal contributes to self-control and stresses out the possibility of the individual to control the situation.

We wish to underline that the two concepts are permanently in a bi-univocal relation, meaning that the status triggers the existence of an attached role, and the role can be determined only in relation to the status. Society and especially the Armed Forces have enough means of implicit or explicit restrictions in order to determine the citizens/soldiers to adapt

their conduct to the pattern which represents the role attached to the recognizable status.

The relation between the roles and the status of the basic officer course graduates, within the land forces.

In the establishment of the relation between the roles and the basic officer course graduates within the land forces, we consider as mandatory the definition and detailing of psychosocial and organisational characteristics of the military institution, generally, and particularly, of the land forces, as follows:

a) The military action is dominated by **the war phenomenon** with its main feature **the combat conflict**, whose main objective is the defeat of the enemy and achievement of victory using destructive means;

b) The military action is regarded as continuous, developing itself in peace time, defining itself by form, way of operation, intensity, and aim towards action in war time. In this respect, its main mission in peace time is the soldiers' training in order to successfully, when needed, participate in combat (*train yourself as you fight*). "The military organisation is therefore characterised by an *intrinsic duplicity*"³. A relatively short moment, the war, corresponds to an often long step – the peace, defined by calmness and sometimes by indifference, step in which the forces' training needs to be organised and performed in physical and psychological conditions that are similar to the ones in war time, namely of maximum danger for the organisation;

c) In order to guarantee soldiers' behaviour in the context of the established provisions (characterised by uncertainty in case of combat), the provision of military norms and organisational cohesion, the report between conviction-constrain is definable for the social control in the Armed Forces ("you don't know-I'll teach you, you can't – I'll help you, you don't want – I'll force you");

d) "Due to the specific features of combat, the military organisation bears the imprint of some collective principles, in opposition to individualism of industrial society"⁴. Thus, military ethics is built on discipline, cohesion, honour and last but not least on sacrifice ("even with the price of life"). So, the military institution by its formal definition

³ Sîntion Filaret, *Componenta psihosocială a liderului militar*, Bucharest, „Carol I” National Defence University Publishing House, 2005, p. 92.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 93.



pursues the outrun of some possible contradictions: following the order or the survival instinct; the Training under difficult conditions for the purpose of achieving the general mission (defeating the enemy in a possible war). For this, the Armed Forces represent a well-defined and structured institution by a unity of command (the decision belongs to the commander whose authority is supreme) yet, without excluding the collective conciliation of him/her by the unit's general staff.

Analysing these characteristics, the American sociologist Erwin Goffman lists the Armed Forces among **the totalitarian institutions**, institutions which take over the life of their members, institutions which try to dominate their members as much as possible. These institutions also remove, mainly, the possibility of members to hold other statuses besides the ones offered by them, very rarely recognising the other statuses of members, especially through the restriction of communication with the outside.

Coming back to the definition of **status**, meaning "the position occupied by a person or group within society"⁵, in our situation, the basic officer course graduate status refers mostly to one's position within the national defence system (subsystem of the land forces) or of the structure of

and make sure that the respective unit fulfils the received mission. For this, the basic officer course graduates are part of a normative system which is well-defined (orders, instructions, rules) using relations which can be of command/subordination (hierarchical) and collaboration (horizontal). This is due to their double position as managers and performers, the proportion between the two varying according to the currently performed mission. All these are possible only by fulfilling the roles associated with the status. However, in the relation between the status and roles, there may be differences. Sometimes, the role given to someone, derived from the held status (platoon commander), enters in contradiction with one's personality, with the psychology of *being*. This situation is also inevitably encountered in armed structures/land forces, where most of the platoon commanders choose the military profession when they enter the military high school, without receiving proper counselling regarding its restrictions and especially, at an age when personality is still not yet defined. In this case, we consider that, without external support, the individual can hardly perform professional obligations.

In the performance of their duties, the basic officer course graduates from land forces (platoon

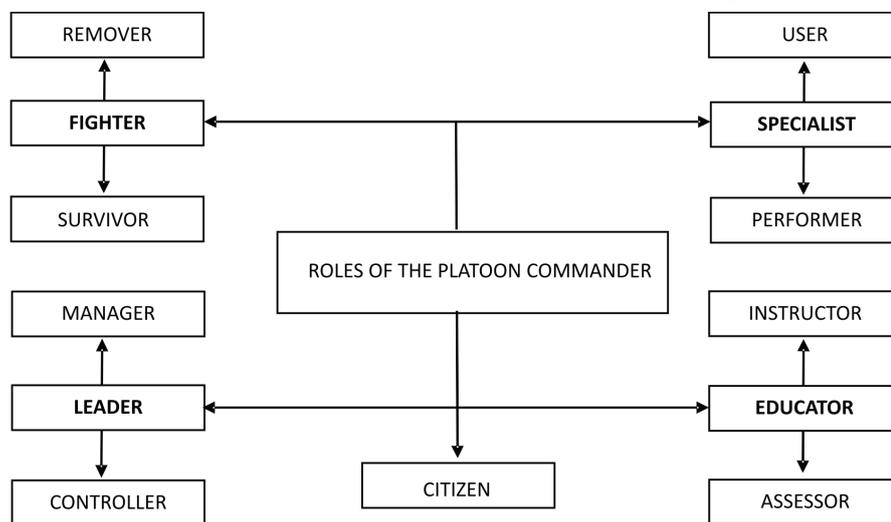


Figure no. 1 Roles of platoon commander

a military unit. This position is mainly, if we refer to the initial training for the military career, the one of platoon commander.

No matter whether they are commanders or chiefs, they share an important common feature: all lead (manage) the soldiers under their command

commander) fulfil a set of roles (according to Figure no.1), as it follows:

- a) The role of member in the Armed Forces, situation in which one needs to perform with efficiency the specific combat actions; in other words, **the role of a fighter and military specialist**;
- b) The psychological role: manager of training

⁵ Cătălin Zamfir, și Lazăr Vlăsceanu, *Dicționar de sociologie*, Bucharest, Babei Publishing House, 1993, p. 612.



area (combat), mediator between the members of the unit he leads and assessor of their activities (**leader and educator**);

c) **The role of citizen** given by the moral and civic behaviour.

The graduate of basic course as fighter and specialist

One of the main responsibilities of The Ministry of National Defence is to build a force structure and achieve the Armed Forces combat capabilities in order to fulfil the specific missions. Under these conditions, in order to deal successfully with the enemy on the modern battlefield, the available human resource, in this case the platoon commanders, needs to be trained in accordance with the contemporary characteristics of the military phenomenon.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to know that planning instruction and effectively training young basic course graduates to fulfil their roles as fighters and specialists improves their capacity to survive on the battlefield and to act in order to fulfil the received task/mission. It actually foresees a complex of competences, which need to respond to the military and technical obligations and requirements, competences which are related to the *non-human* aspects of the military role. "The fulfilment of missions within national defence, The North-Atlantic Alliance and military structures of EU, imposes that every **fighter** should prove moral and physical force, *psychical strength and specific skills in one's military specialty*, in order to be capable to fight within the unit or on his own for the fulfilment of the missions received"⁶.

In order to participate successfully in the military operations, the fighter needs to have complex training on at least two components:

- Regardless of service and specialty, on the component of **general military training**;

- **Specialty training** or in other words as specialist.

The action of the specialised fighter has a unique objective – the destruction of the enemy in all forms and through combat procedures, in direct or remote contact. For this, one must believe in the capacity to overcome, to act firmly and with initiative and to poses the skill to efficiently use the

supplied firearms, equipments, and technique. From our point of view, the success of entrusted missions is directly influenced by the degree of training and instruction for combat, by the applicability level of the following behavioural actions:

- Building maximum motivation for combat and full trust in one's force and in the unit leader;

- Ensuring continuous communication both vertically and horizontally, thus being able to interpret and transmit essential messages regarding combat development, by using the available means;

- Ensuring continuous search of the battlefield, being able to identify and transmit immediately information about the enemy or about the enemy's actions;

- Ensuring effective and efficient use of the supplied firearms in order to neutralise the enemy or his technology and equipment;

- Performing own actions using the most proper combat procedures based upon the available means;

- Applying the proper techniques in order to pass through some CBRN contaminated areas or through any types of obstacles;

- Achieving rapid orientation in the field and using skilfully that to maximise in own interest the offered advantages (increasing own mobility, protection, and personal cloaking or together with the unit);

- Applying the first aid procedures (self-help and reciprocal help), in case of wounding and those of the survival techniques in case of isolation;

- Applying the fundamental provisions of the international humanitarian law specific to military actions.

Additionally, we consider that the specialist officer acts in order to:

- Perform own activities using the most adequate specific procedures of the service/military specialty efficiently and effectively using the supplied technology and the equipment;

- organize and perform the maintenance activities of the supplied equipment of the unit, ensuring its function at full capacity.

In the detailed process of the combat behaviour training, the fundamentally structural element is that of **general military training**. In this way, it is observable that the general military training ensures the combat behaviour built in a systematically interdisciplinary approach in order to successfully deal with a more complex variety of military

⁶ Sîntion Filaret, *Componenta psihosocială a liderului militar*, Bucharest, "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House, 2005, p. 92.



actions, generated by interdependent phenomena and processes. This influences the benchmarking of the personal profile of the future fighter as a good performer of missions and received orders, transforming one's behaviour towards what is mainly military environment, from clothing to punctuality, capacity to evolve on the modern battlefield in all possible complex situations. It is still believed that general military training belongs only to the infantry specific training process. We consider that in reality, things are different; therefore, it is crucial that general military training should prepare all platoon commanders regardless of service in order to define the necessary behaviour to perform their fighter role.

In order to understand general military training in the training process of the future fighter, we need to detail more the parts which are important in his specific actions. Therefore, we consider that no matter the service, in order to act successfully and survive on the battlefield, each platoon commander must at least: perform precise fire with the infantry firearms, respond quickly using procedures and techniques to any alteration of the action environment, survive in temporary secluded conditions, all of these with the help of superior physical and psychological training.

Manager and educator basic course graduate

The platoon commander as a manager and educator involves a polyvalent variable of personality referring to the military leader, including the correct attribution of **his psychosocial role**, the potential to know one's subordinates and to influence their behaviour for the purpose of successfully fulfilling the received missions.

The main determining factors to perform the psychosocial role successfully are the following:

- Developed managerial capacity through the use of procedures that are specific to the situation and unit;
- continuous knowledge of the personality of the subordinates in conjunction with the variety of situations encountered in the development of the military actions;
- flexibility in relation with the subordinates.

In literature⁷ it is shown that the percentage and type of officers' duties are determined by the hierarchic level of the occupied status. Therefore,

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

at beginning of the military career, the proportion of technical tasks is 55%, proportion of managerial tasks is of 28%, leadership being 17%. Together with the advancement to a higher rank and subsequently in the military hierarchy, the proportion of technical duties becomes only 10%, the managerial duties are increased at 34% and those of leadership reach up to 55%.

In a relatively recent controversy from the USA, regarding the content of a regulation (FM 22-100), it is found that the basic level of the military hierarchy stresses more the managerial functions to the detriment of leadership. The dispute is fundamentally theorised by Bernard M. Bass (in the work *Transformational leadership. Industry, military, and educational impact*, New Jersey, 1998), who, among others, states that management represents transactional leadership, and the leadership represents transformational management, meaning that it influences and motivates the subordinates.

Thus, in order for the manager role and also for the educator role to be achieved successfully, the platoon commander needs:

- To prove competence in the fulfilment of the fighter and specialist role. We consider that before leading, the soldier needs to be a good performer, who needs to know well the duties and responsibilities, needs to have the expertise to find solutions to all problems which may occur during the military action performances;

- To prove a critical spirit in the performances of self-assessment and/or of the platoon led, so that objectively one can identify the strong points but especially the weak ones. Once the weak points identified, the leader needs to find perfecting and training ways to diminish, maybe even remove their effects;

- To be an example towards the behaviour, attitude, and performance in the settlement of tasks, clothing, and physical performance. A part of the managerial art is the result of the personal examples;

- to take just and prompt decision, grounded on the rapid and wise estimation of the concrete situation. Wavering and hesitation towards adopting a decision determines the loss of trust from the subordinates' part, with negative effects on the overall trust in the leading capacity of the leader. In the situation where a decision is found to be wrong, according to the management's mistake, it needs to be immediately recognised and corrected in order



to ensure the afterwards credibility;

- to inform the subordinates regarding everything that happens and regarding his own action grounds so that there will be a certainty that they know the situation and what they should do about it. Communication needs to be done in a clear and concise language, using proper vocabulary tailored to their understanding. Questions and clarification of less understood elements are allowed.

- to know the subordinates and their interests. By knowing the subordinates, their behaviour is anticipated in extreme situations as in: rapid short interval situations, under accentuated stressful conditions, under insecurity conditions or lack of food and/or water. Also by knowing the behaviour and capacity of one's subordinates, the real possibilities of specific task performance are also known. Any mission for which they are untrained will have reduced chances of success, in other words, it will be destined to fail.

All these are achievable only if within the training process, the young officers are trained to understand and assimilate the following conduct rules:

a) Missions are fulfilled only by people. Therefore, they need to be priority no. 1. Priority for instruction, motivation, and satisfying their needs.

b) Personal example is a main mobilizing factor. This involves being role model in terms of professional competence (of fighter, specialist), trust in one's force, bravery, conduct.

c) Leadership means at least command and control. Therefore, the way orders are followed needs to be controlled permanently. It is not recommended to give orders that cannot be followed.

d) Punishment and reward are attributes of leadership, but they must be granted with a lot of thought. It is never to be acted on the first impulse.

e) The information of the subordinates needs to be done continuously and in an accessible language to them. The explanation regarding the purpose of the order is justified, but not always mandatory. It needs to be understandable that there are moments when the development of military actions even forbids this aspect.

f) The analysis of negative events from the led structure is mandatory, but the mistakes of the

subordinates are never to be overexaggerated.

Conclusions

Regarding the identification and clear definition of the specific professional roles of the platoon commanders, we consider that this is a necessary and mandatory process in order to efficiently project their training schedules. Additionally, the process is also recommended by the new policies and European curricula planning. These tendencies, often similar and even superimposed, are known in specialty literature under the name of *result based induction* or *education based upon competences*.

Therefore, from our point of view, the analysis of the professional role is absolutely necessary as a foundation to project the occupational competences according to the contemporary educational theories.

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