

Original article

## The possibility of using the military program Leader to shape leadership in civil organizations

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### INFORMATION

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### ABSTRACT

A characteristic feature of the environment in which contemporary organizations operate is its variability. To survive in such an environment, organizations need leaders who can set themselves and their subordinates specific goals and influence their achievement. Many positive examples of leadership can be transferred to the civilian environment thanks to the models developed in the armed forces. One of the tools for shaping leadership attitudes in the Polish Armed Forces is the author's program for training non-commissioned officers called "Leader" in operation since 2008. The knowledge passed on during this program, which is conducted in the form of a course (considered to be one of the most difficult ones in the Armed Forces), is related to building leadership skills. It can be successfully transferred to the civilian environment, wherever there are relationships between superiors and subordinates.

### KEYWORDS

Leader program, leadership, management, competences

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## Introduction

One of the underlying conditions for any organization's functioning is that it has an efficient managerial staff. This requirement applies as much to the Armed Forces as any civil organization, regardless of its form of ownership, and includes manufacturing and service companies. The entire apparatus of administrative authority in the state is not exempt from the requirement either, from papers in municipal offices to peaks of power in the state. All the structures mentioned above have several similarities:

1. They have specific objectives to achieve.
2. These objectives require human structures (teams) that must be influenced.
3. People with the right skills and character traits are necessary to lead teams.

The elements of the Armed Forces' leadership model under the author's program "Leader" can be transferred to the civilian environment. The noticeable scarcity of authorities makes it indispensable to have a management board with leadership skills. On the other hand, leadership skills must be developed, or people with innate desirable character traits must be found. However, even in the latter case, actions (training) providing the future leader with tools to build authority and make subordinates follow him/her are necessary. Being a leader is about shaping the attitudes of subordinates so that they perform their duties with commitment.

A significant difference between the civil and military environment is the motivation to act economically. It is more influential in the civilian environment, especially in the private sector, where the results achieved by management give real financial benefits. In this case, the business community should be as interested as possible in discovering yet another opportunity to gain information on how to form the most powerful leadership position.

When looking for the most important leaders' skills, the ability to generate a vision (goals) for the organization, which in effect translates into setting appropriate tasks for subordinates, is seen as one of the significant abilities. Leaders are expected to be able to demonstrate such qualities as creativity, flexibility, and innovation. Over the centuries, leaders have been *spiritus movens* of creating new ideas, and then, thanks to the strength of their character traits, they have turned them into action. To this day, they are treated with respect for their work, although we often forget that their successes were achieved through the skillful management of their human resources. Studying their CVs can be an exciting lesson about leaders' achievements and failures [1]. The Polish anthem, *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego*, also lists the leaders who are to be the role models: Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Stefan Czarniecki. It is also impossible not to see in history examples of charismatic leaders who were able to destructively influence their surroundings. Lessons should also be learned from their actions to resist such their perception in the future.

## **1. Leadership: management versus leadership in organizations**

Leadership in organizations is based on management and directing. These concepts are often used interchangeably, and people are required to be both efficient leaders and good managers, which is not always possible due to human predisposition. A leader's function is performed due to his/her authority, while the function of a manager results from the power that he/she has. A good manager will perform his/her tasks effectively and efficiently. In turn, a leader should have the ability to set appropriate goals for himself/herself and for the employees that he/she directs, and then he/she will be able to influence the behavior of his/her subordinates, so that they strive to accomplish these goals [2, p. 161]. To properly understand the principle of leadership, it would be necessary to separate it from management. Effective management aims to reduce complexity leading to order and simplification of the surrounding reality. In turn, leadership is based on the ability to act in a changing environment. An effective manager does not have to be a good leader, just as a leader does not necessarily have to cope with management. Thereby, organizations must have a place for both types of people [3, p. 45-47].

The importance of vision and determination in a leader's personality to achieve the designated goals is demonstrated by the example of an American, long-time president of General Electric, Jack Welch. As President of General Electric, he introduced the Six Sigma quality management program to the company in 1995. Six Sigma was founded ten years earlier in Motorola, but it was when GE applied it that and benefits were so spectacular that it spread

throughout the world. Jack Welch is mentioned as one of the biggest (if not the biggest) managers worldwide due to his charisma. In many enterprises (including the world's largest armaments companies), involvement in building the Six Sigma culture has become a springboard to the highest managerial positions and constitutes a part of building a "second suit" of leadership in the organization. The benefits of the Six Sigma program have also been recognized by and implemented in the U.S. Army. For many soldiers, participation in the program guarantees to find high-paid jobs after having left the service.

Leadership should be considered not as a process of influencing people but as the ability to impact them in such a way as to release their strength and potential to strive for greater good [4, p. XIV]. That means that leadership is acting for others and should not be considered a mere path to material success. A focus on earning money can only help achieve a strong leadership position in the short term. It is necessary to introduce a philosophical, not to say metaphysical element to perform a high level of leadership. The spiritual element will be the formulation of a vision of an organization that requires additional dedication and takes precedence over short-term aspirations. In this aspect, leadership becomes a process that affects the satisfaction of both internal and external clients. The process itself must then be redefined and specified as "achieving valuable results with an equitable, caring and respectful approach to all involved people" [4, p. XV]. Whether it be armed forces or a civilian organization, the leader's excessive ego or his/her commitment to gain benefits for himself/herself will be detrimental to their missions. He/She should also testify by his/her behavior that he/she identifies with the actions he/she imposes.

Napoleon's words saying that an army of sheep led by a lion would defeat an army of lions led by a sheep; it was better to have an army of sheep led by a lion than an army of lions led by a sheep also be successfully applied in civil organizations. The principles worked out in combat can be a way to succeed in enterprises, everywhere where the team's objective was to realize a specific mission. All textbooks related to quality sciences emphasize the need for benchmarking activities. Nothing stands in the way of such actions being taken by managers to obtain the best possible leadership patterns that have been used in the armed forces.

An essential aspect without which the functioning of a modern organization cannot be separated is the need for it to fit into a changing, turbulent environment. This environment was defined after the end of the Cold War as VUCA by strategists from U.S. Army War College. They noticed that in the new political situation, reality did not become more comfortable to explain, but on the contrary, the following elements had to be considered to move around more effectively: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. The term coined by the military has found its way to the business world, where it adequately describes the state of the world and the organization's environment. As never before in history, the business environment seems to be full of turmoil deepening the chaos – financial crisis 2008-2009, Brexit, currency fluctuations, oil price spikes, migration of speculative capital can be mentioned as examples of such variables. Besides, other trends affect the infrastructure and culture of companies: the digital transformation, the entry of the millennials into the labor market, and the crisis of engagement. Such a hard reality requires that people managing the organization are capable of running it effectively. Thus, there can only be one solution. Leadership the critical factor on which the "to be or not to be" organization should be built. In turn, "leadership" alone is not enough. The need for a leadership culture, i.e., basing the functioning of an organization on leadership actions, comes to the fore [5].

Due to technological progress, the employees themselves are also exposed to solving increasingly complex problems; they must be open to innovations and changing conditions of the

working environment. Therefore, drawing conclusions from the functioning of military units, where the battlefield forces flexibility and maximization of adaptability, cannot be overestimated. A good example of leaders moving in a hostile environment can be the commanders of guerrilla troops from the years of World War II; their memory is still being honored and cultivated. They are set as a model for future generations, and the activity of their troops is seen through the prism of their personality and mastery of leadership skills. One of them is Jan Piwnik "Ponury" – a "dark and silent" soldier, commander of a partisan grouping from the Świętokrzyskie Mountains region. In the changing business environment of the VUCA era, an effective organization of the future must be even more often organized like a guerrilla unit operating on hostile territory. It must take advantage of the opponents' weaknesses and be based on teams that are autonomous, but flexible and be able to cooperate.

The military commanders, practitioners of the battlefield, do not consider themselves the incarnation of ideal commanders. On the contrary, they judge themselves as leaders who lack a lot to perfection and must learn and develop their leadership talents every day. Such a sincere approach allows them to transfer their knowledge not from a position of superiority, but from the position of people who have reached their abilities through successes and failures. One can get the impression that the attitude of working on oneself, overcoming one's weaknesses, striving for improvement, fits perfectly into the PDCA cycle. The greatest danger here is seen in complacency, which is dangerous on the battlefield, where at any time, flooding with the overwhelming forces of the enemy may take place. Losing, surprise, and maneuvering are among the most important lessons that can come from practice and teach that leadership requires faith in the mission and unbreakable stubbornness in the pursuit of victory. These factors are particularly important when they are denied by those skeptical [6, p. 12-13].

The leader's role on the battlefield is to build coherent creative teams with strong morale and the will to fight. The ancients noticed that the will to fight and morale can have a three-fold advantage over the advanced weaponry and number of the enemy (this observation is still valid today; it also allows the understanding of the partisan army's effectiveness). Moreover, building the right atmosphere in the team stimulates the team's creativity. Every team member can participate in drawing up the action plan and operation. In this manner, the leader can benefit from the intelligence and experience of the collective team. It is apparent that it is always the leader – the commander in combat conditions – who decides, but if he/she uses the collective intelligence of the group, he/she can create a perfect combat plan. There are people in the team with different skills and predispositions, such as an organizer, a communicator, an executor, a critic, a planner, and many others. The synergy of these skills concentrated in the hand of a skillful leader is his/her potential to use. The rules of military leadership understood in this way can be transferred to civilian environments interested in efficient organization management. When the synergy of group intelligence is activated, trust in the team becomes natural. Then management by objectives for the leader also becomes natural. The leader's tasks then include setting realistic tasks and maintaining an atmosphere of appreciating people and maintaining good, motivating relationships.

One of the essential laws of the battlefield is the designation of priorities and their execution and decentralized command [6, p. 20]. The way of the command originating from the Prussian army, called "mission command", consists in achieving a specific goal, where the way of performing the task is less important, and the understanding of the superior's vision becomes crucial. It can be directly transferred to the civilian environment. There, the "to be or not to be" of the company is often decided by understanding and involvement in the implementation of the vision of the management. Moreover, the model of decentralized

leadership is presented as the most effective in most academic textbooks dealing with effective organizational management.

The issue of leadership competence has been given priority in the U.S. Armed Forces. The National Military Strategy published on 1 July 2015, lists the qualities to be trained in future commanders:

- the understanding of the operating environment and the effects of using all national instruments of force,
- anticipating and adapting to surprising changes, situations of uncertainty and chaos,
- the ability to perceive change, including changes in authorities,
- relying on trust, the delegation of powers, and understanding in their actions,
- making ethical decisions based on the shared values of the military profession,
- critical and strategic thinking based on applying universal principles and concepts of warfare in joint operations [7].

These qualities should also be expected from leaders in power in a civilian environment. There is a struggle that is often decisive for the “to be or not to be” of a given organization. The only element that will distinguish them from the battlefield is blood, which is not spilled here.

## **2. The Program Leader**

The idea to create a non-commissioned officer leadership course Leader arose in 2004 among non-commissioned officers serving in the 11<sup>th</sup> Lubuska Armored Cavalry Division. The need resulted from the efforts of non-commissioned officers willing to develop their competences. According to NATO standards, they were to take on the role of mentors for less experienced colleagues and, at the same time, support the commander. The changes, the legitimacy of which was then recognized, were also to some extent connected with contacts made with NATO armed forces, especially with the US Armed Forces. The non-commissioned officer’s chain of command support functioning in it was expected to be transferred to the Polish reality. Officially, the Leader Course was initiated in 2008 and is considered one of the most challenging courses in the Armed Forces. Only volunteers, non-commissioned officers, and officers participated in the course. As for civilian organizations, their positions can be considered to correspond to lower operational level managers. Warrant Officer Andrzej Wojtusik was the co-author of the project and fulfilled the role of the main contractor. In total, over half a thousand non-commissioned officers participated in the course. Half of them completed the course. What is important, participation in the course was also crucial for non-commissioned officers who did not complete the course. Thanks to the Leader, they learned about their weaknesses. During the conducted training, the potential was noticed in twenty non-commissioned officers, who were additionally trained to act as instructors, which made it possible to organize the course simultaneously in several units to which they belong: 17<sup>th</sup> Wielkopolska Mechanized Brigade from Międzyrzecz, 25<sup>th</sup> Air Cavalry Brigade from Tomaszów Mazowiecki, 5<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment from Sulechów, and 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Brigade. The course participants have an ingrained knowledge that while the commander’s power results from his/her rank, the leader’s authority is a conglomerate of many factors. In a sense, it also contains a metaphysical element [8].

The course assumptions were based on the promotion of a leadership culture in the army. The main idea behind it was that the personality of the leader is the most important. The atmosphere in the team depends on it, which directly translates into effectiveness and efficiency

of the team. Thanks to the strength of the leader's character, it is possible to stimulate a synergic influence on the team's collective intelligence, thanks to which it is possible to achieve a multitude of solutions in various situations, especially in critical moments.

Completion of the course could only be achieved by completing four stages of the course within five days:

- I. Capacity verification.
- II. Efficiency verification.
- III. Theoretical examination.
- IV. Completion of the practical part (combat patrol up to 50 km).

As part of the theoretical examination, a public presentation on a selected topic had to be prepared. The presentation time was 5 minutes, and the following elements were evaluated in points: using the means of communication, the way of communication, the logic of expression, the enthusiasm of the message, the use of space, and the choice of words. The practical part consisted of each student commanding a strictly defined, selected task. Thanks to this, each of the trainees had a chance to be a commander and a performer. It allowed the course participant to get a retrospection allowing him/her to assess what is bad and good leadership. The practical part was evaluated in points for the way of implementation, the very fact of completing the assigned task, the level of communication, the demonstration of leadership skills, and the ability to respond to unexpected situations. The large number of elements that make up the Leader course and the high level of difficulty meant that not all the volunteers who took part in the course managed to complete it. The creators of the course were guided by the idea of finding individuals with the best leadership skills, building coherent teams, and carrying out tasks entrusted to them in stressful situations.

We must admit that creating the Leader course requires a lot of vision and courage. The specificity of the military community is its hierarchy. Hence the implications in the form of the need to maintain the principles of military regulations. A non-commissioned officer conducting the course must gain a sense of the situation because even if incompatibilities are identified or if he/she has information that can lead to the improvement of conducted processes, he/she cannot violate the officers' authority.

NCO Leader training course is an excellent and useful tool for learning and selection at the same time. It is built of components derived from psychology, leadership, sociology, and pedagogy. The course uses such innovative solutions as a methodology from neuro-linguistic programming NLP and coaching. Thanks to this, the course program is very modern, taking into account the conservative environment in which it was born. The synergy of scientific disciplines applied in it makes the Program Leader very attractive for the civil market. Until now, the course has been carried out in the Armed Forces. It has not been used in the civilian environment due to the lack of information about this kind of training formula. It consists of components, thanks to which some of them have been used individually in the training of the Police, prison service, counter-terrorist subunits, and Border Guards.

In the case of the Leader course, the interweaving of military and civil environments is so significant that it can be challenging to say which one was more inspiring for the other. The establishment of the Territorial Defense Forces (Polish abbrev. WOT) has made an interesting contribution to examining the mutual saturation of experiences with the phenomenon of broadly defined leadership. The specificity of this kind of troops and their direct contact with the society implies the introduction of various novelties, so far unpracticed in the Armed Forces. One of them is training in Design Thinking. Thanks to this, commanders in the

Permanent Responsibility Areas (Polish abbrev. RSO) have become more sensitive to society's needs. That, in turn, contributed to the creation of the "PARASOL" project, namely a series of workshops whose task is to prepare local governments (voivodships, poviats, and communes) as well as services and institutions subordinate to them for cooperation with the Territorial Defense Forces and efficient use of military potential in the process of crisis management. Such activities aim to improve the assistance provided by WOT soldiers to local communities when natural or catastrophic disasters occur.

Other reasons also cause the implementation of leadership culture in the Territorial Defense Forces. It is not difficult to find, e.g., 400 candidates for volunteers to serve. However, it becomes a significant challenge to direct them during service in such a way that they maintain their zeal and enthusiasm for at least 3 years. During this period, they must regularly attend monthly rotational training courses, and once a year, they must attend a 14-day training course in the training ground. To do so, the instructors who lead them must have the skills to motivate, build solid teams, and establish himself/herself as an authority. Creating an effective leadership model, in this case, must mean moving away from outdated, unmodified for years methodology towards modernization and variety to make training more attractive. Building bridges based on the exchange of mutual experiences between the military and civilian communities to maximize the synergy effect becomes unavoidable here. At present, 15 thousand volunteers remain at WOT's service, more than 30% of whom are university graduates: doctors, lawyers, teachers, business people, university lecturers, and academics. Many of them have professorial and doctoral degrees. Therefore, WOT instructors facing the ranks of troops with such skills must show their example that in addition to their professionalism in the warcraft, they also have leadership skills. That, in turn, may bring fruits in the form of shifting observed positive practices connected with directing people to the civil environment.

## Conclusion

A strong leader in a civilian organization is a leader of change. Like a commander in the Armed Forces, he/she will say to his/her subordinates: "Follow me!" instead of "Forward!". Leadership patterns developed in the Armed Forces can be employed in civil organizations, wherever the developing environment requires the ability to adapt immediately to the current situation and respond flexibly to changing customer needs.

An effective leader must have a set of skills consisting of the following features: appearance, charisma, expression, the ability to attract people to each other, and infect them with their vision through emotions. Under his/her influence, the subordinates will start to act, and the compulsion under which they work will turn into an act of free will.

Whether we assume that a person is a leader from birth or can develop the leadership qualities through painstaking training and self-improvement, organizations must have, if not systems for educating future leaders, at least transparent promotion paths for people with leadership talent.

Leadership skills acquired in the Armed Forces can be used successfully in civilian organizations, and the development of in-service skills can make a significant contribution to a better position in the labor market if the service is terminated.

The Program Leader is designed as a training course to guide the development of leadership skills in the Armed Forces and armed formations. Since it consists of modules, at least some



of them can be used in a civilian environment. A more in-depth study would be needed in particular to interest the civil sector in the training elements related to the course's elements requiring physical strength.

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All authors declared no conflict of interests.


### Author contributions

All authors contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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### Biographical note

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### Możliwości wykorzystania wojskowego programu Lider do kształtowania przywództwa w organizacjach cywilnych

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#### STRESZCZENIE

Charakterystyczną cechą środowiska, w którym funkcjonują współczesne organizacje jest jego zmienność. Aby w takim otoczeniu organizacje mogły przetrwać potrzebują liderów posiadających umiejętność stawiania sobie i swym podwładnym określonych celów oraz wpływania na realizację tych celów. Wiele pozytywnych przykładów przywództwa może zostać przeniesionych do środowiska cywilnego dzięki wzorcom wypracowanym w armii. Jednym z narzędzi kształtowania postaw przywódczych w Wojsku Polskim jest funkcjonujący od 2008 roku autorski program szkolenia podoficerów Lider. Wiedza przekazywana podczas tego programu, prowadzonego w formie kursu (uważanego za jeden z najtrudniejszych z siłach zbrojnych) związana z budowaniem kompetencji przywódczych, może z powodzeniem zostać przeniesiona do środowiska cywilnego, wszędzie tam, gdzie istnieją zależności pomiędzy przełożonymi a podwładnymi.

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**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** program Lider, przywództwo, zarządzanie, kompetencje

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