

Original article

## Competencies of a contemporary commander

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### INFORMATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The undermentioned considerations address a competent preparation of an officer for conducting tasks at his/her first duty assignment – a platoon leader. The article presents a peculiar triad of functions, i.e. a commander—a pedagogue—an instructor and roles to which every graduate of a military academy has to be prepared – to be capable of performing training-educational activities with subordinated soldiers.

Only understanding of a magnitude of undertakings which are associated with preparation of best trained and educated officers of adequately shaped personality will allow a due addressing of the problem under consideration during developing of curricula in military academies.

### KEYWORDS

competences, leadership, personality, education, training

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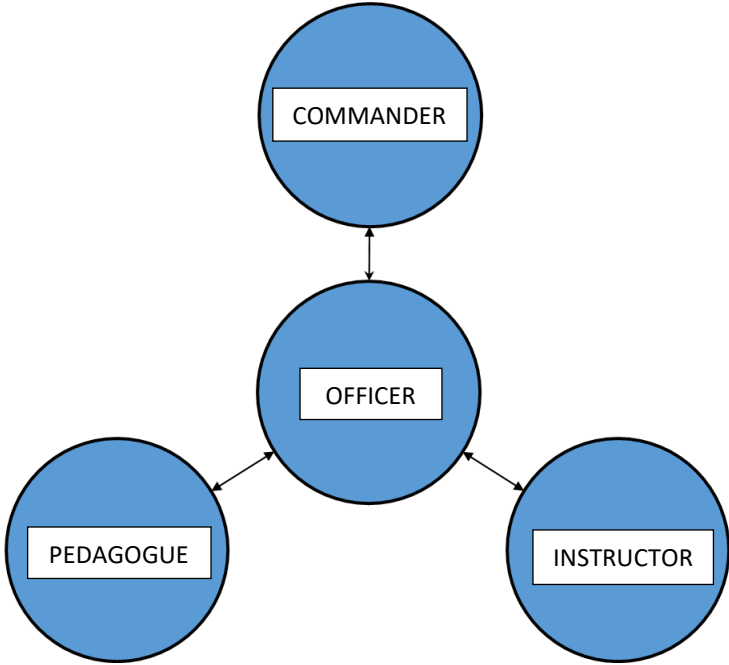


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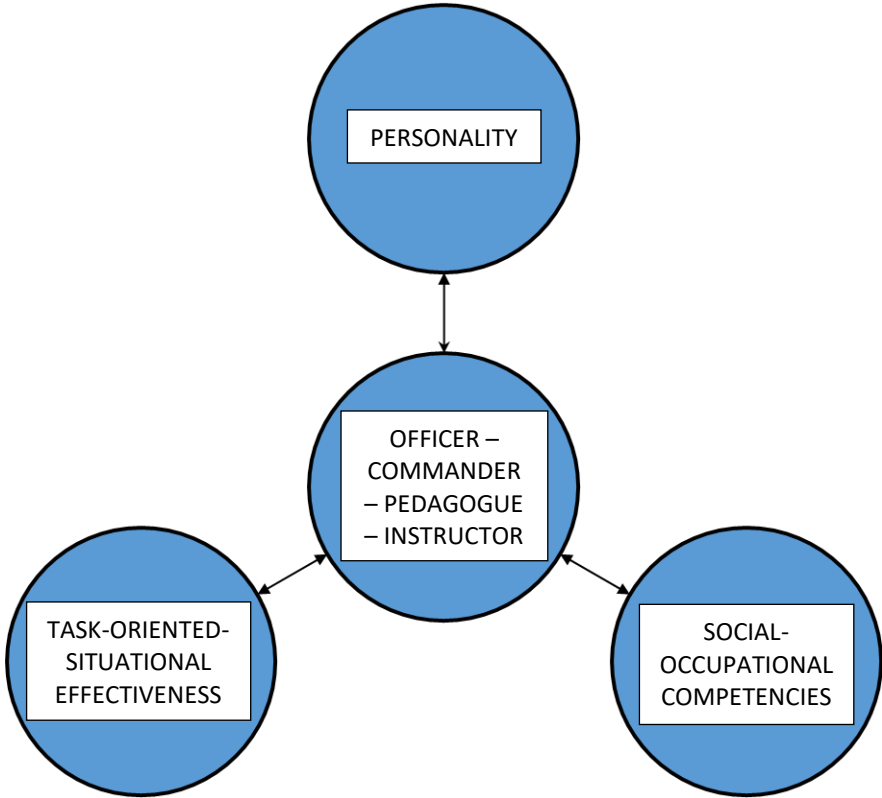
## Introduction

Each officer who commences his/her duty in the Polish Armed Forces should be prepared in terms of a *competence-task-oriented* way in order to fulfill core roles at his/her first assignment – a platoon leader. This primarily pertains to holding a function of *a commander, a pedagogue and an instructor* (Fig. 1). The roles concurrently indicate basic determinants essential for an officer who begins his/her carrier, receiving a subordinated subunit/platoon to be trained, was prepared for this task in a professional manner. These determinants include (Fig. 2):

- personality (shaped, formed),
- social-professional competencies,
- task-situational effectiveness.



**Fig. 1.** Functions executed by an officer at a position of a platoon leader  
*Source: Own study.*



**Fig. 2.** Determinants conditioning professional preparation of an officer for the role of a commander—a pedagogue—an instructor at a platoon leader position  
*Source: Own study.*

Modern and professional armed forces require its organizational structures were effective and trained to an extent to be able to fulfill any assigned task under any circumstances. However, one cannot forget that this task-competence effectiveness of subunits, units, tactical formations (ZT), etc. mainly depends on professionally trained soldiers who create those structures. Therefore, it is of absolute importance to have commanders who begin to train soldiers immediately after graduating of a military academy were prepared for this task in every aspect. At this moment it can be presumed that sufficiently trained soldiers will be capable of executing each task in accordance with a combat capacity of their subunit, unit or tactical formation.

## **1. Amplification of the issues**

### **1.1. Personality of an officer**

Expectations regarding graduates of universities are different, however, personality of an officer is peculiar thus it should be adequately shaped (formed) in a way that assures his/her preparation for conducting roles of a commander as well as a pedagogue and an instructor at his/her first duty assignment.

Taking current scientific acquis into consideration, especially psychology, as well as multiannual experience of commanders *in terms of personality of a graduate of a military academy* – the undermentioned definition entirely captures expectations in this regard:

“Personality of an officer (a commander—a pedagogue—an instructor): an interconnected system of relatively persistent features (characteristics, values), predispositions and agilities (capabilities) which allow an officer to present an appropriate system of behaviors in certain situations, both during peacetime (involvement in humanitarian and peacekeeping actions) and various threats (e.g. terrorism or cataclysm) as well as during a war. This attitude is supported by adequate knowledge and skillset and is constantly enhanced by new experience and appropriate competencies which let an officer to fulfill not only the role of a commander or a leader by also a pedagogue and a teacher (an instructor) towards subordinated soldiers. Personality of an officer is determined by: motives of his/her activities, requirements, attitudes, view of the world, aspirations, self-knowledge, interests, skillsets, intelligence, temperament, character and worldview. This personality has to be self-reflective taking into consideration the permanent civilizational and cultural development of the contemporary world”<sup>1</sup>.

Can everyone be a commander? It appears that not. The personality of a man speaks about him/her a lot. A human image constitutes the interpretation of personality which correlates with the proverb: “fine feathers make fine birds”. A significant number of research have demonstrated that “an image” of himself/herself is one of the most important, if not the most important personal attributes of a commander. It translates into what soldiers are able to see in their superior. It concerns his/her appearance, attitude towards subordinates, way of dealing with their problems, occupational professionalism, reliability, honesty, justice etc. In other words, many soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> Own definition – Lesław Welyczko.

respect their superior, only when a role model can be seen at him/her, whose operational excellence does not raise any reservations. Even when a commander is not “ideal’ in all respects, he/she is self-reflective to an extent which enables relatively effective and quick recognition and elimination of inappropriate behavior – noticed personally or by the others.

Personality of a commander, like any other man’s changes to a bigger or lesser extent but its crucial determinants certainly remain persistent. A personal conduct of a commander is conditioned by situational-milieu and interpersonal interactions. However, subordinates frequently affect given interactions of their superior who attempts to adhere to procedures and in accordance with bending conventions and regulations in this respect. For this reason, regularly, personality assessment of subordinates of their superior is incomplete and untruthful due to the fact that soldiers are not aware of all motives determining behavior of their commander.

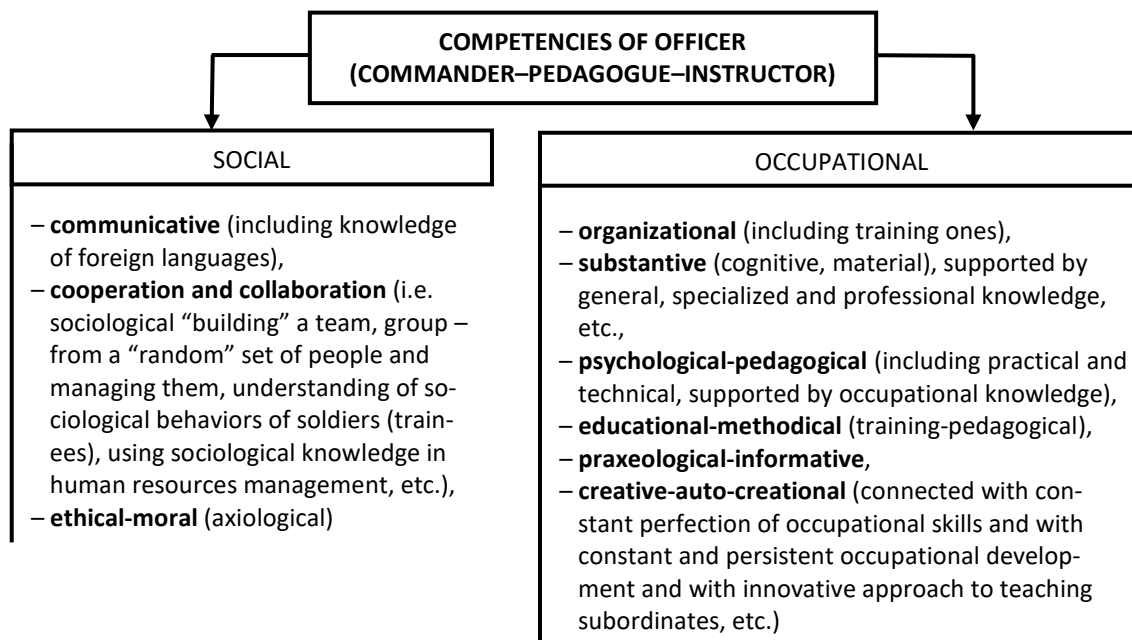
Taking into consideration only aforementioned indicated personality aspects of a commander, it is not hard to imagine how complicated can be shaping (forming) desirable personality of an officer in a military academy to prepare it for fulfilling assigned roles at consecutively occupied duty positions.

## **1.2. Social-occupational competencies**

The authors differently define competencies. Taking into account subject literature, own definition for the purpose of foregoing considerations is worth proposing, i.e.: “*Competencies* is a scope of authority for an activity defined by regulations, supported by an appropriate composition of professional knowledge and ability to conduct professional tasks pursuant to an occupied duty position as well as responsibility for own actions and effects (results) of the work performed, either in occupational-legal or ethical-moral sense, thus readiness to bear relevant consequences of conducted work” [See: 1, p. 25-37; 2, p. 24-32; 3, p. 187].

In the context of the aforementioned definition and the question under consideration, the analogous division of expected social-occupational competencies and their characteristic seems to be relevant. Such the division concerning teachers was proposed by Andrzej Pieczywok and Leslaw Welyczko in their book (Fig. 3) [See: 4, p. 32].

Figure 4 illustrates a division of social-occupational competencies of an officer (a commander—a pedagogue—an instructor) depending on adopted criteria. It seems that such – *undermentioned* – addressing of the issue will allow to picture the complexity and multiple dimensions of essential knowledge, skillsets and functions performed by an officer (a commander—a pedagogue—an instructor) entrusted with a significant group of people (a platoon, a company, a battalion, etc.) for which he/she is responsible in terms of broadly understood training-pedagogical activities which consequently leads to a preparation of subordinates for functioning both in a peacetime and conducting complex tasks under distress conditions (ultimately – a war) – in accordance with a combat capacity of a subunit, a unit or a tactical formation, etc. (which is contained in fight manuals, training programs and other normative documentation in this regard).



**Fig. 3.** Social-occupational competencies of an officer (commander–pedagogue–instructor)

Source: Own study.

### 1.3. Task-situational effectiveness

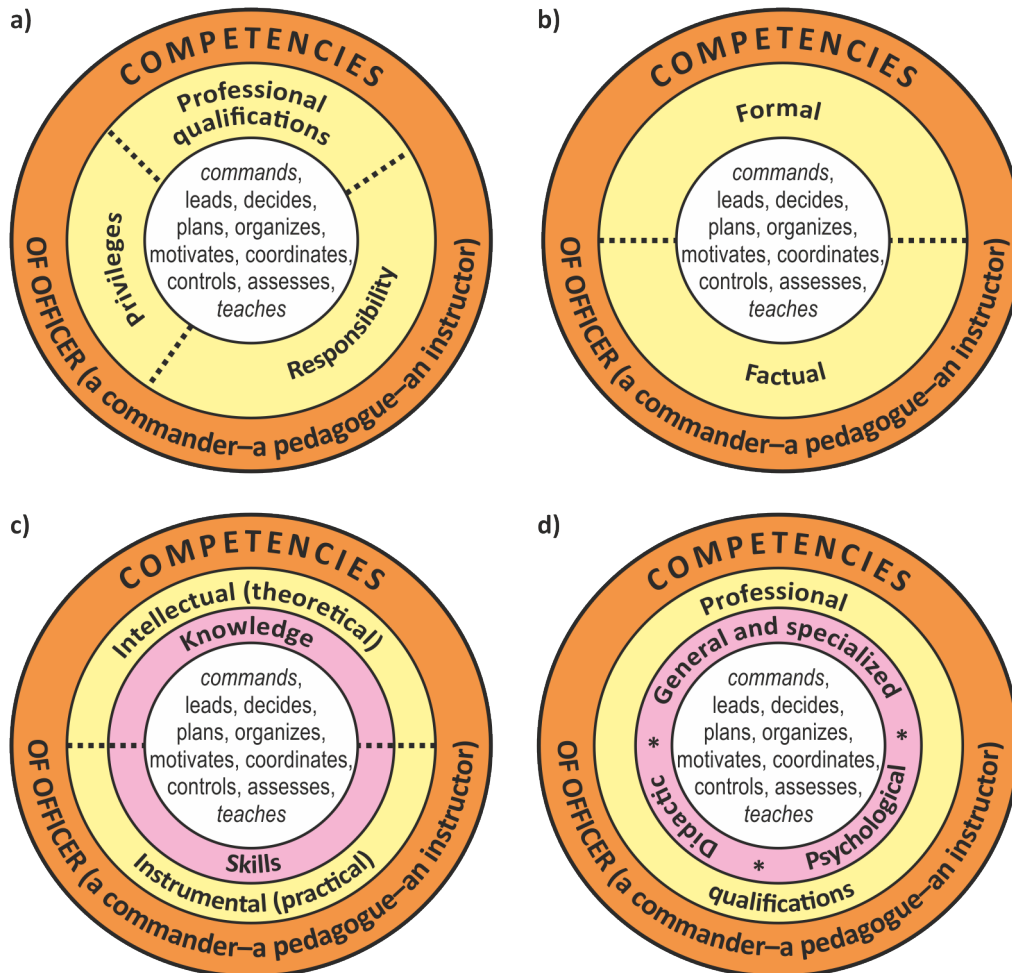
*Effective action* is to be understood as achieving fully or to some extent an objective by an entity or enabling/assuring accomplishment of this objective in the future [5, p. 471].

Taking into consideration the fact that every man apparently would like to be always effective in day-to-day (current) activity, it all the more should be noted – *in the context of the issue under consideration* – in relation to each graduate of a military academy. “Effective activity leads to an effect pursued as an objective” [6, p. 115]. Thus, speaking of task-situational effectiveness of officers who are both commanders as well as pedagogues and instructors, it is to be categorically stated that: “A task effective commander–pedagogue–instructor is a commander who came the closest to reaching a designated objective within the scope of his/her training-pedagogical (didactic-pedagogical, educational) activity”.

R.I. Arends [7] states that methods, processes and techniques of proven effectiveness have the most significant impact on effective teaching (training – author’s note). Simultaneously, the author specifies four determinants of effective teaching.

According to the author they are as follows:

- set of knowledge of a teacher (an instructor – author’s note) on which his/her art of teaching is based on,
- repertoire of effective didactic methods employed by an effective teacher (an instructor – author’s note),
- reflections which have impact on self-assessment both through observation of students’ behaviors and own didactic activities,



**Fig. 4.** Competencies of an officer (commander–pedagogue–training officer) by virtue of:  
 a) qualifications, mandates, skills and responsibility, b) way of their acquirement,  
 c) type of behaviors, d) content

Source: Own study.

- continual learning by a teacher (an officer commander, a pedagogue, an instructor – author’s note) which can assure him/her effectiveness of teaching for years to come as he/she will always keep current in recent achievements and tendencies in the field of didactics (both in Poland and abroad).

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, it can be concluded that the task-oriented effectiveness of officers (commanders–pedagogues–instructors) is influenced by:

- their personality,
- knowledge,
- abilities,
- experience (professionalism).

Generally, one may be tempted to indicate determinants which condition the fact that an officer (a commander–a pedagogue–an instructor) is task-effective at a position on

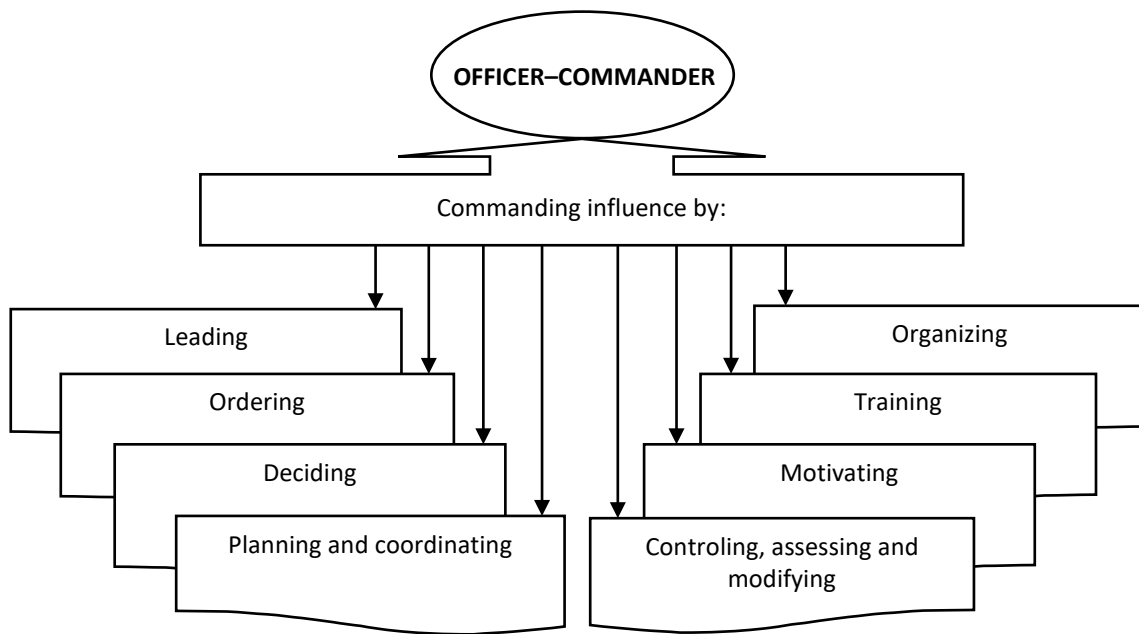
which he/she is responsible for training subordinates and shaping their social-personal features in accordance with expectations of project initiators and implementers of broadly understood educational activities (didactic-pedagogic, training-pedagogic) in the army:

1. An officer (a commander—a pedagogue—an instructor) can be called task-effective when he/she is able to realize all tasks associated with duties, notwithstanding fluidity of objects and circumstances. It means that during the educational process, soldiers should: a) be taught discovering of problems, b) receive not only knowledge and abilities but also methods of thinking, c) be taught solving problems, d) be taught the art of proving own decisions<sup>2</sup> and e) induce a reflection (self-reflection).
2. A task-effective officer (a commander—a pedagogue—an instructor) should be able to prepare subordinate soldiers to be task-effective during their service (fulfilling their role) in a military unit and outside of it.
3. Task-oriented effectiveness of officers (commanders—pedagogues—instructors) is determined by: competencies based on knowledge and abilities, personality and experience that should be subject to constant progression and enrichment. It means that officers (commanders—pedagogues—instructors) will acquire a professional mastery – professionalism over time.
4. On an importance scale, besides competencies of officers (commanders—pedagogues—instructors), their general, pedagogical-psychological and specialized knowledge supported by permanent experience acquired, the motivation to profession and duty and personal culture cannot be forgotten.
5. *Social advancement* demonstrates external success of a man – professional in this regard. On the other hand, *gratification and motivation* to further activity expresses internal success. Lack of success indicates stagnation.
6. Task-oriented effectiveness of officers (commanders—pedagogues—instructors) depends also on a group of external factors e.g. action measures, institutional and environmental conditions, personality of subordinates, a type of task executed, circumstances and situational determinates etc.

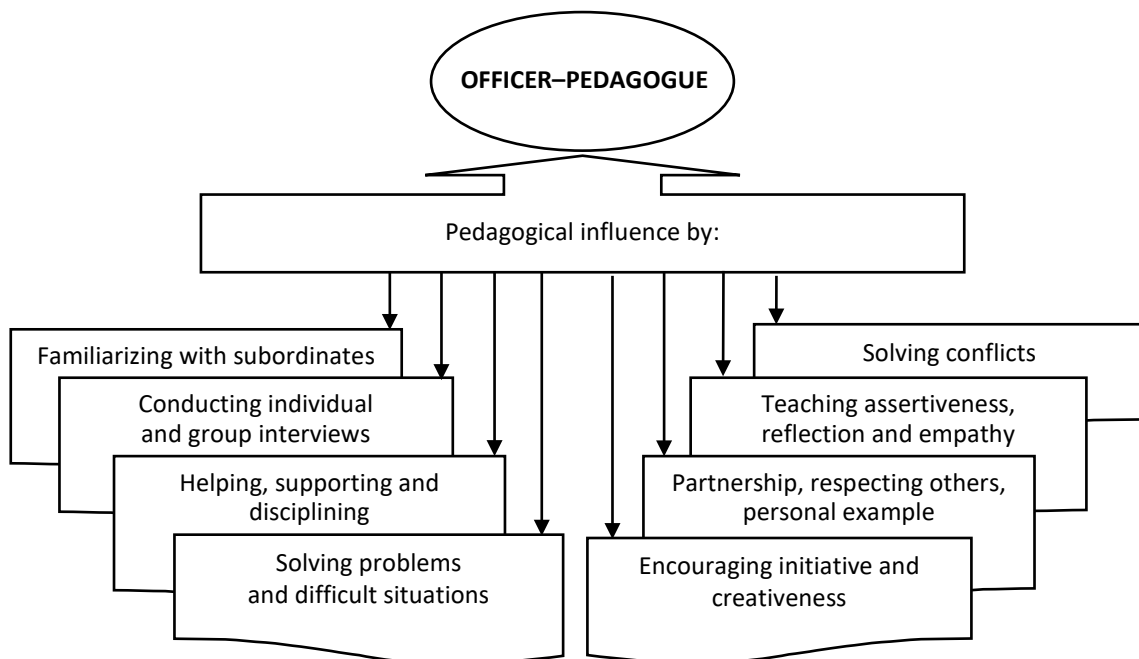
Following Figures 5, 6 and 7 present basic determinants which assign a truly significant role for every officer who is either a commander as well as a pedagogue and an instructor. The indicated roles can be fulfilled under the condition that he/she is task-effective at an official position as well as beyond it.

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<sup>2</sup> To prove means to substantiate claims. To substantiate claims means to indicate the truth.

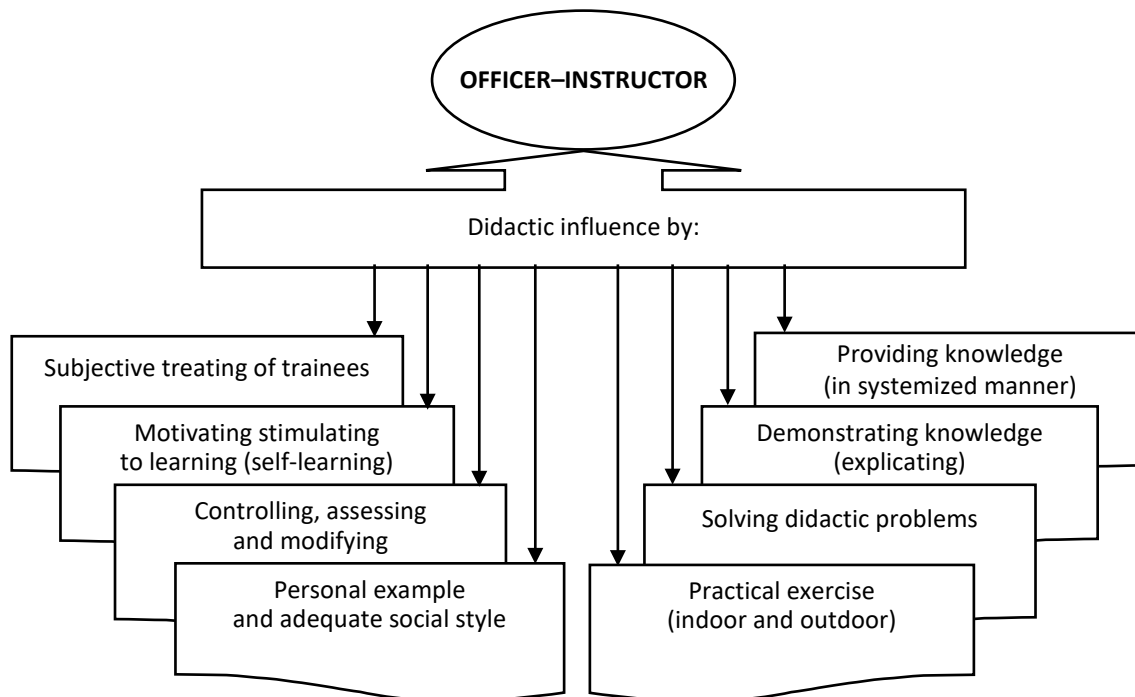


**Fig. 5.** Basic determinants of command  
*Source: Own study.*



**Fig. 6.** Basic pedagogical determinants  
*Source: Own study.*





**Fig. 7.** Basic determinants of training (teaching)  
*Source: Own study.*

## Conclusions

According to the author, the article addresses the most significant aspects related to professionalism of a commander who commencing his/her duty (work) at the first official position – a platoon leader is to be capable of shaping personalities of his/her subordinates and sharing knowledge and consolidating their abilities in particular to enable them performing all tasks either related to duty or those associated with functioning in private life. In other words, every commander has to be comprehensively prepared in all respects. Nowadays, contemporaneity and an incredibly accelerating civilization progress pose new challenges to new generations. As not everyone is capable of occupying a miner, a doctor or a butcher profession, for the same reason, not everyone can become an officer who additionally has to be perfectly prepared to conduct all tasks and fulfill various roles posed by a military service. Being simultaneously a commander, a pedagogue and an instructor (a teacher) is anything but easy. Graduating from a military academy provides only “basics” of such demanding profession. This is life, various life situations, gaining artistry and occupational professionalism, confronting young entrants of military art with the reality enforces approaching tasks within their domain with humility.

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## Conflict of interests

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

**Leslaw Welyczko** – COL Ret., PhD. Doctor of military science in the field of didactics. His interests cover not only pedagogical studies but also management, praxeology and psychology of creativity. Gained lengthy professional experience, occupying key positions in the Military University of Land Forces as well as teaching of approximately 15 subjects during recent 30 years allowed him for transferring those experiences into the oeuvre sphere. He is the author or co-author of approximately 100 publications, i.e. articles and non-serial publications (monographs, handbooks). He has been an organizer or a co-organizer of various conferences related to the aforementioned issues. Within last 20 years he has been a supervisor or a reviewer of approximately 100 theses. The areas of the author's interests include issues related to pedagogics, sociology, psychology, parapsychology, quantum physics, personal development and mainly issues associated with "self-management" – which has been confirmed by a few publications and by the authorial work: "Techniki pracy umyslowej".

**Robert Balcerzyk** – MAJ, PhD. Doctor of economy in the field of management science. The assistant professor at the Management Department at the Military University of Land Forces in Wrocław. The author of various scientific publications (articles/monographs) related to the issues of human resources management and management. A co-organizer of numerous national and international conferences. Currently, he is conducting studies within the framework of two research projects.

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### Kompetencje współczesnego dowódcy

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#### STRESZCZENIE

Poniższe rozważania dotyczą kompetentnego przygotowania oficera do wykonywania zadań na jego pierwszym stanowisku służbowym – dowódcy plutonu. W artykule ukazano swoistą triadę funkcji, tj. dowódcy–wychowawcy–szkoleniowca i ról, do jakich musi być przygotowany każdy absolwent uczelni wojskowej, by móc profesjonalnie realizować działalność szkoleniowo-wychowawczą z podległymi żołnierzami.

Tylko zrozumienie ogromu przedsięwzięć, jakie są związane z przygotowaniem jak najlepiej wyszkolonych, wykształconych o odpowiednio uformowanych osobowościach oficerów – pozwoli w sposób należyty podejść do niniejszego problemu na etapie konstruowania programów kształcenia w uczelniach wojskowych.

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**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** kompetencje, przywództwo, osobowość, kształcenie, szkolenie

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