

OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP: CORE COMPETENCIES¹

LIDERANÇA OPERACIONAL: COMPETÊNCIAS NUCLEARES

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Abstract

The growing environment of uncertainty and complexity faced by the military in modern military operations in operational environments require military leaders to be adaptable and effective in their operations.

In the exercise of leadership, a leader's decisions are influenced and affected by a number of conditions, circumstances and factors. Leading in operational environments requires them to be capable of quickly understanding and assessing situations and of making efficient decisions.

Today, more than ever, the role of leaders as the operational *stress* managers of their units and subordinates is crucial, which means they must possess certain qualities that enable them to deal effectively with adverse situations and be successful. The challenges and trends leaders must prepare for in future operational environments are numerous. Hence, training leaders for action in operational environments is one of the fundamental pillars for the development of their skills.

Thus, this article aims to identify a set of core indicators and competencies that enhance the performance of leaders and which most contribute to leadership effectiveness in operational environments.

¹ The present article is the result of the research done under the Joint General Staff Course of the Institute of Higher Military Studies.

Como citar este artigo: Fernandes, H., 2015. Operational Leadership: Core Competencies. *Revista de Ciências Militares*, Novembro de 2015 III (2), pp. 113-136.
Disponível em: <http://www.iesm.pt/cisdi/index.php/publicacoes/revista-de-ciencias-militares/edicoes>.

Keywords: Operational Environment, Competencies, Indicators, Effectiveness, Leader, Operational Leadership.

Resumo

O crescente ambiente de incerteza e complexidade com que as forças militares se deparam nas modernas operações militares em ambiente operacional, exigem que o líder militar demonstre adaptabilidade e seja eficaz na sua atuação.

No decorrer do exercício da sua liderança são diversas as condições, circunstâncias e fatores que influenciam e afetam as suas decisões. Liderar em ambiente operacional exige líderes capazes de compreender e avaliar rapidamente as situações e tomar decisões eficientes.

Hoje mais do que nunca, o papel do líder como gestor do stress operacional da sua unidade e dos seus homens é determinante e, leva a que ele seja detentor de determinadas valências que lhe permitam lidar eficazmente com situações adversas e ter sucesso. São inúmeros os desafios e tendências para os quais os líderes terão de estar preparados num contexto operacional futuro. Daí que a formação de um líder para atuar em ambiente operacional constitua um dos pilares fundamentais para o desenvolvimento das suas competências.

Neste sentido, este artigo tem como objetivo identificar um conjunto de indicadores e competências nucleares que potenciam o desempenho do líder e que mais contribuem para a eficácia da liderança em ambiente operacional.

Palavras-chave: Ambiente Operacional, Competências, Indicadores, Eficácia, Líder, Liderança Operacional.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key element in the exercise of the military profession and an integral part of our institutional success, now and in the future.

The growing uncertainty and complexity currently faced by the military in Operational Environments (OE) requires leaders to respond in a determined, intelligent and competent manner, both physical and mentally.

Given the role of leadership in Military Institutions and in professional military activity, this learning process requires leaders and commanders to acquire certain specific competencies.

Vieira (2002, p. 9) states that “only through continued development can the military leaders of the future ensure increasing self-assurance, courage, candour, competence, foresight and commitment, thus becoming inspiring leaders who, knowing they have earned the respect and trust of their subordinates, encourage obedience and respect.”

Military interventions in the Theatres of Operations (TO) where Portugal has participated have demanded military forces and their commanders be continuously prepared for

intervening outside their area of operation, in situations where complexity and uncertainty are part of the daily routine and the role of military leaders is put to the test, requiring constant flexibility and adaptability.

Thus, today's operational environments have a complex and multi-national nature, and it is our opinion that they imply differentiated attitudes by leaders as far as leadership is concerned, and that the skills those leaders must possess and, consequently, develop and apply within the group require definition.

In reviewing a few definitions of the concept of leadership, we noted that leadership can be defined as "the process of influencing human behaviour, beyond what would be possible through the sole use of vested authority, to fulfil the purpose, goals and objectives conceived and dictated by the appointed organizational leader" (Vieira, 2002, p. 15).

The concept of leadership has roots in the "art of command", an art with a teaching methodology relying more on example, on contact with personalities known as great commanders and on a set of maxims and feats than on the precepts of the scientific method. Related to the ability to influence and direct subordinates, the art of command² focuses more on leaders than on the process (Jesuino, 1987, p. 7). With regard to leadership, authority comes from the recognition of the group being led and the conviction of that group's commitment to the fulfilment of the mission.

Leadership competencies are developed through a balanced combination of institutional learning, self-development, training and professional experience. Leaders acquire basic direct leadership competencies, and as they progress to the organizational and strategic levels, those skills provide the foundation to drive change (DA, 2012, pp. 1-6).

Leadership may be developed at three levels: tactical, operational and strategic (Vieira, 2006, p. 67), the operational and strategic being of an indirect nature. Direct leadership occurs at the tactical level, face-to-face, and is a personal kind of leadership, where the leader is involved directly with the subordinates. Operational level leadership is concerned with directing or guiding military forces to achieve an operational objective by conducting a major operation or campaign (Prickett, 2003, p. 4).

The object of study of this research encompasses the operational leadership of the Armed Forces (AF), within a reviewed model aimed at developing an operational leader's core competencies in a more efficient manner.

This analysis is delimited, in organizational terms, to military leadership and direct leadership, which occur from the lower levels to the battalion level, as this has been the context of the participation of the Portuguese Armed forces in missions abroad within the framework for International Organizations (IO), which Portugal is member of, with greater focus on the TO in Afghanistan (AFG), where the forces of the three Branches of the Portuguese Armed Forces have intervened, integrated in the Deployed National Forces (DNF).

² The creative and competent use of the authority exercised through decision-making and leadership (EP, 2012, pp. 2-26).

The main objective of this research is to identify the core competencies associated with operational leadership in order to attain maximum effectiveness in the accomplishment of the mission.

This research has sought to answer, among others, the following questions: What model of leadership skills should be adopted in operational environments? What are the challenges and future trends of leadership in operational environments? What are the indicators to measure the effectiveness of leadership in operational environments? What are the core leadership skills in operational environments?

The methods used included a phase for bibliographical and documentary research and for conducting interviews, with the purpose of selecting a wide range of materials to reveal the “state of the art” of leadership in OE.

The time-frame of the exercise of command duties by respondents was between 2000 and 2012. As for gender, the participants, a total of 17, were all men. The youngest member is 36 and the oldest, 51, with a mean age of 45 years.

In addition to this introduction and the conclusions, the present work is divided into three parts. The first part features a brief characterization of the typical OE where modern military operations unfold, in particular the KOS and AFG TOs. We attempt to identify the conditions, circumstances and influencing factors that affect the use of military forces and influence the decisions of operational leaders, those leaders’ role as *stress* managers in OE, and the key challenges and future trends of leadership in OE.

In the second part we describe the state of the art concerning the preparation and training of operational leaders and identify leadership effectiveness indicators in OE, derived from crossing the data from documentary research with the interviews conducted.

In the third part we identify strengths and weaknesses and point out mechanisms and processes to facilitate operational leadership today. From the data analysed, and based on the leadership indicators previously surveyed, we will then identify the most appropriate leadership competencies in OE and a model of competencies for that leadership.

1. OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND LEADERSHIP

a. Operational Environment

(1) Description of the current Operational Environments

The OE in which modern operations take place in is crucial to the management and employment of human and material resources. Despite traditional military threats having been mitigated, factors of instability have emerged from this new environment, translating into new risks and potential threats (EP, 2012, pp. 1-1).

Today’s typical OE of the KOS and AFG TOs consist of a set of variables which influence the employment of military forces and leaders’ decisions on battlefields (BF) characterized by a large diversity of terrains, weather, enemy and technological conditions. In addition to

numerous systems of enemies, opponents, friendly and neutral parties within the spectrum of a conflict, leaders in the field face the challenge of interpreting and understanding the variables that comprise it, namely physical environment, governance, technology, local resources and the culture of the local populations (EP, 2012, pp. 1-1).

The factors that determine or influence OE are: national objectives to be achieved by different vectors of power, the military objectives of the operation, the threat, the area of operations, information, technology, and unit effort, as an essential component for an effective use of military force (EP, 2005, pp. 2-1)

In the words of Guillot (2004, as cited in Ribeiro, 2008, p. 140), the following characteristics of OE can be identified when analysing the interaction of OE with leadership: the volatility of the environment, related to the frequent change of operational situation, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

The scenarios faced by operational leaders today are fuzzy, characterized by uncertain threats in operational environments inside or outside the national territory (NT), where uncertainty and unpredictability require forces to be prepared to accomplish a variety of missions. Maintaining flexibility and a constant adaptability to respond to these new requirements is one of the challenges of operational (Pineiro, 2010, pp. 67-68).

These scenarios are increasingly becoming “havens” for the action of these new threats and actors. And factors such as cultural differences, demographics, the physical characteristics of the terrain and the environment must also be taken into account for the impact they may have on operations (EP, 2012, pp. 1-4).

Conditions are difficult to predict. Military forces and leaders must be prepared to defeat what have been described as hybrid threats³.

Operations will no longer be exclusively oriented towards lethal combat with other armies, and will begin to move towards a complicated mix of lethal and nonlethal actions directed at enemies, opponents and local populations (EP, 2012, pp. 1-16)

(2) The influence of today's Operational Environments in the of action Military Leaders

As a result of our research, we asked the commanders of forces in overseas missions to state, in almost informal fashion and based on their experience (experience and perception), the influence of OEs in the action of military leaders and the conditions, circumstances and factors that influence that leadership. Uncertainty, the conduct of operations within the populations, information, the difficulty in identifying the threat and the multi-nationality of operations were among the most influential factors.

A constant concern is required with being able to predict and anticipate any action or intent on the part of the threat in the TO and, sometimes, we can find at the command level

³ These threats can be defined as hostile states and non-state enemies combining a wide range of capabilities with regard to weapons and regular, irregular and terrorist tactics, and that continuously adapt to avoid the strengths of the opponent and attack what they perceive as weaknesses.

a definition of the basic “zero casualties” operating principle, acting always with maximum force protection in mind.

A TO like the one in AFG, where military forces are permanently in operation, implies leadership concerns related to the living conditions of personnel and the need to lead by example. The levels of danger of the TO and the uncertainty as to the location and manifestation of the threat are a constant concern of military leaders, who will have to make an on-going effort to transmit those concerns to their subordinates and to implement procedures and postures based on that premise.

Another set of factors inherent to OE and that may restrict a leader’s role were also pointed out, such as adverse weather conditions, extended periods of stay in the same location, permanent availability by the military, the impact of operations on the populations (collateral damage), few rest periods and limiting rules of engagement (LRE).

Another aspect pointed out is related to the immediate scrutiny military forces are subjected to by public opinion, national and internationally. This implies that commanders must ensure everyone under their command is aware of the OE, including the culture, local traditions and mores, so that their actions contribute to the accomplishment of the mission and to increase force protection. Cultural awareness⁴ is crucial to the success of multinational operations and an important factor for leaders to extend their influence beyond the chain of command.

From the analysis performed, the idea emerges that the current OE has no effect on its own, unlike leadership actions, but rather works by revealing these leadership skills. Only in the midst of adversity can real leaders emerge, while false leaders will fall. In this perspective, OE do not influence leaders, rather it is through them that true leaders are revealed

b. Operational Leadership

(1) Leading in an Operational Context

It is in the OE that leaders and commanders must develop their command, and they must study and understand it, so they can exploit, with their leadership actions, the opportunities that may present themselves.

When in OE, military leaders must accept complexity and understand that they will have to operate in a decentralized manner and exercise their leadership with some level of uncertainty, as they are developing their activity in an uncertain environment, dealing with issues permeable to external events, which may affect their action (Loureiro, 2008, p. 131).

Leaders must be prepared to deal with multiple dilemmas simultaneously, resulting from the volatile nature of OE and the situation to which they must adapt. When operating in military operations like the one in AFG, a subversive conflict, leaders must reconcile and maintain a balance between initiative and surprise to be able to fight aggressively,

⁴ The generic knowledge of a specific culture or society, cultural awareness does not mean a high level of knowledge or experience.

maintaining an appropriate tactical approach in order to win over the population and contribute to the success of the mission without negatively affecting the task at hand and force protection (ETP, 2012, p. 17).

At the same time, leaders must be able to exploit and take advantage of the full range of capabilities of cutting-edge technology currently at their disposal.

The increasing activity and employment⁵ of joint and combined forces in various operating environments require leaders to possess a set of propensities and skills that fulfil the requirements of joint and combined operational commitment, without allowing it to affect their leadership skills (Loureiro, 2008, p. 139). In all circumstances, leaders must be able to act in an environment with a wide range of non-military actors, with whom they must dialogue, sharing a common understanding, by implementing a comprehensive approach in order to achieve their objectives and accomplish the mission.

In general, all the operational commanders interviewed stressed that leaders must attempt to act by example and know their subordinates, winning them over, listening to them and keeping them informed and motivated in order to develop and exploit the synergies they create as a group. They also reported that it is essential for commanders to understand the organization they belong to and be able to maintain a balance between operational commitment, operational training and rest time⁶ without allowing it to affect discipline, conduct, commitment or the mission. What changes in an operational environment is the situation, the relationship with the other forces and with the threat, and the command action must therefore be more “careful” and appropriate to the circumstances. Things that do not seem of much importance in a garrison context take on new relevance in OE. Operational leadership in a TO is a continuum (Banazol, 2013; Ferrão, 2013). Success in a particular operational challenge belongs to those who have mastered the skills required to act, react, and adapt quickly and creativity.

The ability of a commander to ensure a good performance as operational leader of a group must go beyond checking points off a checklist (Fonseca, 2011, p. 66).

Based on the analysis performed, it was found that operational leaders faced with the dilemma of leadership must first know themselves, mastering the process of “critical thinking”⁷ and evolving; second, they must know their subordinates and the group, how to deal with them and influence their abilities, behaviour and performance; and, in a third phase, as leaders of that group, they must evaluate a specific operational situation and adapt to it as quickly as possible.

⁵ Resulting from the operational requirements of the TO, the mission and the interoperability of means, among other factors, in accordance with the operational requirements of the international organizations to which Portugal belongs.

⁶ “Time of man” in the original - the personal time of military personnel when not engaged in operational activity and training, inversely proportional to rank. Commanders are the military rank with least personal time.

⁷ “Critical thinking is a cornerstone in the training of individuals capable of facing and dealing with the continued change of the increasingly complex systems of the current world. In fact, critical thinking plays a key role in successfully adapting to the personal, social and professional demands of the twenty-first century” (Vieira & Vieira, 2001, p. 14)

(2) The role of leaders as *Stress* managers in Operational Environments

At this stage of the research, we sought to understand whether *stress* is beneficial or detrimental⁸ to the conduct of operations and what is the role of leaders as managers of that stress.

As for the implications of *stress* in OE, a distinction is made between beneficial and harmful stress, as the former, when properly managed and controlled, can be positive in OE. Beneficial *stress* can even foster innovative problem-solving solutions. Beneficial *stress* can act as a stimulus to keep the combatant in a “keener” state of alert, enabling an appropriate response.

Some of aspects mentioned point to a need to build a good *stress* management model that includes inducing *stress* at the strength preparation stage and adjusting and relieving that *stress* in the TO, depending on the OE and on the evolution of the situation.

As for the control of the negative aspects of *stress* by leaders in OE, preparation and training are critical in mitigating those aspects, and commanders must be knowledgeable of the effects it provokes, mentally preparing for potentially adverse situations.

Mention was also made of the importance of a vigilant chain of command and of a leader’s presence in face of the most adverse situations, as a means to identify those situations. Maintaining an environment that fosters human relations and esprit de corps is also critical for controlling the adverse effects of stress.

Both coaching⁹ and a leader’s communication with their peers are seen as helpful in the preparation and handling of adverse situations. Leaders must realize that, in situations of stress, they must necessarily be the most informed individuals, without disregarding the feelings of their subordinates or the situation.

As for a leader’s ability to identify potential *stress* situations, the interviewed were unanimous in stating that it is perfectly possible for experienced leaders with profound knowledge of their subordinates to recognize possible *stress* situations that may affect their performance and the environment of the force.

Mechanisms and attitudes were also mentioned that could be implemented and promoted in this type of environment as a way of mitigating these situations. Among the most important were: realistic training, a profound knowledge of subordinates, proximity and trust, monitoring and supervision of the conduct of operations, occupational *stress* management programs and monitoring by the chaplain and by elements from the Army Centre of Applied Psychology (Centro de Psicologia Aplicada do Exército - CPAE) charged with monitoring the DNF.

⁸ According to Hans Selye (as cited in Serra, 2002, pp. 16-17) there are two types of stress; “eustress” and “distress”. This terminology is now known by the more recent designations “beneficial stress” and “preliminary stress”, or, in the words of Vieira (2002, p. 80), “functional” or “dysfunctional” stress.

⁹ The orientation of another person’s development of new or existing skills during the practice of those same skills (DA, 2012, pp. 7-10).

With regard to the role of leaders as operational *stress* managers, they themselves must become a factor for removing *stress* in adverse situations, acting as a protective barrier from the negative effects of *stress* by conveying confidence and being the individuals who most care about their subordinates.

It was also demonstrated that leaders must display constant presence, must be assertive and intervening, must lead by example and convey, in all situations, an image of calm and thoughtfulness. Only then will their subordinates feel their resilience to adverse situations strengthened.

(3) Future challenges and trends of Operational Leadership

Increasingly complex and uncertain OE are certainly a constantly evolving challenge to the action of military leaders, and will continue to affect the competencies and attributes associated with their development.

The instability and the state of continued conflict of the current international environment display trends that could affect operations and the leadership process (Lousada & Escorrega, 2010, p. 1215).

Current challenges to operational leadership comprise several components such as the OE, the threat, the risk factors, individual and collective preparation, critical factors, and constraints and restrictions, among others (Fonseca, 2011, pp. 67-68).

An issue often mentioned by commanders relates to uncertain and unpredictable threats with the ability to exploit populations, that do not comply with the laws of war and whose action falls outside the normal operations of conventional forces. Information management, the speed with which that information spreads, and its importance in modern operations are also challenges for future leaders in OE.

The phenomenon of internationalization of war, combined with an unprecedented increase of media power, is also a challenge that leaders must face in the conduct of operations and which inevitably influence their decisions.

Leaders will continue to be challenged by technological evolutions and by the attributes of a Network-Centric Warfare¹⁰ (NCW) of fast information processing. They must make decisions better, faster and with more benefits for both leadership and operations. This factor relates to another identified trend, that of an excessively centralized approach by the upper echelons of Command and Control (C2), creating a tendency to directly control actions at the tactical level by the commander of an operational level force¹¹.

Operational leaders must increasingly maintain the right balance between operational activity and rest time while in combat, without jeopardizing the standard of preparedness or the mission.

¹⁰ Effectively translates information superiority into combat power by knowledgeable entities linking with the battle area (Logan, 2003, p. 21).

¹¹ The phenomenon known as micromanagement is a technique or leadership style in which leaders direct or guide forces by the use of "excessive or detailed control" (Prickett, 2003, p. 4).

The challenges of leadership are still seen as an internal personal challenge in which self-development plays a key role, and is ideally the focus of a leader's development. The more knowledge leaders have of human behaviour and of the human dimension, the more they will be able to understand and potentially exert influence.

A more detailed analysis has shown that there are other challenges for which leaders must be prepared in future operational environments. Those challenges are: operations in complex terrains, the increased risk of collateral damage, winning tactically but losing operationally or strategically, the lack of resources, unrealistic expectations with regard to operations, multiculturalism, the command of multinational forces and the "strengthening" of moral values and organizational culture.

2. PREPARATION, TRAINING AND EFFECTIVENESS IN OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

a. The "State of the Art"

As stated by Thomas (2007, p. 50), leadership training is conducted under three headings: institutional, operational and self-learning. The institutional component includes basic training¹², which is designed to provide the qualifications for admission to the different categories, and the knowledge necessary for the performance of duties, as well as continued training to update and further the basic training. The operational component includes the performance of duties in Units, Institutions and Bodies (UIB) and is what allows leaders to acquire, from experience, a set of tools and knowledge to increase their effectiveness in leadership roles (Ulmer et al., 2004, p. 46). Finally, self-learning is the process through which leaders develop their own skills and knowledge. The military training of leaders must be a continued process throughout their career, and must focus on the components of "being (attitudes), knowing (knowledge) and doing (skills)" (Shambach, 2004, p. 55).

Throughout their careers, and in the words of Borges (2011, pp. 16-20), the leadership training model (LTM) is not separate from the officer training model for permanent staff (PS). Leadership training in Public Higher Military Studies Institutions (PHMSI) is theoretical with regard to scientific and technical training, and practical in terms of behavioural training. Throughout their careers and multiple training and qualification courses, military officers also acquire specific leadership training and training in the development of all levels of the qualification process.

Since the 1990s¹³, in the KOS TO, and after 2002 in AFG, the armed forces have been preparing and training units of different levels and types to perform operations in OE. This preparation includes, for both TOs, three phases on NT (Phase I - Administrative and Logistic Preparedness, Phase II - Mission- Oriented Training/Cross-Training, and Phase III - Preparation for projection) complemented with a phase in TO (TO phase), each with

¹² The training received at PHMSI.

¹³ The participation in the KOS mission was in hiatus between 2000 and 2005.

different objectives, conducting training, administrative and logistics activities, and others deemed necessary to accomplish the mission.

The process of developing leaders was found to be sequential and progressive. There are no specific leadership programs or modules to prepare military commanders for the OE where they operate. True preparation of leadership is effected by continuous development, by training, by learning from peers, by the exercise of duties and by acquiring experience in different situations. The entire process constitutes an added value, allowing leaders to develop their adaptability and preparing them to lead in OE. The interviews conducted lend further support to this claim.

With regard to preparation, commanders were unanimous in stating that it was the result of institutional training throughout their career, of experience in the exercise of duties in the various UIB, especially during the command of operational subunits, the participation in earlier NDF in missions outside the NT and a continued process of self-development.

Mention was also made of the importance for the exercise of leadership of the *stress* management training administered during the preparation phase, of the attendance of specific courses and training sessions throughout their career and of a solid preparation of the military personnel in the force.

The creation or conduction of new courses or training activities in the field of leadership, prior to participation in TOs of this kind and in general is not regarded as indispensable. However, the interviewed commanders pointed out the need for a better use of the lessons learned in the context of operational leadership and the dissemination of that knowledge by leaders with experience and a proven track record in operational contexts, during the preparation phases.

The training of leaders for action in OE, while it may be a comprehensive topic, must also be one of the fundamental pillars for the development of those leaders' competencies.

b. Effectiveness in Operational Leadership

The concept of effectiveness is often associated with leadership. The achievement of objectives is imminently associated with the concept of leadership, as when the latter is exerted it must also prove effective (Chemers 1994, cit. in Barracho, 2012, p. 178).

Leaders are effective if they contribute to the effectiveness of the group and of the Institution they belong to and are able to achieve the expected or desired results for the organization.

By acting in a rational and balanced manner, operational leaders contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Institution. They can exercise command in an efficient manner, but to achieve effectiveness they «must be influenced by the so-called “human touch”», what we might call leadership (Gonçalves, Moura, & Macedo, 2010, p. 3). How then should an operational leader act in order to be effective?

The effectiveness of an operational leader is dramatically enhanced by understanding and developing the following areas:

- Military and professional posture: projecting a commanding presence, a professional image of authority;
- Fitness: good health, strength and endurance supporting emotional health and conceptual abilities under prolonged stress;
- Confidence: transmitting self- assurance and conviction in a unit's ability to succeed in every action taken; able to demonstrate serenity and calm over their subordinates through constant emotional control;
- Resilience: physical and psychological ability to recover from adversity and thrive in an environment with high operational tempo (DA, 2012, pp. 4-1).

Operational leaders should encourage a performance improvement mind-set in their subordinates that generates conformity, but goes beyond compliance to rules in striving for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Certain actions are a sign of performance improvement:

- Asking precise questions about how best to perform the tasks;
- Anticipating the need for change and action;
- Analysing activities to determine how to reach or affect a desired end state;
- Identifying ways to improve the procedures of the unit or organization;
- Considering how Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) may improve effectiveness;
- Shaping the critical and creative thinking of subordinates and encouraging that thinking in others (DA, 2012, pp. 8-3).

The growing participation in forces performing missions outside the NT¹⁴ requires commanders to be aware of and be able to deal appropriately with the issues of culture and diversity, and to assess how those issues affect the unity of effort in coalition operations.

Effective operational leaders must create a positive environment, monitoring the ethical climate of their units and taking prompt action to correct any discrepancies that go against the values of the Institution. Whether leaders possess certain traits and are a moral example does not make them effective leaders, nor does it make their subordinates follow them (DA, 2012, pp. 7-4).

Effective leaders must establish concrete objectives, transmitting courses of action and clear guidance to let their subordinates know exactly what is expected of them. In combat, leaders must encourage their subordinates in adversity. Only by a leader's example, can

¹⁴ Such as KOS, where Portugal is the Lead Nation of a multinational battalion made up of Portuguese and Hungarian military, with a Portuguese commander and a Hungarian deputy commander.

mutual trust and respect and a shared vision be effective and render the institution effective (Loureiro, 2008, pp. 12-13).

As stated by Doty & Fenlason (2012, p. 60), we cannot forget that “leadership is more than just accomplishing the mission and securing a promotion.” It also includes the development and training of subordinates, building trust and adding value to the qualities of a given unit.

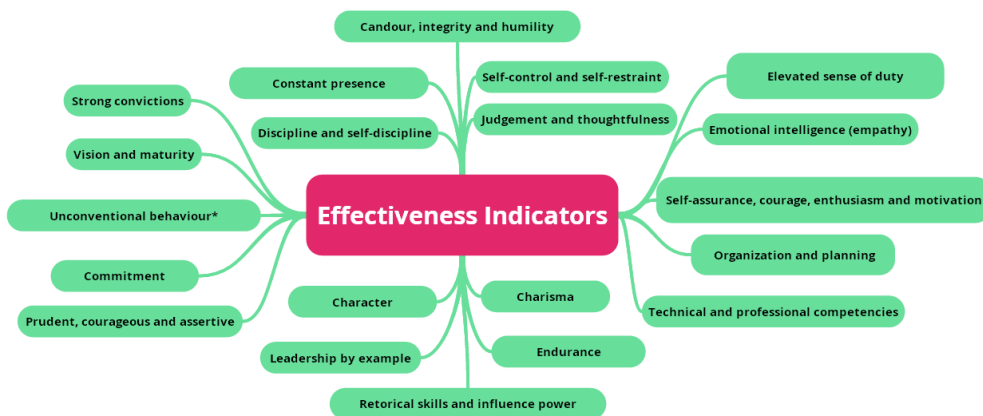
There should, however, be a continued effort to identify the strengths and weaknesses of military leaders in OE, seeking to maximize the strengths and correct and/or minimize the weaknesses. To that end, it is necessary to evaluate the performance of operational leaders at the institutional level, through a set of mechanisms to be implemented in order to improve the operational performance of future military leaders in TO.

c. Effectiveness Indicators in Operational Environments

For a commander’s leadership in OE to be effective, they need to define and implement, from the start, an effective evaluation system and determine the purpose of that system, the desired results at any given moment, the standards of performance of their subordinates, of resources and of their own leadership (Loureiro, 2008, p. 135).

Therefore, leaders should establish a set of performance indicators that enable them to validate whether their unit is achieving the established objectives, as well as their own contribution to that result.

Thus, according to the analysis performed and the interviews conducted, we selected a set of effectiveness indicators that best suit the effective performance of leaders in OE, presented below:



*In certain situations and without resulting in irreverence, insubordination or similar by subordinates.

Figure 1 – Effectiveness indicators in Operational Environments

Source: (Author, gathered from the interviews conducted, 2013)

The indicators listed were based on the experiences of each of the interviewed commanders and, when present in an operational leader, reflect an approach to effective leadership. These indicators were also determined based on the identification, by the various commanders, of critical situations experienced in both TOs in which their leadership was decisive¹⁵ to problem solving.

The importance of leadership is still perceived according to the timeframe of leadership operations rather than by isolated actions, as all actions cumulatively combine to enhance the indicators of an effective leader.

Despite having analysed the effectiveness indicators of an operational leader while conducting their activities in OE, there are other indicators that allow leaders to face the reality of their command. Among those, mention should be made of the indicators external to the organization, the results of evaluations conducted by national or international authorities, the operational indicators¹⁶ arising from the operational activity itself and the interpersonal relationship indicators arising from the relationship between leaders and their subordinates (Loureiro, 2008, p. 14).

3. OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

After surveying a set of effectiveness indicators that best suit the effective performance of leaders in OE, it is important now to list the strengths and weaknesses and the mechanisms and facilitating processes of operational leadership.

a. Strengths and Weaknesses of Operational Leadership

A leader's success also depends on the strengths and weaknesses of their leadership. Through a candid self-assessment, leaders are able to detect their strengths and weaknesses and thus determine their capabilities and limitations. Only thus can they develop specific actions to enhance their strengths and improve or correct their weaknesses (Vieira, 2002, p. 43). However, in OE these factors are not exclusively related to leadership actions, but also to a set of factors that can positively or negatively affect a leader's effectiveness.

In the present analysis, and addressing primarily the strengths, we found that the most underlined aspects concerned leadership by example, technical-professional competencies and appropriate training for the exercise of duties, demonstrating constant presence at all times and the relationship of trust required between leaders and their subordinates.

Other points were also mentioned that are considered important, such as emotional intelligence, the relationship with and the defence of subordinates, effective and ethical judgments and decisions, the admiration of subordinates and lastly, involvement and personal satisfaction in the mission (Doty & Fenlason, 2013, p. 59).

¹⁵ Based on the identification of critical situations (positive or negative) involving a leadership position.

¹⁶ Such as the fulfillment of the mission, a unit's level of preparedness, a unit's state of preparedness at the end of the operation, the number of casualties incurred during the operation, compliance to planning, a unit's proficiency level (firing tables, physical evidence), etc. (DA, 2006, pp. 9-6).

ICTs are also seen as a facilitator of operational leadership. However, we have found that to be effectively true only when a commander has mastered the knowledge and skills of that equipment and as long as it does not contribute to estrangement or interference among command levels.

From the analysis conducted, special mention must be made of the importance of self-knowledge, which allows leaders to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in a number of environments and progressively correct those deficiencies (DA, 2012, pp. 7-7).

With regard to weaknesses, there were references to the fact that operational units do not remain formed full-time, to limited resources, to an inability to adapt to complex situations, to little (and often short) command experience and to a perceived “lack of continuity” in the core values of current soldiers.

A lack of leadership by example, a lack of ability to deal with adverse situations, a tendency to intrude in the command actions of subordinate commanders, inconsistency, indecision and a lack of multicultural openness are also considered command action vulnerabilities.

b. Facilitating Mechanisms and Processes for Operational Leadership

Operational leadership, when conducted at the lower levels, can become more assertive and effective if leaders make use of a set of mechanisms and processes to better meet their goals. These processes and mechanisms, even when not driven directly by leaders, directly or indirectly benefit the exercise of leadership.

One of the facilitating processes of operational leadership relates to the continuity of operating units and the permanence of military personnel. This is not at all strange, as there is no continuity of military personnel in the great majority of our operational units¹⁷ because of a lack of continuity in the command action and the fact that military personnel stay in the ranks for a limited period of time.

A clear and consistent definition of tasks and missions, the trust, respect and consideration of subordinates, knowledge, leading by example, and presence are seen as facilitators of operational leadership. It is important that leaders ensure the freedom and action of subordinate levels and ensure compliance to an operational tempo which enables flexibility and operational adaptability to their subordinates and unit.

An appropriate use of ICT, the assurance of disciplined initiative among subordinates, and unity of command and clarity in the chain of command were also mentioned as decisive and facilitating the leadership action.

Another process worth mentioning has to do with the accountability¹⁸ assigned to subordinates. This accountability will evidently require them to provide feedback for their

¹⁷ Mainly in the Army, which is the Branch that has contributed with greater number of formed units to the KOS and AFG TOs.

¹⁸ The obligation of members of an administrative or representative body, which are accountable to controlling entities or to their constituents.

actions, a decisive mechanism for detection and correction of future mistakes, thereby improving the entire process. Leaders have an important role in advising and guiding subordinates to improve their performance and develop their potential by identifying strengths and weaknesses and creating action plans - counselling¹⁹ (DA, 2012, pp. 7-10).

A number of factors can strengthen the decision-making acts of leaders. Their decisions should be applied with consistent reasoning and logic and must be explained to subordinates, thereby gaining their trust.

Leaders are also responsible for the development of their subordinates and, by knowing them and using them according to their capabilities, for improving their leadership skills and thus contribute to their development.

c. Core Operational Leadership Skills

The exercise of leadership in OE requires a set of personality traits, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that lead to a superior performance. Leaders are the mirror of their unit and their subordinates see themselves in them and in all their actions, good and bad.

Thus, this exercise requires leaders to possess a set of competencies that enable them to make the right decisions at the right time and to develop an action plan for improving their leadership skills (Vieira, 2002, p. 89).

Leadership training must focus on the “being, knowing and doing” components, where “being” converges in attitudes and attributes (behavioural or interpersonal area), “knowing” in knowledge (scientific or conceptual area) and “doing” in skills (military or technical area) (Shambach, 2004, p. 55).

In organizations, competencies are defined as a set of personality traits, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours for a superior performance in the workplace and according to a benchmark or degree of achievement (Rouco, 2012, p. 81).

According to the various AF leadership models of third countries, the list of competencies military leaders must possess is not uniform, and there is no consensus among the scientific community as the term “leadership” evokes many interpretations (Rouco, 2012, p. 56). Although a large directory of traits and skills for effective military leadership may be identified from the literature and research, there is no universal set of characteristics applicable to a wide variety of contexts. Some situational factors are unpredictable. Effective leaders in a given situation may not be effective in others (Rego & Cunha, 2004, p. 190).

The new leadership model of the United States Army (DA, 2012, pp. 1-5) requires value-based leadership, impeccable character and professional competence. This model makes leaders aware of the permanent capabilities required, regardless of leadership level, mission or task. The model comprises two components. The first relates to the attributes²⁰ of what

¹⁹ Counseling is the process used by leaders to guide subordinates in the improvement of their performance and the development of their potential (DA, 2012, pp. 7-10).

²⁰ The attributes describe how an individual behaves and learns in a particular environment.

leaders should “be” and consists of three categories of attributes: character, presence and intellectual ability. The second relates to the core competencies of what leaders should “do”, the first being to lead others, the second, to develop their environment, themselves and their subordinates, and the third, to provide guidance for the achievement of organizational results (DA, 2012, pp. 1-4-1-5).

These core competencies are developed through a balanced combination of institutional education, self-development, realistic training and professional experience (DA, 2012, pp. 1-6).

Despite the importance of these competencies to the leadership action, the present work focuses on the core competencies deemed essential, from the performance of leaders to the lower levels. To this end, and to use a military leadership model, the main reference for this work will be the model of the Canadian Armed Forces.

According to the National Defence of Canada (IN-Canada) (2005, p. 19), there is no definitive list of essential qualities in a leader, nor any guarantee that the possession of all or some of the identified attributes will result in effective leadership. However, effective leadership skills can be developed through the acquisition and development of competencies in five dimensions:

- **Knowledge and skills** - direct leaders are required to possess a high level of proficiency in technical and tactical skills. A higher level of knowledge and expertise relating to strategic systems and institutional functioning is mandatory from leaders at the operational and strategic levels,
- **Cognitive skills** - analytical skills and creative thinking are essential abilities for all leaders.
- **Social capacities** - at all levels of leadership, interpersonal relationships skills (communication, persuasion, conflict management, etc.) are critical to working with others.
- **Personality traits** - effective leaders make their decisions and actions with integrity. These decisions and actions display a number of personal characteristics that relate to adaptability: openness to experience, flexibility of thought and behaviour and self-assurance.
- **Professional motivation and values** - professionalism reflects a strong commitment to the social responsibility of the profession, the high valuation of professional competence and military skills, and a personal identification with the values and virtues of the Institution (National Defence-Canada, 2005, p. 19).

Therefore, and based on the core competencies identified by the operational commanders interviewed, those same competencies were analysed and grouped according to the five dimensions proposed:

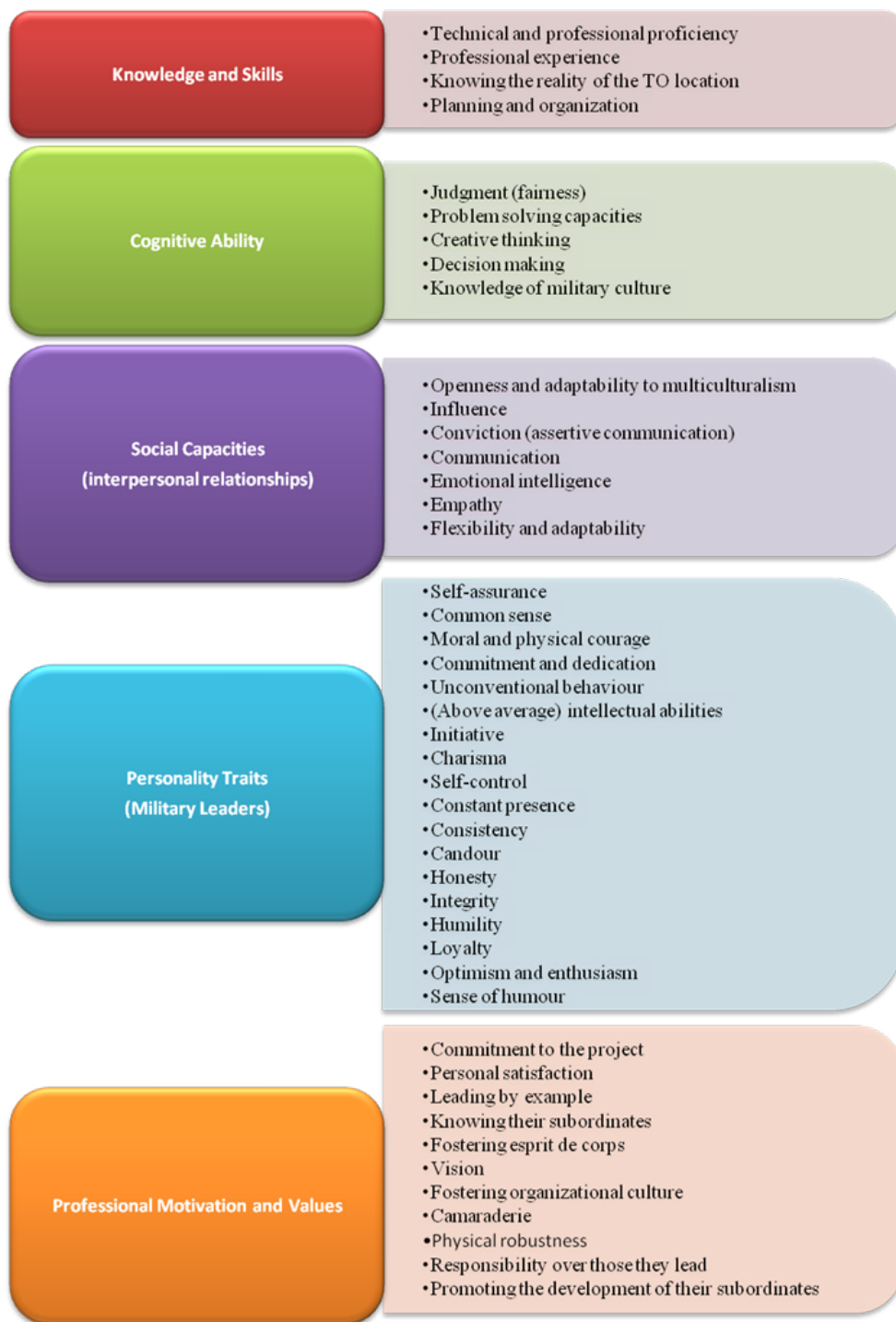


Figure 2 - Core Competencies for Operational Leadership

Source: Adapted from ND-Canada (2005, p. 19)

Our analysis performed revealed that the competencies demonstrated in the area of control of personality traits are essential for the development of effective leadership capability, without which leaders cannot call themselves as such. Despite seeming reductive to establish a hierarchy among these competencies in order of importance, we believe that there are certain competencies that hold precedence over the others, as in the case of professional competence, leading by example, judgment, and the power to exert influence.

d. Competence Model for Operational Leaders

The graphical representation of the model²¹ we proposed to develop illustrates the relationship between the various variables that contribute, in our opinion and according to the evidence obtained, to improve effectiveness in the performance of leaders. This model consists of four main variables, three of them dependent: competencies²², individual/group variables, results, and one independent variable, the OE.

We assumed that the OE variable does not depend on the other three variables, thus it is independent. It is an existing fact, the result of the succession and interaction of situational factors, of human and nonhuman factors inherent to the OE that have the potential to affect and influence the remaining variables (leaders' behaviour, individual/group behaviour or results). The purpose of this model is to express the relationships between the different variables:

- How the competencies of the operational leader and the situational factors of OE make it possible for leaders to exert their influence;
- How a leader's influence affects the capabilities, behaviour and performance of the individuals/group;
- How a leader's influence affects the capabilities and performance of the OE, of the system and of the institution as a whole;
- Finally, how the skills, behaviour and performance of the individuals/group and of the OE generate results.

²¹ Which is based on the competencies of operational leaders deemed relevant for effective performance and which are included in our operational leader's competence model (based on the interviews conducted).

²² Knowledge, behaviors, skills and attitudes associated with leadership.

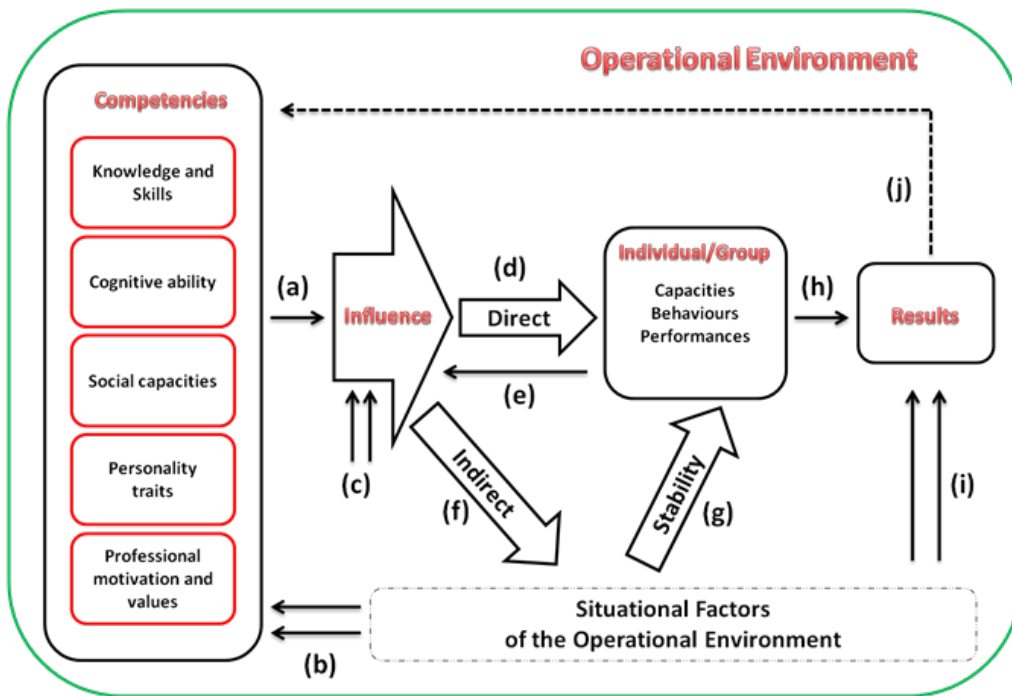


Figure 3 - Competency Model for Operational Leaders

Source: Adapted from ND-Canada (2005, p. 17)

Relationship (a) in the model shows that the skills identified in the five areas are the foundation of the personal power of leaders, the basis for the quality of their analysis, decisions and plans when problem-solving at the tactical or operational levels. The influence process, regarded as the essence of leadership, can be affected by their personal and professional competencies.

In relationship (b), the situational factors of the OE also affect leaders' competencies, their ability to analyse and to shape an intention. An example of this is a leader's awareness of their responsibilities, thinking, imagination and decision making. The restrictions and opportunities of the OE guide and shape a leader's behaviour.

These constraints are felt at all levels and apply to the time, resources or behaviour factors. The LRE, as applied to a specific mission, are a typical example of behavioural restrictions.

Relationship (c) shows that the influence of a leader can be enhanced or diminished by situational factors in the OE. It is easier for commanders to communicate their intention and implement their plan, for example, if the environment experienced in their unit is marked by pride and professionalism.

Relationship (d) shows that results are achieved by the individuals/group, which means that a leader's influence is directly applied to modifying capacities, behaviours and individual/group performance. In addition to their influence on subordinates, leaders may also influence the decisions and actions of their peers and superiors.

Similarly, in relationship (e), the individuals/group may also try to proactively influence or reactively counter-influence their leader, confirming leadership as a dynamic and interactive process.

Relationship (f), shows that the influence of a leader can be exercised indirectly to shape situational factors in the OE. According to their level of authority and responsibility, leaders can change or influence a particular operating procedure (e.g., a tactical innovation), the organizational structure in the TO (e.g., structural changes), systems capacity (e.g., new technology or doctrine), the characteristics of the institution (e.g., organizational culture) and even the conditions of the external environment (e.g., public relations activities). This way, leaders seek to improve the OE conditions to ensure effective performance and to achieve results.

In relationship (g) the indirect influence exercised by a leader on the different variables of the OE enhances the capability and performance of individuals/group, by providing them with stability.

Relationships (h) and (i) show that the individuals/group and the OE contribute jointly and independently to the results of the fulfilment of the mission, to the welfare and development of its members, to the group's internal integration and operational adaptability, among others.

Finally, relationship (j) shows that the results achieved are reflected on leaders, affecting their subsequent behaviour. Those results also influence how the capabilities and effectiveness of leaders are perceived by their subordinates, peers and superiors, increasing or decreasing their legitimacy and ability to lead.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the present research, we attempted to focus on identifying the core competencies of leaders in OE that enable them to achieve maximum efficiency in the execution of their leadership role. The uncertainty scenarios faced by operational leaders are characterized by a number of factors that require them to fulfil a wide variety of roles, to be highly capable of being autonomous and adaptive and to be able to cope with contingencies and uncertainties.

The OE where modern military operations unfold, particularly in the KOS and AFG TOs, are complex, volatile, uncertain, ambiguous and present factors of instability that translate into new risks and potential threats.

We have been able to confirm the importance of a leader's role as operational *stress* manager. Leaders must take preventive measures to minimize the negative effects of stress. *Stress* can be beneficial for the conduct of operations, when well-managed, in a balanced

manner, and ensuring that the level of demand placed on subordinates is equal to their capacity to endure it. In certain circumstances, inducing *stress* may be necessary in order to maximize superior performances. Leaders must always lead by example and present themselves as a *stress* removal factor.

Operational leadership is marked by a series of challenges and future trends, which we have identified, that affect operations and the very process of leadership, establishing the guidelines for future operations in OE.

Another key aspect relates to the training of leaders for action in OE, which must be a fundamental pillar for the development of competencies in the military. We found that specific leadership training and the development of the competencies process at the different levels is administered during the various training and qualification courses. However, there are no specific leadership programmes or modules in the preparation of forces and their commanders for action in OE, as that training is conducted through continued development, training, peer learning, exercise of duties and previous experience in different situations.

Effective leadership involves a leader's ability to win the trust and support of their followers and the ability of the direct them towards an objective. Effective and efficient leadership by commanders is decisive. We found that it is critical for the exercise of effective leadership and for the respect and admiration from subordinates, that operational leaders have a deep understanding of themselves and what they can do at different levels.

Based on the scientific and empirical knowledge collected, resulting from the experience of leaders who have performed missions in OE, we have identified a set of effectiveness indicators with positive effects on the action of leaders in OE and that most suit an efficient performance.

Leadership in OE was also found to carry its own strengths and weaknesses, which are related to a leader's performance and to a set of factors that can positively or negatively affect a leader's effectiveness and may help to enhance the positive factors and minimize vulnerabilities, improving the performance of an operational leader.

The exercise of leadership requires leaders to possess a set of personality traits, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that lead to a superior performance in OE. This analysis has allowed us to identify a profile of core competencies that operational leaders must demonstrate in the exercise of leadership in OE, developed through the acquisition and development of skills in five dimensions for an effective performance.

It is essential for operational leaders to possess a set of personality traits (innate) that enable them to develop different competencies in various fields; that they are professionally competent; that they possess sound judgment and power of influence over their subordinates, in order to develop effective leadership skills.

Thus, in our opinion, the model of leadership skills that the armed forces must adopt to respond to future challenges must be a model comprising the competencies listed, the

individual/group variables, the results and the OE. In this model, an operational leader's competencies and the situational factors make it possible for leaders, through their influence, to affect the capacities, behaviour and performance of the individuals/group and the OE, and provides the conditions for an effective exercise of leadership in OE.

This model allows us to ensure the training of operational leaders with the adaptation skills needed to work in OE and to achieve results. Military leaders continue to be challenged by a number of factors for which they must be prepared. Only thus can they step beyond their comfort zone, adapt, and influence the individuals under their command. One thing appears certain: man will remain a core and decisive component of any operational context.

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