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FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES OF JUNIOR COMMANDERS IN THE TRAINING CENTERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF UKRAINE

The article explores the formation and development of leadership competencies of junior commanders in the training center of the National Guard of Ukraine. The main approaches to the understanding of military leadership and its role in raising the unit's combat readiness are analyzed. The authors present the results of an empirical study of the level of leadership qualities shaping among the graduates of the Vasyl Vyshyvanyi Training Center of the National Guard of Ukraine and provide suggestions for improving the educational process to ensure further progress of the professional development of the non-commissioned officers.

Keywords: military leadership, leadership competencies, leadership development, professional training, junior commander.

Statement of the problem. A new stage of the russian-ukrainian war began on February 24, 2022, as a result of the russian federation's invasion into the territory of Ukraine, when hundreds of thousands of servicemembers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), the National Guard of Ukraine (NGU), and other military formations of the national security and defense sector stood up to defend the Ukrainian state, which led to the growth of constant changes and social transformation of both subordinates and senior personnel.

Large-scale hostilities have drastically accentuated the issue of effective leaders on the battlefield and in the divisions that support military operations to the same extent. Immediate commanders set goals for their followers, guide their actions, arrange work within the unit, and coordinate the actions of separate military elements. In addition, they show concern for their personnel, motivate them, build confidence, and maintain resilience in the face of combat stressors. Quite often, insufficiently trained servicemen who were conscripted during mobilization or may be younger and less experienced than their subordinates perform the role of a direct superior – a sergeant.

The effectiveness of the military mission execution and the protection of the troops' lives

both depend on the qualification of the direct commander in combat conditions. Subordinates have to trust their leader's decisions and believe that he or she will not expose them to unjustified risk for the unit to operate effectively. The experience of joint actions under field conditions significantly affects the perception of the immediate superior by their subordinates, influences the separation of the primary and the secondary in his or her personality and leadership characteristics.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

At the current time, there are many insights on the issues of the development of leadership skills of the security and defense forces servicemembers not only in Ukraine but also in the world's leading countries. These findings are published in scientific journals, educational and methodical materials, and form the basis for making the governing documents.

Modern scholars have different views on this issue. Thus, O. Krasnytska defines the main qualities and skills that ensure the efficiency of performing military professional tasks and leading subordinates while outlining the portrait of a true commander-leader [1]. Researchers L. Lebedyk and V. Strelnikov consider the opportunity to form leadership qualities through an individual approach

to training future officers of the NGU [2]. Such scholars as V. Lahodzynskyi and O. Shevchuk believe that one of the main objectives of the development of leadership qualities is to foster emotional intelligence, improve internal communication abilities, and use "language focuses" in the process of unit control [3]. Simultaneously, the papers' authors [4, 5], addressing the problem of shaping the military personnel leadership, take as a basis the need to develop morality and increase moral readiness with regard to NATO and the russian-ukrainian war experience. Some scientists, in particular O. Kokun, I. Pishko, N. Lozinska, V. Oliinyk, devote more attention to the empirical study of servicemembers' leadership qualities, as well as the factors that determine the display of these qualities [6].

The academic results were specifically used as a foundation for the processing of such guiding documents as the Doctrine on Military Leadership in the National Guard of Ukraine and the Doctrine on the Development of Military Leadership in the Armed Forces of Ukraine [7, 8]. The purpose of the adaptation of these doctrines was to achieve interoperability between the NGU, the AFU, and other components of the security and defense sector, as well as with similar forces of partner countries, to establish a common set of views on military leadership, the basic principles of its development, standards, values, personal qualities, and basic competencies of military leaders.

However, there remains a constant demand to improve the system of leadership skills development due to the dynamics of modern military and political challenges, the increasing role of the moral and psychological component, and the need to transform the military leaders' training in accordance with new threats and changes in the operational environment in spite of the scientific research conducted.

The purpose of the article is to justify the ways of shaping and promoting the leadership competencies of junior commanders in the training centers of the National Guard of Ukraine by analyzing the current state of training, summarizing the results of empirical investigation, and making practical recommendations to raise the effectiveness of the professional development system in the context of modern security challenges.

Summary of the main material. Advanced leadership skills of non-commissioned officers

play an essential part in ensuring the fighting capacity and effectiveness of the service and battle activities of the NGU units in the context of the contemporary russian-ukrainian war. Sergeants represent the key link between the officer corps and the soldiers, ensuring the passing of order, coordination of actions, and morale of the military contingent. Under the conditions of high dynamism and unpredictability of modern battle, sergeants are required to be capable of making complex decisions in a rapid and well-reasoned manner, directly influence the morale of their dependents, primarily by personal example, serve as mentors and teachers for subordinates, and be capable of passing on their combat experience.

Numerous studies and an analysis of accumulated domestic and foreign experience provide an opportunity to identify key aspects of the development of leadership in the context of Ukrainian security and defense sector building. Since leadership is now becoming one of the primary factors of a successful defense sector performance, it is necessary to realize the significance of its role and place in the system of professional non-commissioned officers training. This is related to the following facts [9]:

1) leadership is one of the defining success drivers in the current conditions since leaders combine the expertise to perform critical events analysis with the ability to motivate and inspire subordinates to achieve high results;

2) systematic improvement of leadership skills can only be achieved through education, training, and practice in various situations;

3) recognizing that authorities' effectiveness has both an individual and a group dimension, where leadership is a solid team for achieving a common goal is an important factor;

4) leadership becomes critical in extreme conditions, in particular during warfare or emergencies, when leaders must be able to make competent decisions quickly;

5) the constant evolution and auto-improvement of the military leadership system cause the need to study the impact of different management styles on the effectiveness of combat operations, as well as the design and perfection of specialized programs in the formation and development of leadership skills among servicemembers.

The concepts of "military leader" and "military leadership" are often interpreted in the scientific literature and governing documents. Specifically,

the Doctrine on Military Leadership in the NGU [7] provides the following definitions.

1. Leadership is a social phenomenon that contributes to the achievement of group objectives at the optimal time and with the greatest effect. It means influencing people by setting them a goal, a way of acting, motivation to accomplish assigned tasks, and upgrading the establishment.

2. Military leadership is the targeted influence of various categories of personnel on the armed contingent in day-to-day, corporate, training, and combat performance, as well as in disordered (non-standard, critical) situations by assigning them with a purpose, guiding them to achieve it, ensuring discipline and motivation to perform designated tasks, maintaining trust and respect, and modernizing the National Guard of Ukraine as a social institution.

The authors like V. Liubych, M. Domnenko, and I. Vishchun note that military leaders are an example for their troops thanks to their personal traits and constant self-improvement. They inspire personnel to perform duties in a disciplined manner, achieve assigned goals, and cultivate the ability to successfully perform any task through their continuous efforts aimed at training, professional development, and upholding military traditions. At the same time, such leaders help to improve the organization and concentrate efforts on the efficient implementation of the squad's mission [5].

Special attention should be paid to the scientific contribution of O. Krasnytska [1], who defines the main qualities and skills that enable the successful performance of military and professional tasks and effective unit command while drawing a portrait of an army leader. These include:

- the presence of the leader directly next to his or her subordinates, guiding them by personal example, demonstration of courage, endurance, and dedication [10];
- strengthening the subordinates' resilience, inspiring them with a belief in victory, and maintaining high morale even in critical situations [11];
- the ability to work in conditions of uncertainty, make decisions in a chaotic and high-risk environment, and quickly adapt to the changes on the battleground [12, 13];
- the formation of new leaders through active training, personnel development, and delegation of authority to prepare future commanders [11, 12];

– awareness of personal responsibility for the life and health of subordinates, for the success of combat missions, and readiness to take hard decisions [14];

– mastery of public speaking that ensures effective communication with military staff, inspires, motivates, and persuades through clear and meaningful communication;

– demonstrating an example of self-sacrifice, strength of spirit, and the will to win, working at full capacity;

– gaining undisputed respect due to high professionalism, care for subordinates, and individual courage.

Consequently, a military leader is a servicemember who has a purposeful influence on the troops, motivates them to perform orders as appointed, keeps morale up, promotes the development of subordinates, and ensures squad performance both in everyday activities and in extreme conditions due to advanced personality traits, professional competencies, and ethical principles.

The Doctrine on Military Leadership in the NGU defines the mission of military leaders: mentally, psychologically, professionally prepare themselves and subject personnel to complete tasks as assigned, consolidate military corps, and lead them to a specific target [7].

The formation of leadership qualities, especially in the servicemembers, is the result of systematic preparation and professional development rather than innate abilities. The commander of the British Fourteenth Army in Burma, Field Marshal Sir William Slim, noted that leaders are more often made than born. Everyone demonstrates leadership skills. They should be developed through deliberate training and practice [15]. That is why it is important to cultivate and improve leadership development programs for non-commissioned officers of the NGU on a continuous basis.

The Vasyl Vyshyvanyi Training Center, which simultaneously functions as a military facility and a state institution of professional (vocational) education, providing training, retraining, and advanced training for junior and senior enlisted officers, occupies a prominent place in the professional development system of the NGU servicemembers.

The key targets of the Center are as follows:

- providing military and professional training according to the state demand and the needs of the NGU;
- organizing the educational process in accordance with the principles of personality-oriented humanistic pedagogy;
- developing academic curricula based on the national standards of vocational education;
- certification, internships, and advanced training for professors and instructors;
- implementing national-patriotic education and formation of public stance among academic applicants;
- cooperating on the international level within the limits of competence.

The training center plays a main role in the formation of professional competencies of the servicemembers in accordance with the national educational standards and the NGU requirements [16, 17]. The center delivers courses in more than 60 fields of activity, including the academic training program of military occupational specialty 100182P, "Squad Leader". This program was prepared by the teaching staff of the Training Center [18].

The program aims to build leadership skills, develop critical thinking, enable balanced decision-making, and effective unit direction. The training is carried out through comprehensive educational activities that include theoretical studies, professional and practical classes, in-service training, and examinations. The learning process covers a total of 332 hours and focuses on an in-depth learning of the next disciplines: leadership, tactics, weapons, military medical training, military topography, day-to-day operations management, etc.

The system of cadets' progress monitoring involves intermediate and final evaluation, and upon completion of the course, a graduate receives a corresponding certificate. The analysis of the course results and feedback from the students are used to improve the educational program further.

While the program is structured clearly and meets modern academic requirements and standards for non-commissioned officer training, the effectiveness of its implementation in practical terms requires scientific justification. The success of the formation of leadership qualities and professional competencies of the future squad commanders is determined not only by the content and scope of the curriculum but also by the level of

knowledge acquisition, practical skills gained, and the cadets' ability to apply them in real conditions of military service.

This problem is now becoming especially relevant in the context of the ongoing russian-ukrainian war, which puts forward new requirements for the junior commanders' training: the necessity of decision-making in dynamic and unstable circumstances, effective control of subordinates in combat settings, the ability to maintain the moral and psychological stability of military personnel. For this reason, it becomes necessary to conduct empirical research aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the squad leaders' educational training program.

The authors designed a questionnaire survey intended to explore the issues related to the learning process at the Training Center in this regard. In particular, the following aspects were studied: determining the most important qualities and skills that a sergeant should possess; identifying the aspects of leadership that are most relevant for non-commissioned officers; evaluating the level of efficiency of the leadership development system at the Training Center; defining the most effective teaching methods for developing leadership skills; establishing ways to improve the training system for non-commissioned officers; providing a rationale for adjusting the proportion of academic disciplines in the "Division Commander" field of study.

The survey was conducted at the end of 2024 with the help of a Google form in one of the military bases of the Northern Operational and Territorial Union of the NGU. The poll involved 270 respondents who work closely with section commanders, including 60.7 % – chief sergeants, 30 % – platoon commanders, and 9.3 % – company leaders. Servicemembers participating in the survey have sufficient experience of military service and holding their posts: up to 1 year – 7.8 %, 1-3 years – 41.1 %, 4-6 years – 24.4 %, over 6 years – 26.7 %.

The respondents were offered to rate the level of sergeants' – graduates of the Training Center – leadership skills development on a 10-point scale, where 10 points corresponded to the highest level of leadership skills development.

The results of the survey showed that 14.7 % of the participants have a low level of leadership qualities (score: 1-4); 21.1 % have an average level (score: 5-6); 64.8 % have a high level (score: 7-10 points). Thus, more than 30 % of sergeants

have an average or low level of leadership qualities development.

The authors of the article believe that the indicators of leadership skills formation should be much higher, taking into account the tasks and responsibilities assigned to the specified category of servicemen, especially during combat missions under the legal regime of martial law.

Accordingly, there comes up an objective necessity to improve the system of the professional training of non-commissioned officers with an emphasis on the formation of leadership competencies. The suggestions of the respondents who directly interact with the squad leaders and have practical experience in measuring the level of their preparation were analyzed to determine possible areas of improvement.

The survey participants proposed the following: to increase the number of practical classes (as indicated by 63 % of the interviewed persons); to take measures to upgrade the qualifications of the instructors (34.1 %); to raise the quantity of interactive training (31.1 %); to expand the coaching and mentoring program (25.6 %).

At the same time, respondents pointed out the need to redistribute training time between the disciplines, in particular by increasing the hours of tactical training (58.5 %), weapons training (48.9 %), leadership courses (45.9 %), professional psychological training (42.2 %), and military medical preparation (40.4 %).

Therefore, the summarization of the respondents' proposals makes it possible to outline the main areas for improving the non-commissioned officer's preparation systems at the Vasyl Vyshyvanyi Training Center of the National Guard of Ukraine.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be made based on the conducted research.

1. The formation and development of leadership competencies of junior commanders is a crucial factor in ensuring the effectiveness of the National Guard of Ukraine units, especially in the context of the ongoing russian-ukrainian war.

2. The analysis of theoretical sources and practical experience has reaffirmed the need for systematic and purposeful training of non-commissioned officers that is focused on the improvement of personal, moral psychological,

and professional qualities of sergeants in their capacity as military leaders.

3. The empirical study results showed that more than 30 % of the graduates of the Vasyl Vyshyvanyi Training Center of the National Guard of Ukraine have an average or low level of leadership skills development, which causes an improvement of the approaches to this field of study.

4. The proposals of the respondents indicate the relevance of increasing the volume of practical exercises, developing interactive forms of training, improving the qualifications of instructors, intensifying the leadership course, and increasing the number of study hours in tactical, weapons, professional psychological, and military medical training.

5. The modernization of the professional training system should be grounded in the results of continuous monitoring, consideration of combat operations experience, mentoring and coaching programs development, and an adaptation of educational programs to the security environment changes.

The authors consider the development and approbation of innovative methods for improving the leadership competencies of junior commanders in the training centers of the National Guard of Ukraine to be a line of further research.

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ФОРМУВАННЯ І РОЗВИТОК ЛІДЕРСЬКИХ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЕЙ МОЛОДШИХ КОМАНДИРІВ У НАВЧАЛЬНИХ ЦЕНТРАХ НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ ГВАРДІЇ УКРАЇНИ

Розглянуто проблему розвитку лідерських компетентностей молодших командирів у навчальних центрах Національної гвардії України в умовах сучасних безпекових викликів, спричинених триваючою російсько-українською війною. Акцентовано увагу на вирішальній ролі ефективних військових лідерів у забезпеченні боєготовності підрозділів, підтриманні морального духу особового складу, координації дій на полі бою та здатності діяти у нестандартних ситуаціях.

На основі аналізу сучасної наукової літератури, керівних документів (зокрема Доктрини військового лідерства в Національній гвардії України) та міжнародного досвіду окреслено ключові аспекти розвитку лідерства у військовослужбовців. Виокремлено основні риси військового лідера, серед яких: здатність вести за собою особистим прикладом, ухвалювати рішення в умовах невизначеності, підтримувати моральний дух, розвивати підлеглих, володіти комунікативними навичками та брати відповідальність за життя ввірених військовослужбовців.

Подано результати емпіричного дослідження, проведеного наприкінці 2024 р. серед командирів підрозділів Національної гвардії України. Метою дослідження було оцінити рівень сформованості лідерських компетентностей у випускників Навчального центру імені Василя Вишиваного НГУ. Аналіз результатів дослідження виявив необхідність удосконалювання програми освітньої підготовки.

Авторами запропоновано шляхи підвищення ефективності системи професійної підготовки молодших командирів, зокрема: збільшення обсягу практичних занять, активне застосування інтерактивних методів навчання, підвищення кваліфікації інструкторів та розширення програм наставництва. Наголошено також на необхідності перегляду структури навчального плану з посиленням уваги до тактичної, вогневої, професійно-психологічної та військово-медичної підготовки.

У висновках обґрунтовано, що розвиток лідерських компетентностей молодших командирів має бути системним і безперервним, з урахуванням динамічного бойового досвіду, змін у безпековому середовищі та викликів сучасної війни. Запропоновані вдосконалення сприятимуть підвищенню рівня підготовленості сержантського складу й ефективності виконання завдань Національною гвардією України. Одержані результати мають практичне значення для вдосконалювання освітніх програм у закладах військової підготовки, розроблення методичних рекомендацій з формування лідерських компетентностей та створення ефективної системи професійної підготовки сержантського складу в умовах трансформації сектору безпеки і оборони.

Ключові слова: *військове лідерство, лідерські компетентності, розвиток лідерства, професійна підготовка, молодші командири.*

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