

# Personality of Military Professionals (Commanders) and Their Way of Leading and Commanding Today and in Historical Context

Petra Hurbišová, Monika Davidová

**Abstract**—The article deals with the personality of military professionals (commanders) and their way of leading and commanding today and in historical context. The first part focuses on the leadership skills of Alexander the Great, who introduced strategic innovations and even from today's perspective; he excelled in efficient work with people. This paper focuses on the way which he achieved his goals. Further attention is paid to approaches to commander's personality by other great generals. The paper is also focused on personality traits of military professionals necessary for successful management and leadership in today's variable and challenging environment. Finally, attention is paid to the effective and ineffective ways of behavior of commanders and determining what styles of leadership is appropriate for a given situation, whether in peacetime or on deployment.

**Keywords**—Authority, commander, leader, leadership, military professional, personality.

## I. INTRODUCTION

LIFE in the army and military service have an extraordinary influence on the personality of the military professionals, because both are particularly demanding in terms of requirements with a focus on physical readiness of soldiers and psychological requirements. In today's highly changing environment, it is generally necessary to reckon with the fact that stressful and challenging situations will increase. Military professionals will have to work effectively under stress not only carrying out their duties during routine daily work in the unit but also in their deployment. As an example might be the workload in foreign missions, and current considerations about deployment of the military to cope with the influx of refugees into Europe. Therefore, attention should be given to the commanders' personality and ensure their successful leadership style in challenging situations.

## II. LESSONS FROM THE SUCCESSFUL MILITARY COMMANDERS IN HISTORY

### A. Ancient Military Commander Alexander the Great and His Command and Leadership Style

First, it is necessary to avoid confusing the concepts of leading and commanding. Commanding relies on getting people to do things the commander wants, through the use of force, coercion and fear of punishment. Leading is more

subtle, and relies on the ability of leader to inspire performance and a desirable action through reliance on confidence, respect, trust, inspiration, common goals, vision and so on [1]. Leadership from the military point of view is characterized as the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation whereas operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization [2].

Leadership is the art of dealing with people. In better words, it is the art of influencing people through a conviction and personal example to constantly act in a certain direction. Leadership can never merge with coercion [3]. Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) is widely recognized as a significant leader and commander. From a leadership perspective, it is not very difficult to say that Alexander was incomparable. He could be magnanimous toward defeated enemies and extremely loyal toward his friends. As a general, he led by example, leading from the front [4]. He followed his vision.

The visionary leadership style of Alexander is the classic mold of leadership currently taught in business schools and military academies. Research shows this style to be the most effective of all styles because it communicates a sense of common purpose to people and resonates with their hearts and emotions. The feeling of belonging to something greater than self is what produces the passion and commitment which generates discretionary effort [5].

Alexander the Great for the realization of his goals and visions introduced strategic innovation. He worked notably with people. During his speeches, he touched the collective imagination of people. He acted with a good example and performed to his people as a source of inspiration. He made "walking around" and encouraged the spirit: telling people – each separately and all together – how courageous and successful they were. He ensured that each of his men felt like a special individual. He also devoted himself to their training and development [6].

Alexander's reign illustrates a number of important leadership lessons from which today's military professionals (commanders) can draw inspiration. His way of achieving results [4], [6]:

- 1) Strong Vision – Alexander managed to achieve that his vision became shared.
- 2) Creative strategy corresponding to the strength of the enemy – he was a brilliant strategist. He adjusted his strategy very quickly and creatively to his enemies' behavior.

P. Hurbišová and M. Davidová are with University of Defence, Kounicova 65, 662 10 Brno, Czech Republic (phone: +420734397827; e-mail: hurbisova@gmail.com, monika.davidova@unob.cz).

- 3) Good constellation of executive roles – Alexander's executive team was built on the different strengths of its members.
- 4) Walk the talk – Alexander set the example of excellence with his leadership style. He led his troops quite literally from the front.
- 5) Encourage innovation – He applied science in both its military and the administration.
- 6) Management of the importance and development of group identification – Alexander could speak so that others were motivated and inspired. He very frequently and skillfully used metaphors, analogies, stories, etc.
- 7) Encourage and support followers – Alexander knew how to encourage his people for their excellence in battle in ways that brought out greater excellence.
- 8) Invest in talent management – It was extremely visionary for his time. Alexander spent an extraordinary amount of resources on training and development. He not only trained his present troops but also looked to the future by developing the next generation.

During the twelve years of constant military campaign he defeated armies four and five times his size, leading his army of Macedonians across deserts and over 15,000 foot peaks in freezing weather, facing incredible hardships to unite the known world under one common vision. The basis of Alexander's success as a leader was his ability to inspire his men to think great things and then accomplish them with passion, enthusiasm, and commitment. This puts him as a great leader of all times. This puts him as a great leader of all times who inspired his men and gave them the much needed passion, enthusiasm, and commitment to do the same thing. Alexander was also adaptable as seen by his use of elephants in battles. He was a very confident and resourceful person [5]. Alexander the Great can serve as a valuable source of inspiration for military commanders and leaders.

#### *B. Approaches to Commander's Personality by Other Great Generals*

From everlasting, an emphasis is placed on the commanders' personality. In the Middle Ages, in connection with military discipline the commander's (lord's, ruler's) personality was being applied. Their participation in combat had become necessary because noblemen were not otherwise willing to obey during expeditions to commanders with less social inclusion than the lord or ruler. Otherwise, there was a loosening of discipline, disregard orders and no consistent procedure. The authority of the commander was not given only by social function, but had to be supported by command and personal skills, which often decided about the fate of the battle. Their moral fighting qualities (bravery, courage, heroism) consolidated a battle morale [7].

Significant personality in the period of Hussite wars is John Zizka of Trocnov<sup>1</sup> (c. 1360–1424), Czech general and Hussite leader, follower of Jan Hus and creator of military defensive

<sup>1</sup> K. Marx compared his importance to O. Cromwell (1599-1658); he organized army of a new type.

tactics based on the war wagon. He was one of the best generals of world history. In his life, he never lost a single battle and he was able to cope with even stronger enemy, and in situations that seemed hopeless. Masterfully knew how to use the terrain and adjust the battle tactics to his soldiers, who were often originally peasants. In terms of the military, it was an extraordinary personality. He demanded revolutionary discipline and discipline of all members of soldiers without distinction of social status, emphasis on the motivation to fight and moral values of combat fighters, the strict organization of training and regime of troops, patriotism, and faith in victory [7].

In Modern Times, Tsar Peter the Great (1672–1725) was the first Emperor of Russia and very inspirational military leader. In his order, he emphasized the assumptions and characteristics of commander: skills and talent, expertise and morally volitional qualities. According to him, the commander should be [7]: "...not only a very talented man, and brave, but also with good manners... His valor gives the enemy a fear, his skills encourages men to trust him... His good qualities arouse obedience, increasing his authority... and respect..."

When Peter found the inability or lack of knowledge among officers, he required from their superiors to put "higher to lower and lower to higher post". This should arouse the concern and efforts. In connection with the commander's characteristics there can be mention some aspects of the psychological characteristics of the Peter's personality. Regarding the type of thinking, he was a man of practical sense. He had a special fondness for all dangerous combat situations, which also increased his intellectual activity; he could control his negative emotions – fear. He had the unique ability to pay attention with great precision on different details and to solve the main problem of combat, politics etc. [7].

As interesting was also a thinking of Frederick II, known as Frederick the Great (1712–1786), who was the king of Prussia and unlike predecessors the educated military general. He required a differentiated approach of generals to officers and the ability to psychologically influence subordinates (ability to control themselves, suppress feelings, etc., because general (commander) is seen by whole army, which perceive his appearance, mood, gestures...). Ideas of Frederick the Great were not implemented rigorously in military practice. Authority and relationships were based mainly on pedantry and oppression [7].

Another very well educated military commander was Alexandr Vasiljevič Suvorov (1730–1800) who is also known for his innovative approach to the soldier's personality. Suvorov in his book "The Obligations of the Company Commander" states for example the following obligations: knowledge of subordinates' characteristics, meeting the needs of soldiers, the creation of heartfelt relationships, teaching soldiers what requires their service placement, etc. But the most he respected officer's personal example, which should be: "... an example of noble behavior, knowledge of service and its fulfillment, in obedience, do not let himself get swayed by the imprudence, he is especially demanding on himself..." Educational role of personal example Suvorov demonstrated

both on himself (in critical combat situations personally plunged into a struggle) and also on heroes of the past, from them the soldiers were critically supposed to take over the best. Suvorov stated: "Take the example from a hero of yore, observe him, follow him, straighten him, catch up with him and overtake him!" Suvorov's educational system counted with the psychological preparation of soldiers for combat. He developed the volitional side of the personality, higher emotions, certain qualities of thinking, emphasized the importance of transferring a distraction from fear and fatigue. E.g. in combat unexperienced soldiers were fleeing from the enemy; Suvorov rode up to them, and without a word of complaint, he praised them for elicitation of the enemy. This assessment of the situation changed sense of retreat, the soldiers got rid of the fear and acted again as the fighters. Suvorov was able to stridently analyze the situation, the results of his analytical and synthetic activity (judgments, plans and decisions) were remarkable and at the same time simple and clear. Suvorov had considerable ability for exact systematization of knowledge. In the intellectual area, he excelled in speed of orientation, judgement and problem solving. In all his speeches and activities there was a speed, vigour and mobility reflected [7].

The first emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) emphasized the ability of commanders to make decisions instantly and act quickly. He excelled in characteristics of thinking as independence, criticality, speed, and flexibility. Bonaparte proclaimed about himself: „My priority in the battle lies in the fact that I am able to think faster than others.” According to Napoleon, a man who did not show a care for the soldier's needs was not allowed to command<sup>2</sup> [7].

### III. PERSONALITY OF MILITARY PROFESSIONAL

Often quoted definition of personality in psychological textbooks was formulated by G. Allport in 1961 as “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought” [8]. According to Weinberg and Gould is the personality: “the characteristics or blend of characteristics that make a person unique” [9]. H. Piéron saw a personality in the unity of the intelligence, character, temperament and constitution [10]. However, these definitions are from the perspective of psychology. In everyday life, the term "personality" is understood somewhat differently. Normally, personality is attributed to the people who stand well above the others. They are the natural authorities and have achieved high social prestige. They may be statesmen, scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs. Of course, they may also be great generals and commanders as was after all pointed out in the previous chapter [11].

The personality of a man requires to be respected and appreciated in order to preserve her dignity. It is not easy to keep to this principle in a military environment. The

commander from his subordinates must require obedience and discipline, sometimes in contradiction with the focus of their personality. In some situations, this can lead to considerations on the need to break this personality, forcing someone to carry out something without inner consent, against his will. Some commanders not even consider the accuracy or correctness of such a procedure. To accomplish the task is ready to suppress his personality and that of their subordinates. Such extreme disrespect of personality is always negatively reflected in human behavior, the results of its activities, in social relations, deforms the personality. Assuming that the commander performs its educational duties well, then there is no need to break the personality of soldiers in crisis situations [12].

To enable the commander to command and lead the troops he must thoroughly know his subordinates. For individual work with military professionals, it is very important to understand their unique characteristics. The purpose of knowledge of military professionals lies in answers to these questions [11]:

- 1) What the real prerequisites of military professional are for obtaining military qualifications by predetermination and expertise.
- 2) What his character is like.
- 3) What his mental state and psychological resilience are like.
- 4) What his resistance to extreme psychophysical stress is like.
- 5) What his ability to live and work in groups, to adapt to the conditions of military service is like.

Getting to know the personality of a soldier cannot be a one-time act, but a long process of continuous learning about [11]. Military professionals are mainly characterized by [10]:

- 1) Their temperament.
- 2) Their physical fitness and performance, health and readiness to deploy their strength, hardiness, resistance.
- 3) Skills and abilities, art of coping with the intellectual and technical challenges in creative way in certain specific areas - fields, versatile skills, innovation and ideas.
- 4) The art of dealing with people, to establish contacts, to communicate, to integrate into social groups to assert their leadership, becoming their spokesman, entertain and stimulate their activity.
- 5) Character, moral and volitional qualities, directivity, beliefs, attitudes, and value orientation.

### IV. COMMANDER'S AUTHORITY

Hard to imagine any society without authority, i.e. without personalities, groups of people and societal institutions which have a decisive influence on other people, institutions and society [13]. Commander authority is based on the social responsibility of the commander for unit tasks fulfillment. It arises from his function of the objectives and personality qualities, his characteristics and abilities. It is not possible to command without authority and lead subordinates during deployment in action, when people's lives are often at stake. This implies that authority should be a means leading to a goal achievement - to establish firmly unified combat team [14].

<sup>2</sup> In 1802, he even ordered to General Caffarelli in the warrant, to visit the soldier and find out the reasons why he wanted to commit a suicide.

Based on efficacy authority may be formal and informal. Formal authority is based solely on societal entrustment, therefore, not supported by commander's qualities [13]. In the military, the commander has clearly defined his powers according to basic orders and regulations. Also he is aware that based on his integral command authority are all his subordinates (both direct and indirect) required to fully carry out their orders. Especially younger and newly recruited commanders tend to rely completely on their power arising from the work position; they are less concerned with the reactions of subordinates. Subordinates then may try to circumvent them. Therefore, an integral part of formal authority is the actual – informal authority which is based on societal entrustment and thus merges outstanding personality traits of commander [15].

#### *A. Extreme Types of Authority*

In practice, there are various methods of authority consolidation and development, which can essentially be distinguished on the autocratic (commander decides everything alone and relies solely on his own information) and democratic or participative style of leading (commander lets subordinates to express their opinions). However, these methods are extreme cases and its consequences undermine the authority of commanders. These include [16]:

- 1) Oppression and pedantry – excessive use of power, coming up with extraordinary and purposeless work, meticulous insistence on useless trifles and actually irrelevant details. In its consequences raises intractability of soldiers, crafty behavior or diffidence and fear.
- 2) Distance from subordinates, arrogance – usually leads to the formal tasks fulfillment by soldiers, decrease in group and individual activities and the necessity to introduce stronger control measures.
- 3) Moralizing, mentoring – presented by excess of preaching, pretense of infallibility and high commander's morals. Raises resistance particularly in the area of attitudes and beliefs, so even good ideas are not accepted and implemented by soldiers.
- 4) Soft-hearted – artificial avoidance of all conflicts or seeking for the path of least resistance. The unit is thus not commanded, leads to disorganization and dominance of group standards of behavior and conduct. The consequence is that the soldiers fail in challenging tasks.
- 5) Bribery, obtaining promises for obedience, reliefs in training, rewards – analogous consequences as in the previous point.
- 6) Hiding behind other authority (behind the authority of senior commanders, group) – emphasizing formal sources of authority in the absence of positive commander's qualities, possibly reevaluation of the meaning and place of military collectives. This may result in accepting the higher functions by a team of soldiers than they are entitled. Furthermore, circumvention of commander is taking place in solving important issues and appears incorrect direction of soldiers' activity.

#### *B. Improvements of Commander's Authority and Subordinates' Initiative and Activities*

Commander's authority and subordinates' initiative and activities improvement may be supported by [13]:

- 1) The possibility that subordinates could participate in the forthcoming decisions.
- 2) Constant awareness of subordinates about matters which concern them.
- 3) Situation elucidation and the intentions of commanders.
- 4) Listening to subordinates' opinions by commander.
- 5) Respecting justified criticisms and comments.
- 6) Incitement of subordinates to submission of new ideas.
- 7) Implementation of submitted proposals.
- 8) Ability to carry out the work in a way that the subordinates themselves deem as most appropriate.
- 9) Release of austerity in the mutual behavior.
- 10) Effort to make commander's own role to be properly understood by his subordinates.

The commander must be able to correctly assess in what situation he should ask the subordinates for cooperation in problem solving, about their opinions and advices, etc. The most serious is always a sense of purpose and action. The means to achieve the goals and methods of activity may differ. Defining the objectives of the action is always a task for the commander, but in other matters, it might be possible that the subordinates would be involved in solving. This not only strengthens the authority of commanders, but also forms the command characteristics [13].

#### V. GOOD VS BAD LEADERSHIP AND COMMAND

To obtain informal authority and assert themselves as a good commander and leader of the military professionals should follow several recommendations. Here are mentioned a several of the wide range. First rule is to settle on a worthy goal. In the military, commanders do not always get to choose their objectives, but they should advocate vehemently for objectives that are worthy the soldiers' efforts and risks. Their subordinates need to know that their superiors are even more committed to the objective than they are [17]. Commanders should listen to their subordinates, co-workers, and superiors – addressing their complaints, suggestions, concerns, and personal issues at work [18]. Further to coach people when necessary to raise them to a higher standard. Optimism is a force multiplier. A team will not believe it succeed unless its leader believes it. So, acknowledge challenges and setbacks, but keep them in perspective. Unless commander is convinced that his goal is unattainable, he should not let discouragement reign. Communication belongs to the most important tools which commanders have, so if they are not communicating, they are failing. Commanders should be able to admit their mistakes. Even if their team makes a mistake, as a commander it is his mistake. Again, there is a possibility to learn from the history [17].

According to another great military generals in history, commanders (leaders) should [19]:

- “Trust in their core team” (General G. Washington, 1732–1799),
- “Never compromise” (General-in-Chief W. Scott, 1786–1866),
- “Respect their team” (General R. E. Lee, 1807–1870),
- “Do not give up!” (General U. S. Grant, 1822–1885),
- “Help their team to achieve greatness!” (General G. S. Patton, 1885–1945),
- “Stay positive!” (Lieutenant General L. B. “Chesty” Puller, 1898–1971),
- “Create a cooperative culture!” (General D. D. Eisenhower, 1890–1969);
- and further “Keep everyone motivated!” (Lieutenant Commander, D. “Mush” Morton 1907–1943);
- “Recognize their hard workers!” (Rear Admiral E. B. Fluckey, 1913–2007).

The military, like everywhere else has great commanders and leaders, and poor ones. Ineffective commanders are with poor character, lack of performance, poor communication skills, self-serving nature, no flexibility, lack of focus and follow-through. They have a problem with being goal-oriented and following a vision [20]. And many others, such as mentioned in subchapter dedicated to extreme types of authority.

## VI. CONCLUSION

History proves that great leaders and commanders are not born but made. Leadership is not a privilege of one class. The article stated that Alexander the Great, John Zizka of Trocnov, Peter the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte and others – none of them was born as a leader or commander. They were great leaders and commanders in one person as they were good at what they did. They had a good training and confidence that comes from knowledge. Their profound professional and general knowledge associated with the great personal attention to their subordinates. They all were aware that people can be led only if they wish to be led, and these generals truly did all that was in their power to ignite this desire in their men. This article is intended to inspire how to be a good commander and be perceived by subordinates as a leader by means of given lessons of great generals of our history and by present approach to commander’s personality, his authority and command and leadership style.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The contribution was created under the support of the project at University of Defence, Faculty of Military Leadership in Brno with the ID code SV13-FEM-K109-03-DAV: “Education and Development of Crisis Managers in the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic”. And with the contribution of project with ID code PRO PASVŘ2012: “Advanced automated command and control system”, under the sub-task “Application of Crew Resource Management to the advanced automated command and control system.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bacal & Associates. *Leadership Resource Center. Society pushes us to confuse commanding with leading*. 2015. Available at: <http://leadertoday.org/faq/mistakescommanding.htm>.
- [2] G. Sewell. Emotional intelligence and the army leadership requirements model. In *Military Review*, pp. 93–98. Nov.-Dec. 2009. Available at: [http://www.defence.gov.au/ADC/Docs/CDLE/CDLE\\_120329\\_SewellGF2009EmotionalIntelligenceandtheArmyLeadershipReqsModel.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/ADC/Docs/CDLE/CDLE_120329_SewellGF2009EmotionalIntelligenceandtheArmyLeadershipReqsModel.pdf).
- [3] N. Copeland. *Psychologie pro důstojníka*. Prague: Klement Gottwald Military Political Academy, 1964, pp. 54-55.
- [4] Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries. *11 leadership lessons from Alexander the Great*. 2014. Available at: <http://knowledge.insead.edu/blog/insead-blog/11-leadership-lessons-from-alexander-the-great-3697>.
- [5] Team Trek. *Alexander the Great and visionary leadership*. 2005. Available at: <http://www.teamtrek.com/content/journal/200507.PDF>.
- [6] M. Hájek. *Poučení z leadership Alexandra Velikého*. 2010. Available at: <http://www.vedeme.cz/pro-vedeni/inspirace/465-poucení-alexandr-veliký.html>.
- [7] V. Vavrečka. and M. Vavrečková. *Kapitoly z dějin vojenské pedagogiky*. Brno: Vojenská akademie Antonína Zápotockého, 1967, pp. 45-156.
- [8] V. Směkal. *Pozvání do psychologie osobnosti: člověk v zrcadlení vědomí a jednání*. 3rd ed., Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2009, pp. 24-25.
- [9] S. A. McLeod, *Theories of Personality*. 2014. Available at: [www.simplypsychology.org/personality-theories.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/personality-theories.html)
- [10] P. Hartl, and H. Hartlová H. *Velký psychologický slovník*. 4th ed., Praha: Portál, 2010, p. 373.
- [11] F. Černoch, O. Pífil, and A. Velehradský. *Vybrané kapitoly z vojenské psychologie a pedagogiky. Metodická příručka pro učitele předmětu vojenské psychologie a pedagogiky v poddůstojnických školách*. Praha: MAGNET-PRESS s.p., 1991, pp.17-24.
- [12] O. Pífil, and A. Velehradský. *Psychologie a pedagogika v sociálním řízení vojsk*. Praha: Magnet-Press, 1993, pp. 37-38.
- [13] O. Havelka. *Jak vychovávat, učit a vést: studijní materiály pro žáky poddůstojnických škol a škol pro důstojníky v záloze*. 2nd ed. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1970, pp. 48-55.
- [14] B. Buchar, O. Pífil. *Vojenská pedagogika: vybrané kapitoly z teorie výchovy, vyučování a výcviku v československých ozbrojených silách*. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1965, p. 403.
- [15] M. Mašlej, V. Stodůlka, and B. Brechta, “Autorita velitele (řídícího pracovníka) v profesionální AČR”, *Military Review*, vol. 16 (48), no. 1, pp. 153-159, Jan. 2007.
- [16] L. Onderka. *Metodická příručka pro učitele kursů vybraných otázek z pedagogiky a psychologie v poddůstojnických školách a školách pro důstojníky v záloze*. 1st ed. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1970, pp. 26-53.
- [17] B. Murphy. *23 Things Great Leaders Always Do*. 2014. Available at: <http://www.inc.com/bill-murphy-jr/23-things-great-leaders-always-do.html>.
- [18] B. Simonton. *Good vs Bad Leadership*. 2015. Available at: <http://bensimonton.com/good-vs-bad-leadership/>.
- [19] K. Ohngren. *10 Lessons from America’s Greatest Military Leaders*. 2011. Available at: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/slideshow/220667>.
- [20] M. Mike. *12 Ways to Spot Ineffective Leadership*. 2011. Available at: <http://www.n2growth.com/blog/6-traits-of-ineffective-leaders/>.