

Leadership in the Polish Armed Forces From Idea to Practice

By **Captain (Navy) Piotr Gawliczek** and **Lieutenant Colonel Leszek Kanarski***

In the past, the Polish Armed Forces have not focused on how a leader should behave. The leaders were often created by stereotypes and were associated with autocratic activities of superiors, and leadership was also based on the principles of one-way communication aimed at maximizing profits. The leaders didn't care about the social losses of their subordinates. Such an image of leadership is for many people, especially today, not encouraging and not worthy of following, even in situations where it is possible to choose one's followers. Furthermore, it is not the desired model of

leadership for a modern force that is struggling for its proper place in the structures of a democratic state, and at the same time is trying to optimise its own possibilities for collective activities and coalition cooperation, for example during joint operations.

The Polish Leadership Concept touches upon the basic foundations of, and tendencies in the shaping of modern educational and training forms, and a practice of command. It is also the synthesis of our national approaches, designed with the military leader in mind.

Areas of interest for leadership in the Polish Armed Forces

We are convinced that the necessity of having a modern leadership, as far as NATO is concerned, does not have its only source in the offices of superiors, lecture rooms or in the minds of theorists and researchers. It also appears in the practice of training and military activities - in circumstances of enlarged risks and in situations in which usual rules of formal subordination are not sufficient.

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It is the result of searching for more socially effective forms of influence on subordinates, and simultaneously ensuring the highest reliability.¹ Current interest in leadership in the Armed Forces is also due to other developments, including:

- Changes of the present world and changed tasks for the national Armed Forces. Recent experiences – over the last decade – show that if the Armed Forces are deployed to support political aims, then the only effective and coherent way is through the joint forces,

- A wider range of tasks for the Armed Forces, especially tasks connected to the aspect of MOOTW (Military Operations Other Than War),

- Predictions related to the character of and vision on future conflicts and subsequent operations, as well as the expectations regarding competence of the future commanders. In future operations the Armed Forces are not supposed to be gathered along the lines, operations will have a “non-linear” dimension, and missions will be executed simultaneously in all areas of operations (the theatre of war),

- Emerging signs, from the middle of the 1970s, confirming the crisis within the command system, which is historically based on formalization and autocratic procedures of relations between the leader and the subordinate,

- A current need for “step by step” reduction of the Armed Forces, and the need for efficient re-conversion of personnel being retired,

- Creation of an attractive military image of contemporary commanders (leaders), not only efficient, but also effective from the social point of view.

One can say, that these points constitute a wide framework of efforts in the field of redefining leadership, which started a few years ago in the Polish Armed Forces.

Ever since, the *heart of leadership* in our Armed Forces gains more and more interest of the practitioners.² Research concerning the educational concept for the military system of different levels and programs of instruction are taking place.³

As far as the first phase of this research, at the beginning of the 1990s, is concerned, the special value of developing an interest in this problem was shown by the visits of our representatives to the training centres, schools and academies of other NATO member-states (among others, the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, and France). This was especially interesting for officers from the highest organizational levels of schools, academies, staffs, and the Ministry of Defence.¹ We had the opportunity to join and assess educational and training programs that were implemented at the institutions, and as a result we were able to prepare analyses on how we should educate and train our Armed Forces, especially at the National Defence University. The institutions that we visited were situated in Europe as well as in the U.S.A.

Furthermore, professional soldiers (mostly officers) had the possibility to participate in various leadership courses organized by the educational and training centres of the Armed Forces of the

NATO member-countries. The experience they gained, supported by analyses of educational and training programmes, manuals, and periodicals proved our conviction regarding several aspects:

1. Acquiring leadership has become a very important undertaking in many Armed Forces, mostly in the West. It requires intensive education and training specifically aimed at increasing the competence of commanders beyond their known boundaries.

2. The concept of leadership is very similar in most of western Armed Forces, even though each country has specific approaches due to its national traditions and experiences.

3. Implementation of the leadership concept takes place at every level of the educational and training process; however, the impact of this implementation on the lower levels of the chain of command can be identified as the most direct.

4. In many countries, special education and training structures were prepared for the implementation of leadership programmes either for the entire Armed

Forces (e.g. Denmark and Germany), for components of the Armed Forces (e.g. the United States and the Netherlands), for a specific level of military education (e.g. officers, non-commissioned officers), or for specific types of education (in many Armed Forces, as separate courses, programmes, and profiles).

Based on the assumptions mentioned above and the gained experience we managed to develop a basic foundation for the concept of leadership in the Polish Armed Forces. We have to mention that the Armed Forces have been dealing with the problems of leadership for several years. At that time Poland was not a member of NATO. A special interest in developing the concept of leadership stemmed from the on-going developments mentioned above. In searching (mainly in the NDU⁵) for the Polish concept we identified, among other things:

- Examples of leadership from the history of the Polish Armed Forces,
- Our comprehension and essence of leadership, also theoretical foundations,

- Necessary leadership traits on each level of the organizational structure of the Armed Forces,

- Leadership qualities of commanders and possibilities for developments,

- Stages of implementation of the leadership concept in the Polish Armed Forces.

These aspects will be discussed later in this article.

Basic assumptions of the leadership concept in the Polish Armed Forces

Leadership and each of its components are expressed by the deeds of many national heroes that are more or less known. Addressing the glorious tradition, famous acts, and examples enables us to prepare an education that is not just an empty shell, a theoretical set of leadership traits, and procedures of efficient activities. It is a lively and dynamic set of examples of leadership.

We assume that the tradition of the Polish Armed Forces of its historical fig-

ures, description of historical context, features and personal values, and facts could testify the dimension of leadership. This aspect also includes the legacy of the military institutions and units of the Polish Armed Forces,⁶ named after national heroes, mostly qualified for the leaders.⁷

Leadership as a notion in the context of the Polish Armed Forces has a long and fruitful tradition, including in the fights for independence, not only in Poland but also in foreign countries. This is illustrated by a famous proverb in Poland: "For your and our freedom".

Now let us explain what our present perception of leadership is. We define it as the ability to get subordinates to accomplish a specified mission (goal). Until recently leadership was associated with domination in spontaneous (non-formal) groups, whereas the command was connected with a position in the institutional (formal) structure. For many years the leadership in Poland was identified as the same concept as command. One used them as synonyms, or at least it was assumed

that the concept of command also dealt with leadership. In both cases, one associated them with rank and social position.

The notion of organizational leadership within groups is determined especially by two elements: the ability for efficient and common realization of tasks and the gift of gaining followers. We can state that the notion of leadership is transforming from being a synonym of command to the characteristic of the command's efficiency and its social effectiveness. It becomes one of the most important skills, predisposition, or features, which are perceived and desired in the sphere of command. The essence of leadership can be described as follows:

- It is a distinguishing combination of skills of every person in the Armed Forces,
- It can be both of formal character, while connected with the activities of commanders, and of informal character, when characterizing abilities of each person to get support by exerting the leadership skills,

- It facilitates command, when it is connected to the character and competence of the leader, but on the other hand, it can impede command when applied to certain relations outside the formal structure of organization,

- It is dynamic and can be measured by the number of real or potential supporters.

As far as a better understanding of the notion of leadership in the Armed Forces is concerned, we can address two approaches dealing with organizational leadership: the transactional theory and the transformational theory.⁸ The first approach can serve as a preliminary base that we have to "keep in mind", whereas second approach can be the standard determinant of the relations between the superiors and their subordinates, or the leader and his followers.

In the Polish Armed Forces, in spite of increased awareness of a necessity to develop the leaders' competence, we are aware that leadership differs at each level of the organizational structure of the

Armed Forces. We assume that leadership takes place on three levels (Figure 1):

- Level one – direct leadership (influence towards individuals),
- Level two – leadership in small groups (direct and indirect influences),
- Level three – organizational leadership (direct, indirect and structural influence).

As far as the lowest level of command is concerned (level 1), this deals with leadership towards the individuals, “face to face” relations, joint realization of missions, and burden sharing. At this level

of leadership, skills and experiences are more important than theoretical knowledge. It is characterized by: skilfully concentrating subordinates around a common goal, providing a vision of success, instructing, coaching, and helping. It also embraces the necessity of joint work and the ability of an optimal utilization of individual’s possibilities.

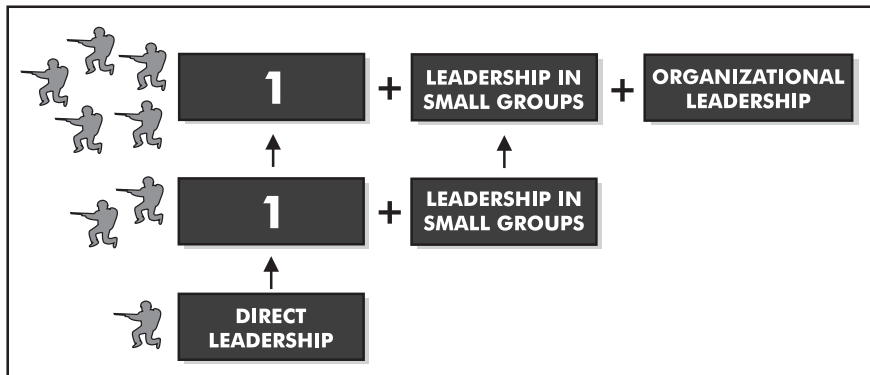
As far as the middle level of command is concerned (level 2), we have to deal with leadership towards small groups or teams where indirect and direct influences take

place. It is focused, on the one hand, on a creation of common vision of the coordinated activities and, on the other hand, on making efficient working groups (task teams).

The upper level of organizational leadership (level 3), contains both macro and micro dimensions: it has both a direct, an indirect, and an organizational influence. Its highest goal is based on the development and presentation of an organizational vision. It is also creation of a value system, modelling and adapting of structures, co-ordination of activities, and cooperation of structures.

For the commander, the interaction of leadership competences on each level is the reason for a steady development. Simultaneously, it is also the source of necessity to develop specific programmes for applying the leadership at each level of the organizational structure of the Armed Forces. It also gives a chance for preparing an efficient selection mechanism for prospective commanders and it facilitates the estimations of leadership competence on each level.

Figure 1 – Three levels of leadership



Characterization of selected elements of leadership competence of commanders and possibilities for development

Leadership requires a combination of experience, knowledge, and skills, accompanied by the commander's own competence, to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

As far as the important aspects of dealing with the development of leadership are concerned, we can enumerate, for example, the following: knowledge, skills, predispositions and some indispensable abilities: to get followers, to understand their characters and needs, to influence individuals and groups, to communicate verbal and non verbal, to create and develop teams, to work jointly and cooperate, to solve individual and joint problems, to develop and communicate visions, and to behave properly in crisis situations.

Leadership is also a combination of predisposition, knowledge, skills and ex-

perience, which can be applied to the principles of teaching, and also to other practices. It is possible to develop, to modify and to shape leadership. The inborn talent is, just like in case of other capabilities, an important asset, but not a singular determinant of what we call the process "to get the followers".

A search for and the development of the leadership predisposition of the commanders and of the educational-training system should be extended according to the needs stemming from each organizational level of the Armed Forces. Leadership cannot be learned and developed only by using traditional form of lectures or seminars. In such case we are talking only "about leadership", which is important only from the perspective of preliminary touching the idea, but is of no value for practicing command. The only solution is to meet the expectations of the patricians as well as to educate and train "towards leadership". They should be based upon acquiring, confirming and developing experiences, and the procedures of activities and skills.

As means to achieve these objectives, and the number of implied tasks with regard to leadership in the Polish Armed Forces, we can address among other things: popularisation of the idea of leadership, agreement on the principles and definitions, development of a detailed education and training concept for the Polish Armed Forces and institutions.

We are convinced that there is a need for joint discussion and especially cooperation related to the concepts and experiences from the different NATO countries. From our perspective such cooperation is important, because it would give us the possibility to discuss and exchange experiences with other countries which have greater traditions. But we must be aware that we are having a common future while working together in the NATO or EU framework. Cooperation is also important because it could refer to:

- Activities in an international framework (the examples are: the Gulf War, situation in Bosnia, in Kosovo);
- Activities in multinational task groups and forces (from the Polish perspective:

Multinational Corps North East MC NE in Szczecin, also multinational brigades and battalions);

- Needs that are connected with the future staff structures dealing with joint operations (Combined Joint Task Force) including aspects of Civil Military Co-operation - CIMIC.

Implementation of the leadership idea at the NDU

Above all, as far as the implementation of the leadership idea in the Polish Armed Forces is concerned, we must underline the activities that are taking place at the National Defence University, Warsaw⁹. We could divide our considerations into three groups: 1) objectives connected with the background of educational system, 2) current activities, and 3) intentions for the future.

In spite of the increased conviction of the necessity of developing leadership competence, we are aware that the leadership differs at each level of organizational structure. This is of special importance for us, because we are able to formulate

our intentions towards specific educational groups. For example, as far as academic personnel and students are concerned, we want to teach them and stress the essence of leadership. However, only using traditional forms of lectures or seminars is not adequate to develop this process. If this is the case our considerations are focused only on talking “about leadership”, what is important from the perspective of preliminary touching the idea, but not very important for practising the command. We would like to train and educate all of our officers “towards leadership”, and this area should be based on acquiring, confirming and developing experiences, and the procedures of activities and skills.

We are fully aware that in the 21st century, the principles of “education towards leadership” are of special importance, and it is not only the set of functions or principles. On the contrary, the future battlefield commanders should be able to respond actively to the emerging threats while adjusting their leadership skills to a given situation.

As far as the students of various forms of education are concerned, we want them to develop the knowledge of leadership, skills and abilities especially by carefully preparing training and exercises.

A special task for so called “senior” officers (but not only!) is to arm them with the ability to spot the leaders among a group or a team. On the other hand, such activities also deal with the understanding of leadership predispositions of the students.

Reaching this point of the article, we would like to ask an important question, often raised by the NDU personnel: “Is it possible to teach leadership”? We, however, have the opinion that it would be better to ask the question “How is it possible to teach leadership”? The answer is not easily found because of many prejudices related to commanders-posts and charisma stemming from them.

Let us proceed to the second part of the considerations that are related to our current activities. First of all we must admit, that the *heart of leadership* in our military environment gains more and more

interest of the ones who practise leadership. In order to achieve these objectives and number of implied tasks, as far as leadership in the National Defence University is concerned, we can address the popularisation of the leadership idea and the development of a detailed education and training concept for the Polish Armed Forces and its institutions. It is also a review of the structure of the programmes for shaping leadership on each level, group and structure. It is important to add that in November 2001, the NDU hosted a two-day conference "Theory and practice of leadership at the scope of educational system". Military and civilian experts discussed many problems related to the field of management and leadership.

Research and projects concerning the educational concept are also taking place. At the moment a dissertation thesis is being prepared at the NDU, and it relates directly to the problems of developing a leadership education, especially in the context of combined and joint operations. Probably next year, it will be

possible to present preliminary results of this scientific approach to leadership.

As far as the third item - the intentions - is concerned, we can mention a few examples. The base for searching and developing the leadership predisposition of commanders, educational-training system will be extended, due to the needs stemming from each organizational level of the armed forces. It will be based on such forms of joint activities as: seminars, conferences, lectures, workshops, commanding exercises, and simulations. Also intellectual and physical training should facilitate the recognition of personal possibilities and limitations.

It is the idea to establish, within the NDU structure, a Centre of Leadership, as the leading institution regarding the development of leadership in the Polish Armed Forces. The aim is to give the personnel and students a possibility for better knowledge of educational and training processes in the armed forces, service components, centres and schools.

Starting with the current academic year we are going to introduce specialized

courses in leadership, for the duration of 20 lessons, for the students of Masters' studies and the most important postgraduate course for Polish officers at the Operational-Strategic level. It is also worth mentioning that in the nearest future we are going to inaugurate, after a few years break, specialized courses in pedagogy for commanders of a battalion, regiment and brigade level. The important part of the educational programme deals with the development of leadership skills and social competences.

The National Defence University is, at present, an important educational centre in the field of Polish military science and is a leading force behind the development of leadership. We are convinced that in the near future it will become the main centre to provide education and training on leadership from the Polish (or common) perspective.

Summing up the considerations we would like to underline that in the Polish considerations in relation to the problem of leadership we must also take into account the fact that at present the condi-

tions connected with NATO and future EU membership will determine that we in principle will act in a multinational dimension. Analyses concerning the achievements in current conflicts confirm that they have never been realized exclusively by one actor, for example by the Polish Armed Forces. In different phases and different range, the organizations and non-military institutions also participated. Therefore the problem of leadership exceeds the issue of leadership of the Armed Forces and the ethos of "leadership" expands beyond the pure military realm.

¹ See i.e.: P. E. Blockwell, G. J. Bozek, Leadership for the New Millennium, /in/ Military Review, May - June 1998; W. Kaczmarek and Z. Scibiorek, "Future war - which one?" Warsaw 1995. (Przyszła wojna - jaka?, Warszawa 1995); L. Kanarski and J. Swiniarski, „Changes in the way of thinking in the armed forces”, Warsaw 1997. (Przemiany myślenia w wojsku, Warszawa 1997; M. Wiatr, „Between strategy and tactics”, Torun 1999. (Miedzy strategia a taktyka, Torun 1999)

² For example, in 1997 the international seminar was organized. It touched upon selected problems of the prospective Polish accession to NATO,

among other things the aspects of leadership in the armed forces. See: "Citizen's education and information activity in the Polish Armed Forces in face of the integration with NATO", Warsaw, 1997. (Edukacja obywatelska i dzialalnosc informacyjna w wojsku wobec perspektyw integracji z NATO, Warszawa 1997)

³ A. Balasiewicz and W. Chojnacki, „The fundamentals of preparations of the educational programs in the face of integration with NATO”, Warsaw 1997. (Podstawy projektowania programow ksztalcenia w perspektywie integracji z NATO, Warszawa, 1997).

⁴ L. Kanarski and B. Rokicki and J. Swiniarski, „Personal and structural security in the face of challenges posed by contemporary world”, Warsaw, 2000. (Bezpieczenstwo personalne i strukturalne wobec wyzwan wspolczesnego swiata, Warszawa 2000).

⁵ B. Szulc, "Possibilities of the implementation of NATO leadership concept in the Polish Army", Warsaw, 2000, (Mozliwosci zastosowania koncepcji przywodztwa NATO w Wojskach Ladowych RP, Warszawa 2000).

⁶ See: "Outstanding commanders. Famous citizens", special edition of *Military and education*, Warsaw 1993. (Wybitni dowodcy. Slawni obywatele, „Wojsko i wychowanie”, dodatek specjalny, Warszawa 1993).

⁷ See: J. Cieciera and D. Radziwillowicz and J. Slipiec and W. J. Wysocki, A. Cz. Zak „Patrons of contemporary military units of the Polish Armed Forces”, Warsaw 1998. (Patroni wspolczesnych jednostek Wojska Polskiego, Warszawa, 1998)

⁸ L. Kanarski and R. Peksa and A. Zak, „Military leadership”, Warsaw 1997 (Przywodztwo wojskowe, Warszawa 1997)

⁹ See: L. Balcerowicz, P. Gawliczek, L. Kanarski, "The perspective of the leadership education at the National Defence University", presentation delivered by Major General Boleslaw Balcerowicz (Commandant-Rector of the NDU, Warsaw) during Conference of Commandants held at NATO Defence College Rome on the 21st of June 2002