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TASK AND COMPETENCE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMANDING OFFICERS BEGINNING THEIR SERVICE IN MILITARY UNITS AND SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the most important aspects of task and competence effectiveness of future commanding officers, who must be professionally prepared to assume their first official position – platoon commander. This is important due to the fact that only high-class commanders are capable of preparing their soldiers and subunits in accordance with their battle-field role both in times of peace, as well as when peace is threatened (in times of crisis or war). The article constitutes an attempt at identifying the above, as well as significant problems which are related to the task and competence effectiveness of commanding officers.

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Ambition and professionalism are measured by one's approach to performing one's duties, which are of significant import for the **social world**¹ and

¹ "The *Social World* is composed of collective actions, performed in the context of social communication via particular symbols; it manifests in *actions*, based on which *individu-*

the intricate, socially constructed **security environment** within. While this claim may appear obvious, it becomes uniquely important in the context of performing those duties by professional soldiers.

Every reasonable professional wants to perform his or her duties to the best degree possible. The article pertains to the role of military university graduates – future **commanding officers** who, after being promoted to officer, are appointed to military units to assume their first leadership position – that of platoon commander.

This breakthrough moment marks the beginning of their military careers, as well as constituting the finale of their five years of study at officer schools. Preparing officer candidates by imparting appropriate values and skills has been the main challenge for military instructors for as long as military education has existed. Instructors and teachers have always been aware of the fact that selecting appropriate training methods, materials and intensity directly impacts the quality of service of second lieutenants assuming their first leadership position.

What should be done from the moment of the professional soldier (cadet) candidate enlisting? What skills should the graduates be equipped with and what values should be imparted onto them in order to train them properly (mould their personality), so that they perform their duties and tasks in a professional manner?

The answer to these questions is not as simple as it would seem. Numerous systemic and process-related factors play a role here. In order for an officer to be professionally prepared to effectively perform his role as a commander of military units, he must possess appropriate competences backed by necessary knowledge (general, professional and specialist),

al security subjects negotiate the rules of social interactions, social roles, language, methods of communication; the research concerning the *Social World*, based on the works of Edmund Husserl and implemented in Alfred Schütz's sociology developed by his continuators, does not treat the *Social World* as an objective *entity* – it is a *social construct*" source: J. Piwowarski, *Transdyscyplinarna istota kultury bezpieczeństwa narodowego*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej w Słupsku, Słupsk 2016, p. 330, 441; Cf. A. Schütz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1967; A. E. Clarke, *Social Worlds/Arenas Theory as Organizational Theory*, [in:] *Social Organization and Social Process: Essays in Honor of Anselm Strauss*, D. Maines (ed.), New York 1991, p. 119–158; A. Kasperczyk, *Zastosowanie koncepcji społecznych światów w badaniach empirycznych*, [in:] *Konstruowanie jaźni i społeczeństwa: Europejskie warianty interakcjonizmu symbolicznego*, E. Hałas, K. T. Konecki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2005.

skills (to a varying degree, both specialist and methodological). He should acquire proper certifications, often only available as part of a given specialisation, as well as requiring an appropriate level of security clearance and knowledge of certain equipment or machines.

It is also very important to properly shape the personality of commanding officers, taking into account the entire personality spectrum, which is indispensable to working as a professional soldier.

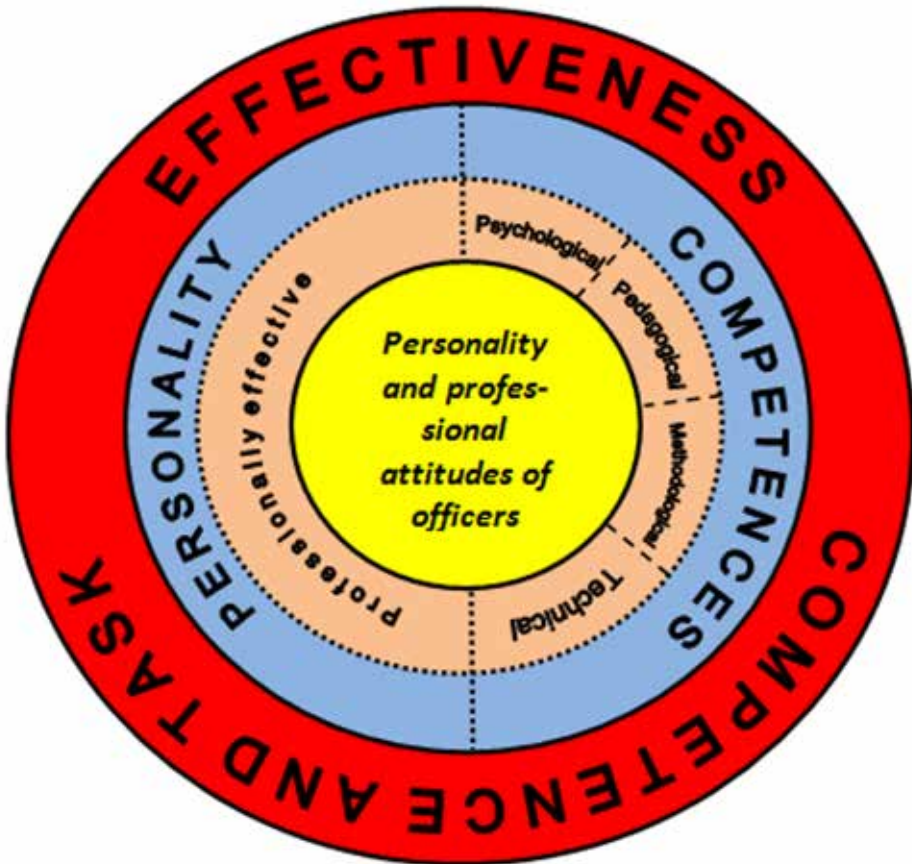
In light of the above, the article points towards only the most important aspects related to the *task and competence effectiveness of commanding officers* in their first military positions. However, it is important to remember that, in addition to the problems and matters related to the competences and personality of future commanding officers described in this article, the time which future officers spend studying should be approached holistically. It is during that time that, in accordance with the curriculum, with the help of appropriate study and training materials, as well as coordinated command and specialist internships, military students acquire the necessary competences. In addition to the above, the entirety of pedagogical activity, aimed at shaping the personalities of military university graduates, is among the most important parts of the process.

Today, in the 21st century, identifying the personality and professional traits of graduates of not only the Land Forces Military Academy, but any other military school as well, is far from simple. This is why this paper focuses on the most numerous type of Armed Forces, the Land Forces.

Meeting the expectations of employers, which commanders of land units undoubtedly are, is also complex and ambiguous – especially in a world so influenced by civilizational, technological and geopolitical progress.

The above indicates that the task and competence effectiveness of potential commanders (graduates of the Land Forces Academy) in their first military position should be analysed based on two base categories – personality and competences. At this point, one could assume that “... *a commanding officer whose personality is fully-formed and who is lacking in professional competences is defective, and the same applies in reverse – highly-competent officers without the expected (fully-formed) personality are also defective...*”. This is demonstrated by Fig. 1.

FIG. 1 COMMANDING OFFICER TASK AND COMPETENCE EFFECTIVENESS MODEL



Source: authors' own work

When analysing the professional training of commanding officers to perform duties as part of a military unit, it is important to remember the “professional roles” they should be prepared for in order to best perform their appointed tasks.

Fig. 2 demonstrates the fundamental tasks for which every commanding officer should be prepared (as a commander, educator and trainer) if he is to be perceived as both a professional and an unquestionable exemplar by his superiors, subordinates and peers. In this regard, i.e. commanding

officers identifying with their assigned roles, it is important to mention their ability to be a:

- **citizen of the country:** [...] with a well-founded patriotic and defence awareness, as well as strong educational ambitions, prepared to live an active life and perform public functions;
- **patriot:** [...] attached to his homeland, in solidarity and identifying with the history, traditions and culture of his own nation, cultivating the traditions of the Polish military [...];
- **commander:** [...] with well-formed officer traits, possessing the appropriate knowledge and command skills, ensuring effective leadership [...];
- **leader:** [...] able to convince his team to assume appropriate attitudes and value systems, able to inspire the team members to perform their assigned social roles [...];
- **military specialist:** [...] possessing high qualifications and competences necessary in their role as an expert, commander and mentor in their chosen military specialisation [...];
- **organiser of the subunit's training process:** [...] possessing, strong teaching skills with regard to training subordinate soldiers [...];
- **person able to self-improve:** [...] who understands the need to constantly expand their knowledge and social competences, as well as the need to never stop learning [...];
- **person prepared to function in national and international structures:** [...] as regards both national and international (macroscale) military missions and operations [...].

Fig. 3 illustrates the fundamental tasks of commanding officers as commanders-pedagogues and trainers as part of the pedagogical and training process in military units. These tasks are reflected in the types of commanding officer activities related to his subordinates, which include:

- **command activity**, as part of which commanding officers are assigned soldiers which they command, assign tasks to, as well as acting as their direct superior and disciplinary officer;
- **pedagogical activity**, which should shape the personalities of soldiers as necessary, with respect to the personal and professional traits expect-

ed of military school graduates – future commanding officers, prepared to perform this type of activity targeted at their subordinates;

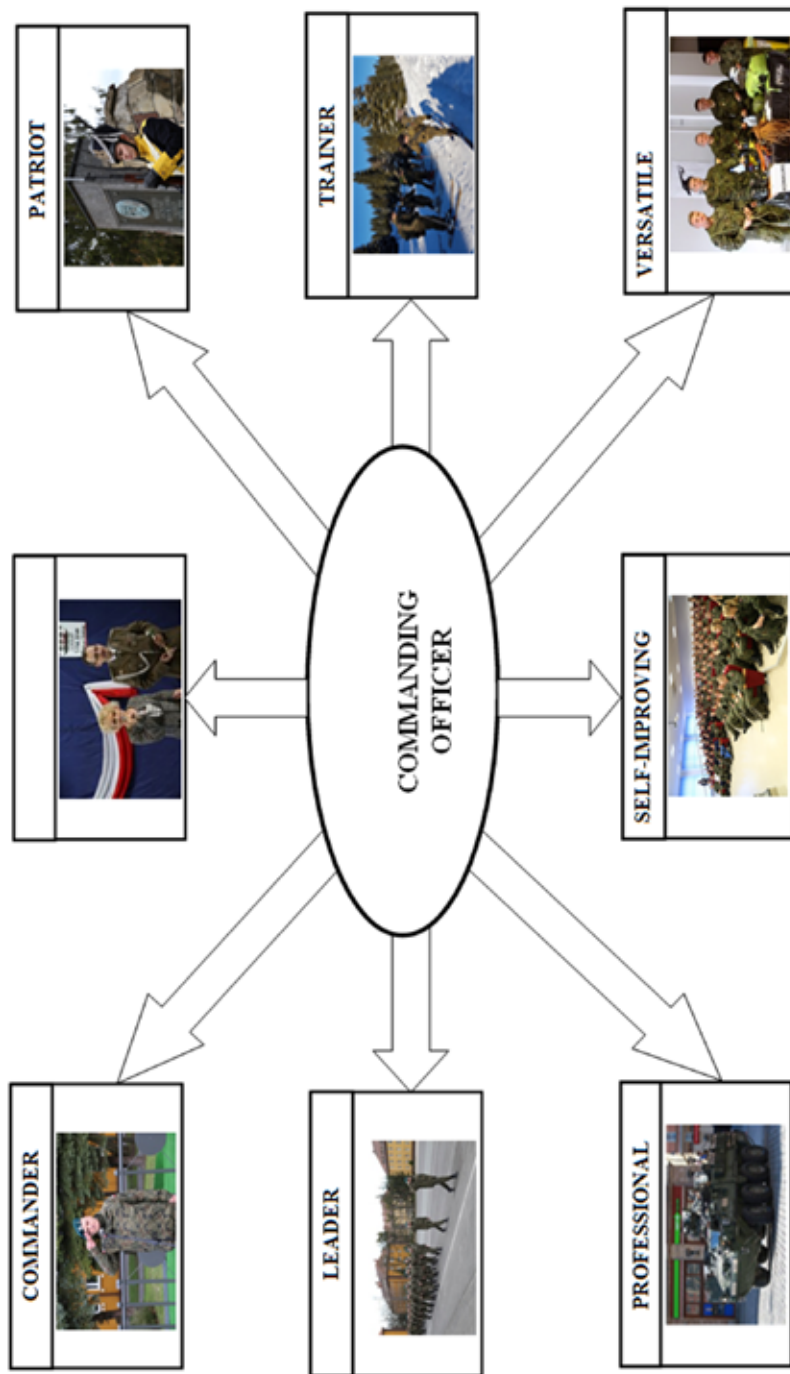
- **training and methodological activity**, which should shape the personalities of soldiers in accordance with their battlefield role, which is determined by the type of force, military specialisation, relevant codes of conduct, resolutions, etc. In addition, as a result of this activity, commanding officers should acquire the relevant training and methodological competences, enabling them to quickly and effectively train their subordinates – in accordance with the relevant principles of education and methodology.

In light of the above-mentioned desired professional competences and the theory of psychology, the desired personality of commanding officers can be defined as follows:

Commanding officer personality: is an interrelated system of relatively permanent traits (properties, values), orders and skills (abilities), which result in a system of behaviours appropriate for particular situations, both in times of peace (including participation in humanitarian aid and peace-keeping operations), when participating in missions (stabilisation, training, etc.) or facing various threats (e.g. terrorism or natural disasters), as well as in times of war. These behaviours are backed by relevant knowledge and skills, in addition to being constantly supplemented by new experiences and relevant competences, which allow commanding officers to not only perform their role as commanders, but also their role as teachers (trainers) for their subordinates, in accordance with the rule “you train, you command, you are responsible”.

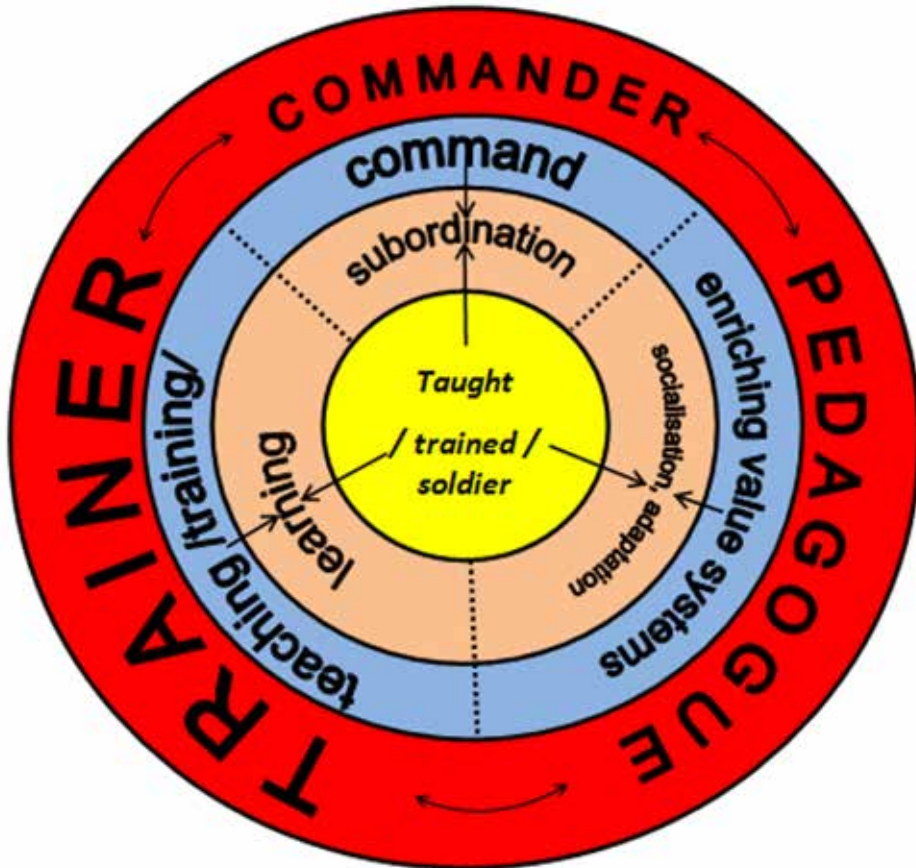
The personalities of commanding officers are determined primarily by: their motives, needs, attitudes, perception of the world, ambitions, knowledge gained in life, interests, skills, intelligence, temperament, personality and world view. However, it is necessary that they are constantly supplemented with new experiences, self-improvement and education with respect to the civilizational, technological and cultural progress of the modern world.

FIG. 2 THE DETERMINANTS OF PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL PROFILES OF COMMANDING OFFICERS



Source: authors' own work using images from <http://www.wso.wroc.pl/archiwum-aktualnosci/4439-prezentacje-kol-i-sekcji>

FIG. 3 FUNDAMENTAL TASKS OF COMMANDING OFFICERS IN THE EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGICAL PROCESS



Source: authors' own work

Currently, every teaching subject, which includes commanding officers (as commanders, pedagogues and trainers), is expected to perform certain tasks and functions in the education and pedagogical process (training and pedagogical process). These include:

- information and education functions: the teacher shares with his students (trainees) knowledge of various subjects, develops their skills, habits, interests and cognitive abilities, influences their world view etc.;
- practical and professional functions: these are performed primarily by teachers in vocational schools (which directly prepare students for

- a profession), sharing with students knowledge related to a particular production activity, shaping their specialist skills and habits, which help prepare them for work (their profession);
- social and professional functions: resulting from the fact that, in the education and pedagogical (training and pedagogical) process, teachers prepare students (to varying degrees) for participating in the life of society; this preparation should involve scheduling by the teacher the lives and work of the students (trainees) at school and in their social environment.

So far, it is evident that professional competences must constitute an integral part of shaping the personality of commanding officers from the very beginning of their service as a cadet, when they are still students of military schools.

Currently, it is impossible to determine the personality of students or their personality after graduation. Personality is affected by numerous factors, the most important of which are undoubtedly various environmental (socialisation) aspects, the organisational culture of a given school, as well as the direct influence that instructors and commanders have on students, not only in lecture halls and training rooms, but also during command and specialisation internships in military units.

In light of the above, it appears that the so-called effective personality (effective professionally – authors' note) referred to above (see Fig. 1), described by Stanisław Jarmoszko in his book², warrants a mention in this context. It is defined as follows:

“Effective personality is a certain theoretical construct, used to describe personality as regards its action-oriented aspects and the environmental conditions of performed tasks...”³

It is important to note that, as regards the above definition of the *effective officer personality* within the context of the desired social and professional profile of an officer of the Polish Armed Forces, it contains a spectrum – a construct (personality model) containing the sum of expectations toward graduates of military schools, which include both the desired attitudes toward oneself, others and one's duties, professionalism, as well as ethical and moral values and desired leadership skills. The definition

² *Podstawy Pedagogiki w kształceniu oficerów*, S. Jarmoszko (ed.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Wojskowa Akademia Techniczna – Instytut Nauk Humanistycznych, Toruń 2002, p. 30–47.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 30–32.

also requires that the officer perceive reality in a constructive and rational manner. Within the context of the *effective officer personality* referred to above, which should be fully-formed by the time of graduation, it is important to note that S. Jarmoszko points toward a very important fact, i.e. that the entire spectrum referred to in the effective officer personality model is situational in character⁴. It therefore follows that every life situation determines the appropriate systems of behaviour for a given situation.

Listed below are our proposed personal and professional traits and their related predicates, which follow from the model of the effective officer personality, as well as those added based on the authors' own long-time experience and reflections as professional soldiers⁵:

1. attitude towards oneself:

- willpower;
- expectations towards oneself;
- belief in oneself (in one's own knowledge, skills, professional and life experience);
- self-criticism;
- ability to control one's own emotions;
- caution;

2. attitude towards professional duties:

- diligence, perseverance, accuracy, punctuality, consistency;
- ability to take risks;
- responsibility, generosity;
- passion for the military;
- professional ambitions;
- creating a vision of action;
- taking initiative;

3. attitude towards others:

- subjective approach;
- caring about one's subordinates;
- friendliness;
- cooperative skills;
- assertiveness, empathy and introspection;

4. external image:

- appearance;

⁴ Cf. Ibidem, Fig. 2.2., p. 40.

⁵ Cf. Ibidem.

- physical fitness;
- methods of verbal and extraverbal communication;

5. professionalism:

- general, professional and specialist knowledge, as well as general military knowledge;
- necessary knowledge of psychology, pedagogy (including didactics and methodology) and sociology, as well as management, IT and praxeology;
- command of foreign languages;
- intellectual fitness;
- creative skills;

6. ethical and moral values:

- patriotism, honour;
- dignity;
- respecting the dignity of others;
- moral sensitivity;
- fairness, honesty;
- sincerity, principledness;

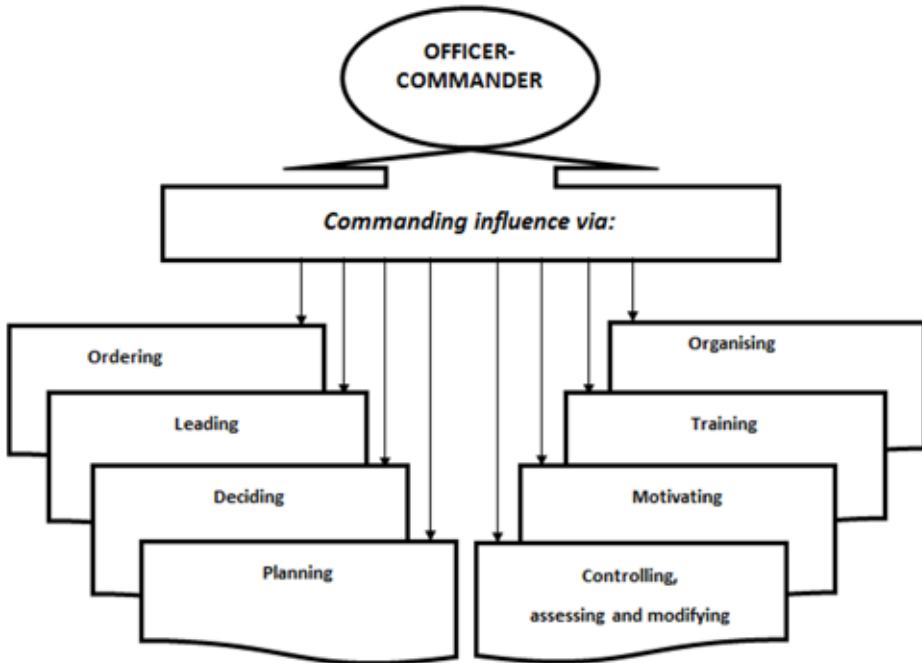
7. leadership skills:

- possessing authority;
- culture of exercising power, tact;
- courage, mental resilience;
- drive for achievement, resolve;
- discipline;
- loyalty to superiors and subordinates;
- instrumental and cognitive skills (including: leadership and command skills, the ability to work alone and in teams, as well as the ability to set requirements for one's subordinates and maintain discipline, solve problems and difficult situations, as well as the skills necessary to make decisions in various situations, even those bearing significant risk and marked by uncertainty);
- independent action.

Every commanding officer must be a professional after graduation. With regard to the above, commanding officers should possess the relevant competences, referred to above, as well as personality. This allows them to perform their competency-related duties in their military unit, both in times of peace, as well as in the face of all threats, including war-time operations.

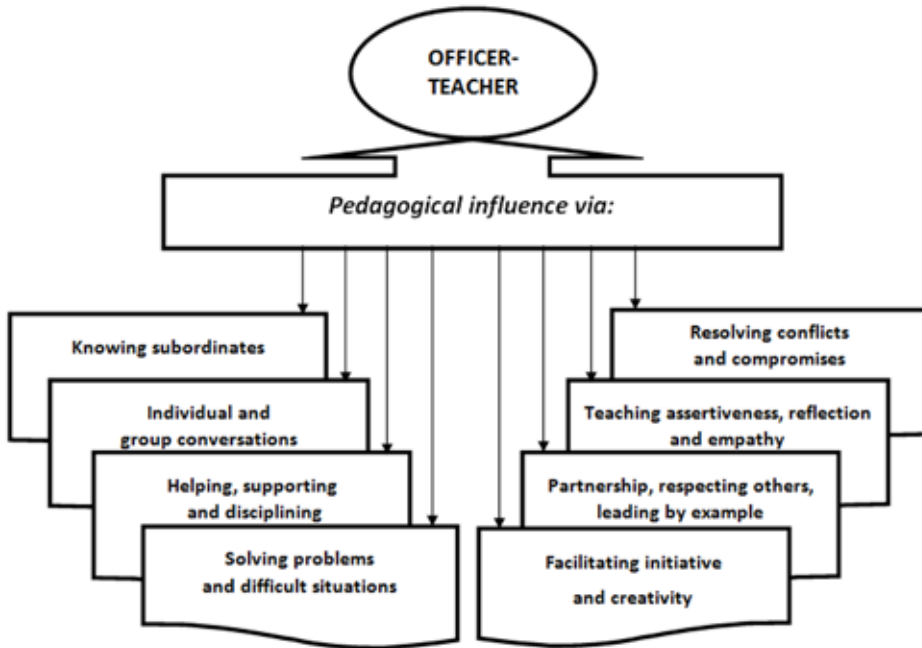
The social and professional mobility of commanding officers (constant self-improvement as regards military skill) must be maintained throughout the entire military service and beyond. Thus, taking into consideration the task and competence effectiveness in a given position and the expected personal and professional traits and competences of future commanding officers (graduates of military schools), it is possible to identify the main tasks they will be ordered to perform in their first position as platoon commander. A type of triad of roles which are assigned to them, i.e.: as a commander-pedagogue-trainer, can be illustrated using particular activities (determinants), as illustrated by the following figures: 4–6.

FIG. 4 FUNDAMENTAL DETERMINANTS OF COMMAND



Source: L. Wełyczko, *Wybrane zagadnienia z dydaktyki wojskowej. Poradnik dla wojskowych i cywilnych nauczycieli akademickich oraz dowódców*, WSOWL, 26/2003, Wrocław, p. 133–134.

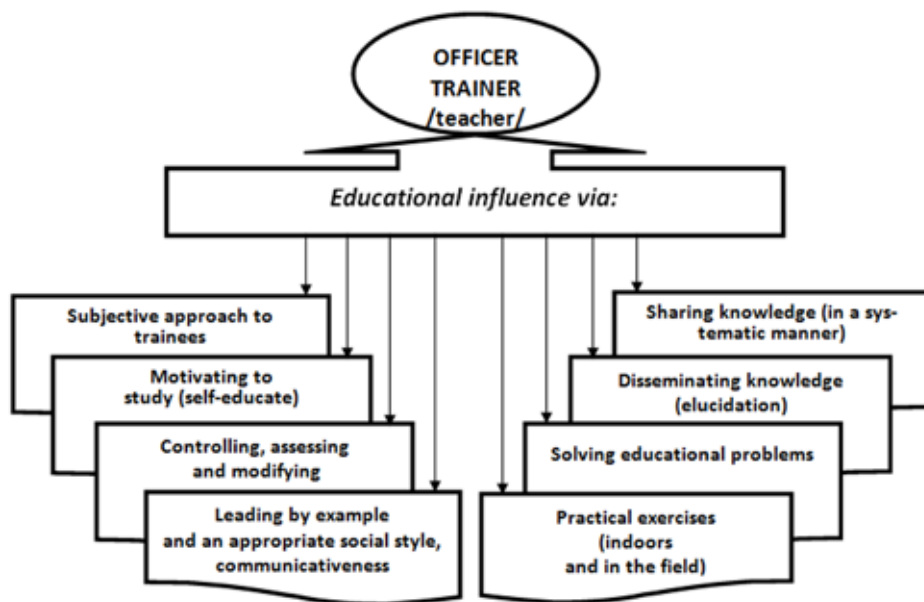
FIG. 5 FUNDAMENTAL DETERMINANTS OF PERSONALITY SHAPING



Source: L. Wełyczko, *Wybrane zagadnienia z dydaktyki wojskowej. Poradnik dla wojskowych i cywilnych nauczycieli akademickich oraz dowódców*, WSOWL, 26/2003, Wrocław, p. 133–134.

In conclusion, task and competence effectiveness of commanding officers in military units, in their first position as platoon commander, is determined by professional preparation, which has its origins in military education. It is important to remember that it is in military academies and training centres that future commanding officers acquire a robust theoretical and practical base necessary to ceaselessly self-improve in their profession by acquiring new experiences and skills. It is the commanders of officers arriving to military units after graduating from military universities who are responsible for adapting them to work in their first official position. The entire process has a direct impact on the quality of training, as well as increasing security during tasks performed by future subordinates.

FIG. 6 FUNDAMENTAL DETERMINANTS OF TRAINING (TEACHING)



Source: L. Węlyczko, *Wybrane zagadnienia z dydaktyki wojskowej. Poradnik dla wojskowych i cywilnych nauczycieli akademickich oraz dowódców*, WSOWL, 26/2003, Wrocław, p. 133–134.

Superiors achieve this in various ways, including by assigning new commanding officers to the most experienced “*introducing officers*”, who provide counsel and give hints regarding matters at hand, methodology, organisation and logistics related to training subordinates and proper organisation of activities, depending on the infrastructure of a given military unit. In addition, new commanding officers participate in special instructor and methodology courses, as well as other methodological forms of self-improvement, in order to be able to train subordinate soldiers and sub-units in the most expedient manner possible.

It can be said with full certainty that the task and competence effectiveness of commanding officers in official positions primarily depends on the officers themselves, but their professionalism is also determined by their direct superiors and their professional environment. It is them who are responsible for shaping the personality of commanding officers as their direct subordinates and collaborators, as well as for increasing their professionalism at work and directing them on their “professional career”.

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