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## SMOMELP STUDENTS MOTIVATION REGARDING MANAGERIAL ENTRY LEVEL POSITION

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**Abstract:** *Consistent with the current challenges posed by Romania military integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures, an increase in professional performance of the military is more than a necessity. In line with this demand, the current project is aimed at investigating the factors that affect motivation among Air Force Academy students and discover the best means by which to improve their prospective professional performance. The methods to be used consist of: redefining the role of the platoon commander, developing and implementing a mentorship program, identifying the optimal profile of the military leader at the entry level, and establishing the demotivating factors leading to poor performance alongside study years. In terms of innovation, it is for the first time that a mentorship program is designed to be implemented in the Romanian military.*

**Keywords:** *motivation, military students, project*

The mission of Air Force Academy "Henri Coandă" Braşov (AFA) is to continuously generate professional human resources for the Air Force and other national and international military and civilian structures. The Academy's training objectives are:

- Acquiring intellectual skills;
- Developing communication skills in a foreign language;
- Gaining leadership skills;
- Initial arm specialization.

This paper is about an open-mind exercise, as in "what if..." The team imagined that we only need a good project, defined by well scheduled activities, to achieve our goal

(to generate optimal motivated human resources for military career), because all funds we need have already been approved.

Consequently, suppose that the Air Force Academy requests funding for a four year project aimed at enhancing the quality of the academic process within the Aeronautical Management Faculty.

The output envisaged for this project includes: changed curricula, as well as an ongoing curricula improvement program, redesign of the platoon commander's job description, redesign of annual performance assessment of students. The direct beneficiaries are the students that will graduate. The indirect target customers for this project are: operational units from the national

defense system and prospective employers of the graduates.

The departments and specialists involved are:

- Air Force Academy staff;
- Human Resources;
- Management of Education;
- Student Battalions;
- Faculty of Aeronautical Management;
- Psychologist;
- Subproject managers.

SMOMELP representative will manage communications to satisfy the requirements of and resolve issues with project stakeholders.

Organizational planning involves identifying, documenting, and assigning project roles, responsibilities, and reporting relationships.

- **Project sponsor**

The sponsor of this project should be Air Force Headquarters.

This institution has always been interested in enhancing the educational quality process for cadets in order to sustain the professional development for every military leader. Air Force Headquarters is focused on military units benefiting from optimal motivated commissioned officers. This can only be met in practice by: carrying out an investigation into the optimal profile for managerial entry level positions to be filled by Air Force graduates; establishing an individual profile for freshmen and hence a professional development path; establishing a mentorship program in order to attain the previous objective.

Therefore, this four year project undertakes to achieve the aforementioned. Consistent with the above observations, the Air Force Headquarters will act as a sponsor for this project, as it follows:

- will provide the statement of work for the project team-members;
- will support research endeavors by granting all necessary approvals;
- will allow project team to use the infrastructure available within Air Force Academy;
- will finance the project during four fiscal years.

- **Defining the problem**

The main problem is the decrease of military students' motivation during the period of study and, as a direct consequence, the graduates do not perform as expected and in accordance with the standards required by Air Force Headquarters.

That observation was statistically verified through a study made in July 2009, upon the request of Human Resources Management Directorate. According to "Characteristics of students' professional motivation from military academies", a study undertaken by the Sociological Department, in the actual context, 40% from military students would not opt again for a military institution and 38,5% are dissatisfied with the content of educational curricula.

In addition, it was pointed out that 'leadership' requires competitive, mental and relational skills without which a graduate in a managerial entry level position may not have motivation to achieve professional performance required in military organization.

In this respect, the aim of the Air Force Headquarters is to meet the societal need of professional graduates by acquiring new knowledge about their motivation dynamics, redefining platoon commanders role, implementing a mentorship programme and, as follows, improving their public image.

At a global level, research in the field of individual development has gained importance. Therefore, substantial funds have been granted for investing in such modern



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investigation. One example is: Yale-New Haven – Social competence promotion program, Roger Weissberg, University of Illinois Chicago, research consisting in the evaluation performed in public schools of New Haven, by independent observers, as well as depending on the students and teachers reports compared to another control group. The study revealed the following aspects of the assessed subjects: improvement of problem solving ability, higher involvement in human relations, a better impulse control, improved behavior, interpersonal efficiency and improved popularity, increased adjusting abilities, a better ability to master interpersonal issues, a better adjustment to anxiety, less offending behavior, better abilities of conflict management (M.J. Elias and R. P. Weissberg, School-Based Social Competence Promotion as a Primary Prevention Strategy: A Tale of Two Projects, Prevention in Human Services 7, 1 (1990), pp.177-200).

Currently, the AFA runs another research project with international financing: *Qualitative dimensions of the career management of military officers Romania: methodologies for counseling and to optimize the recruitment process support tools for process selection*, process development and training correlation with labor market requirements in the grant funding won by the Land Forces Academy, in partnership with the Air Force Academy, Academy Navy and National Defense University.

• **Goals and objectives**

Goal: to enhance students' motivation for performance in order to connect military instruction with leadership requirements.

AFA intends, through this project, to identify and reduce the influence of factors that affect students' motivation during the 3 years of study. The chosen strategy is based on actual requirements and objectives of the primary beneficiaries of the educational process and continues to redefine the role of platoon commander, together with profiling the management functions under the first hierarchical level.

The objectives to be reached during this four year are:

- A minimum 30% rise in students' yearly motivation at the end of the recruitment and selection process for platoon commanders, consistent with the optimal profile established for this position;
- By September (first year), a new methodology for recruiting and selecting platoon commanders will be in place. The methodology will include: redesign of platoon commander's job description and a list of necessary skills to fill in such a position;
- By September, the schedule of academic and military instruction activities will be redesigned and approved in accordance with the time ratio allocated to academic activities/military instruction;
- By September, new SOPs to evaluate students' activities will be in place;
- A minimum 30% rise in students' yearly motivation for performance as a result of developing and implementing a mentorship program;
- By September, an optimal profile for managerial entry level positions will be

developed, consistent with beneficiary requirements;

- By September, the instruments necessary to establish students' individual profile will be developed and implemented;
- By September, a mentorship program, based on optimal profile and individual profiles, will be implemented.
- A minimum 30% rise in students' yearly motivation for performance as a result of psychological support to increase the specific target's involvement in academic activities and sports competitions;
- By September (last year), the dynamics of students' participation in sports competitions on a volunteer basis will be statistically established;
- By September, the dynamics of students' participation in academic activities will be statistically established;
- By September, the dynamics of students' participation in extracurricular activities on a volunteer basis will be statistically established.
- By September, the instruments necessary to identify students' expectations related to educational process will be developed and applied;
- By September, a list of suggestions consistent with the findings will be drawn up and submitted for further action.

- **Activities description**

- Redefine the role of a platoon commander - initiate a recruitment and selection process for platoon commander – this activity will be accomplished by designing a recruitment and selection methodology; its aim is to redesign job description for platoon commanders and to list the skills necessary to fill the afore mentioned position; this work package is running in the first part of the project and has

as aim to strengthen the role of platoon commander in the educational process. Authority knowledge, managerial skills and personal conduct will make it a model worth following;

- Change the schedule of activities – considering the current imbalance between the ratio of academic activities and the ratio of military instruction, reflected in the overall schedule of activities, we aim to compute the number of hours necessary to conduct a military instruction in accordance with student's needs, to identify the extent to which the curricula need to be changed, consistent with the newly computed hours of military instruction, to implement an objective evaluation system of the activities that students need to accomplish and to investigate students opinion on actual evaluating system;
- Establish Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) for duty activities based on standards of performance. This activity involves the following steps: to elaborate a list of duty activities based on military regulations, to establish clear standards of performance for each duty activity and special categories (i.e. minimum, medium, maximum standards of performance) and to establish SOPs;
- Identification of the skills needed for managerial entry level in order to identify the optimal profile for managerial entry positions of AFA graduates we intend to distribute a questionnaire to the end beneficiaries of our educational process (i.e. operational units). The optimal profile will be developed consistent with their demands and necessities;



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- Identification of initial individual profile from perspective of managerial entry positions needed - based on the optimal profile developed in the previous stage, we design and validate a set of psychological tests. Their aim is to establish freshmen's individual profile. Moreover, based on it each and every 1st year student will delineate the steps needed to take in order to conform to the minimal requirements of the optimal profile by the end of the 3rd year;
- Implement a mentorship program to follow the personal development path - consistent with the individual profile established at the beginning of the 1st year and in accordance with the requirements of the optimal profile a personal development path is established for each freshman. Based on this a mentorship program is designed and implemented. Its results should be visible at the end of this project;
- Establish dynamics of competitive skills during those three years of studies, which means to establish the number of participants involved in sports competitions on volunteer basis. This will serve as a predecessor for the very next activity;
- Establish the dynamics of scholarship performance, meaning the academic performance scores of freshmen and seniors. This will serve as a predecessor for the very next activity;
- Establish the number of participants in extracurricular activities

During the three years of study, we will identify the extracurricular activities as approved by AFA and contrast them with those favored by students. Moreover, we will establish the number of freshmen and seniors involved in extracurricular activities on a volunteer basis. We will identify dynamics and make suggestions to improve the list of extracurricular activities approved by AFA, to identify possible sponsors and specific means by which students' educational performance can be acknowledged and promoted.

- Identify students expectations related to educational process, which means to draw up a questionnaire (to validate, apply, sum up the questionnaire findings and to make suggestions consistent with conclusions) to identify focused expectations of freshmen and seniors, by using a Likert scale, related to the educational process in terms of quality, instruments, evaluations, their professional status upon graduation, as well as their life quality as students;

• **Outputs description**

In any project output description contains documents about product requirements and characteristics of the product or service that the project will undertake to create. The product requirements will have less detail during the initiation process and more details during later processes, as the product characteristics are progressively elaborated. These requirements should also document the relationship among the products

or services being created and the business need or other stimulus that causes the need. While the form and substance of the product requirements document will vary, it will be still detailed.

SMOMELP has, as final results, the following products:

- Methodology for selection and recruitment of platoon commanders, based on the new job description and skills test for them also to become military instructors
- SOPs for regular duty activities
- Annual evaluations of students
- Students database, consisting of students' ID, individual managerial profile, scholarship performance and extracurricular activities, periodical evaluations
- A Mentorship Course that will be piloted on 20 teachers and military instructors
- A mentorship manual which will be elaborated in accordance with the research regarding the individual managerial profile and will have the following format: introduction to mentoring culture, pairing up apprentices and mentors, setting the rules of engagement, mentoring guide, case studies; mentorship curricula

#### • **Costs**

Estimated costs are minimal, because the funds will be provided by the project sponsor following the legal procedure regarding the Annual Plan of Public Acquisitions. The project costs will be budgeted for 4 years and consist of: direct costs (paper, editing a mentorship scientific book, toner for copy machines and printers, participation taxes, CDs), no personnel costs (the team project members are AFA employees and the research and work will be performed during the regular duty program with approval from AFA HQs),

and no administrative costs (all the activities are based on AFA and AF HQs infrastructure).

#### • **Risks**

There are many definitions of *risk* that vary by specific application and situational context. The widely inconsistent and ambiguous use of the word is one of several current criticisms of the methods to manage risk. One is that risk is an issue, which can be avoided or mitigated (wherein an issue is a potential problem that has to be fixed now.)

Risk is described both qualitatively and quantitatively. In some texts risk is described as a situation which would lead to negative consequences. Qualitatively, risk is proportional to both the expected losses which may be caused by an event and to the probability of this event. Greater loss and greater event likelihood result in greater overall risk.

There are many formal methods used to assess or to "measure" risk, the latter being considered as a critical indicator of the human decision making process. Huge ethical and political issues arise when human beings themselves are seen or treated as "risks", or when the risk decision making of people who use human services might have an impact on that service. The experience of many people who rely on human services for support is that the so called "risk" is often used as a reason to prevent them from gaining further independence or fully accessing the professional advantages. Therefore, those services are often unnecessarily risk adverse.

A risk is a potential problem, a situation that, if materialized, may adversely affect the project. All projects have risks, and all risks are ultimately handled: some disappear, some develop into problems that demand attention and a few escalate into crises that destroy projects.



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The goal of risk management is to ensure that risks never fall into the third category.

- **Communication**

Under the pressure of day-to-day activities, leaders often fail to adequately communicate their vision to the organization, and in particular, they don't communicate it in a way that helps their subordinates determine where to focus their own efforts. Employees want to know where the business is going. While managers are taught to actively communicate, many either unintentionally undercommunicate or fail to articulate specific priorities and thus may not meet their people's tremendous hunger for guidance.

As follows, communications planning means the process necessary to determine the information and communication needs of the project stakeholders in a timely manner; the sender (SMOMELP representative) is responsible for making the information clear and complete so that the receiver (AFH) can receive it correctly, and for confirming that it is properly understood. The receiver is responsible for making sure that the information is received in its entirety and understood correctly.

- **Closing project**

All the projects come eventually to an end. The final section always includes all the processes used to formally close all activities of the project and hand off the completed outcomes to stakeholders and sponsors.

For SMOMELP project, the closure also emphasizes the fact that it could and it should be continued.

It is worth mentioning that the whole project is in a piloting stage. Therefore, its results are expected to be disseminated in further projects. Thus, we envision that the outcomes are not only relevant for others military branches, but also worth investigating as thoroughly as possible. Besides, the perspective usage of project outputs by the military system, this endeavor yields fruitful results in terms of career development and successful integration of Air Force Graduates into workplace environment.

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