

## **PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AMONG STUDENTS OF THE ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY AND YOUNG CAREER OFFICERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The dramatic changes in both the military and civilian society require a new vision on leadership behaviour of an officer. "Situational Leadership" is now the main idea. In 1998 the chiefs of staff of the Belgian Armed Forces decided to rely on the model of the "Competing Values" of R.E. Quinn. This model can be considered as an integration of all former models of the past century. The model describes eight roles - Innovator, Negotiator, Producer, Director, Co-ordinator, Controller, Motivator and Mentor - in terms of 24 aptitudes and skills that one should master to be effective in a certain role. Meanwhile, it has been decided which aptitudes are considered important at a certain moment of an officer's career and by when he should master them. Our department is in charge of developing an instrument for the evaluation of the effectiveness of education/training activities with respect to these roles. So first we have to determine a "base line"; in other words what perception of leadership do people have - i.e. our RMA students and young officers - who did not receive any leadership instruction or training (according to the model of Quinn).*

*In the presentation, four points will be addressed: 1) the model itself, 2) which characteristics of leadership are believed to be important, 3) how are these related to the roles, and 4) what is the relationship between some personality characteristics and dominant roles.*

In 1998 the chiefs of staff of the Belgian Armed Forces decided to rely on the model of the “Competing Values” of R.E. Quinn in establishing a new vision on leadership behaviour for all NCO’s and officers of the Belgian Armed Forces, irrespective of their rank. Meanwhile, it has been decided which aptitudes are considered important at a certain moment of an officer’s career and by when he should master them. Our department is in charge of developing an instrument for the evaluation of the effectiveness of education/training activities with respect to these roles. So first we have to determine a “base line”; in other words what perception of leadership do people have – i.c. our RMA students and young officers - who did not receive any leadership instruction or training (according to the model of Quinn).

In this presentation, four points will be addressed: 1) the model itself; 2) which characteristics of leadership are believed to be important by these young people; 3) how are these characteristics related to the roles that a leader should master; and 4) what is the relationship between personality characteristics and roles.

### **The competing values model**

The competing values model can be considered as an integration of all former approaches prevailing at a certain moment in the past century and in which the leaders behaved according to some typical role. In the rational objectives approach, in the beginning of the industrial era, a leader is in the first place a producer and a director. The internal process approach, in the period of big size manufactories, is characterised by attention for the control and co-ordination functions. The human relations approach, after the Ohio experiments in the thirties, shows that a leader should pay attention to the dimension and be especially a motivator and a counsellor. Finally, the open system approach, after the economic crisis of the seventies, proved that the primary roles of a leader are being an innovator and a negotiator, with his external world as with his internal world as well.

The competing values model describes these eight roles in terms of 24 aptitudes and skills that one should master to be effective in a given role<sup>1</sup>. Table 1 shows how approaches and roles fit together and lists the aptitudes per role.

### **Method**

To determine the intuitive leadership conceptions of the target groups, a questionnaire ad hoc has been constructed. It consists of four parts. Part A aims at definitorial elements of the leadership concept. Therefore, the respondents had first to define leadership in their own words. Second they had to define *military* leadership and, third, they had to pick the eight most and the four least typical adjectives out of a list adjectives which characterise leadership and which refer to the aptitudes and skills (see Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed presentation of the model see my paper in the proceedings of the 35<sup>th</sup> IAMPS (Firenze, May 1999).

**Table 1 Link between approach, roles, skills and “qualifiers” used in the questionnaire.**

OPEN SYSTEM	INNOVATOR	1. Live with changes 2. Creative thinking 3. Management of changes	Creative Adaptive Visionary
	NEGOTIATOR	1. Provide and maintain a basis of power 2. Negotiate commitment and agreement 3. Present ideas	Diplomatic Convincing Mediation
RATIONAL OBJECTIVES	PRODUCER	1. Personal productivity and motivation 2. Time and stress management 3. Create a productive environment	Productive Motivating Managing
	DIRECTOR	1. Have a vision, plan, set goals 2. Devise and organise 3. Delegate effectively	Initiates Delegates Plans
INTERNAL PROCESSES	COORDINATOR	1. Project management 2. Design tasks 3. Cross-functional management	Plans Systematic Controls
	CONTROLLER	1. Control own functioning 2. Control functioning of the collectivities 3. Control functioning of the organisation	Dutiful Precise Examines
HUMAN RELATIONS	MOTIVATOR	1. Team building 2. Participation in decision making 3. Management of conflicts	Mediation Collaborative Unifying
	COUNSELLOR	1. Insight in yourself & in others 2. Effective communication 3. Development of subordinates	Communicative Empathy Counselling

Part B aims at determining the most preferred and the least preferred role out of four in a described situation. Two times ten situations have been presented (e.g. relation with subordinates, work atmosphere, decision making). In the first set of situations the four behaviours refer to each time to the role of controller, counsellor, negotiator and director. In the second set of situations, the behaviours refer to the roles of innovator, director, co-ordinator and motivator.

For example:

*If, during a mission, one of my subordinates asks me for a leave for personnel reasons:*

*I verify first the disturbances his absence may cause in the unit [controller]*

*I discuss with him his problems and check if I can help him [counsellor]*

*I send his request to my superior with a recommendation [negotiator]*

*I give him the number of days according to his rights [director]*

[The text between the brackets does not appear in the questionnaire!]

Part C is the Lavoegie questionnaire, which allows for a description of personality in terms of nine dimensions: general activity, sociability, perseverance, social intelligence, influence, maturity, optimism, sincerity and mastering.

Part D contains some biographical data.

The questionnaire has been “tested” by submitting it to the 98 students of the Preparatory Division of the RMA. Only minor changes to the first draft were necessary. Particularly, it was indicated to substitute three adjectives by a synonym. For example, “flexible” was confused with “indulgent or lenient” and therefore substituted by “adaptive”.

The target group consists of three subgroups. The first group is composed of RMA students who are attending the courses of the first academic year, respectively the last year; i.e. the fourth year for students in the Social and Military Sciences Division and the fifth year for the Civil Engineers Division. The third group is composed of officers with less than five years experience in the Armed Services.

In this presentation the results of the second and the third group only will be addressed. The sample consisting of last year RMA students counts 73 people and the sample of young officers 102. The response quotas are 67 and 42 respectively.

Among those 109, we have 93 male and 16 female respondents. Eighty belong to the Army, 21 to the Air Force, 5 to the Navy and 3 to the Medical Service.

### Results Part A

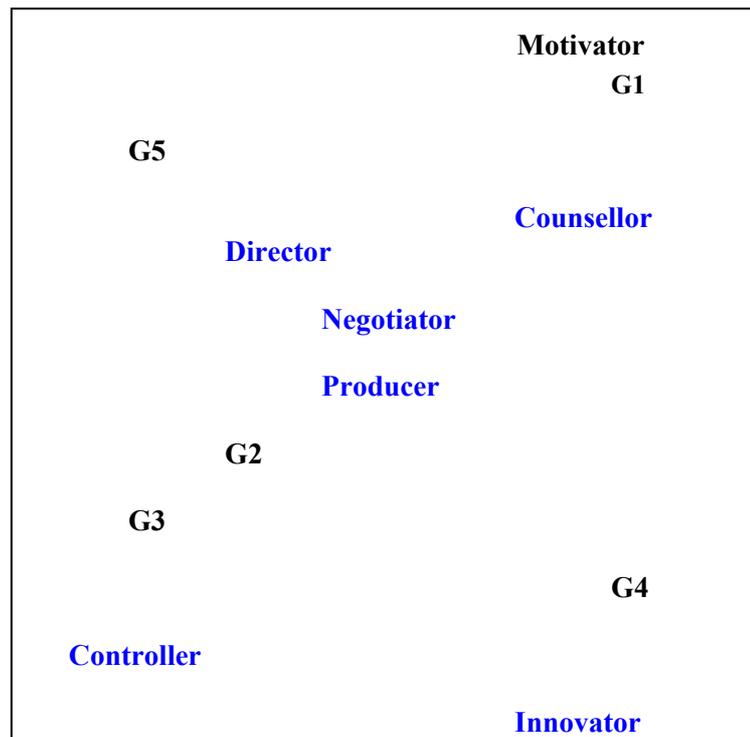
The definition our RMA students gave looked often “academic definitions” rather than own perceptions. They probably tried to remember what definition has been given in the courses of psychology. The young officers gave already a more personal description but, in fact, it reflects the same fundamental aspects. Often cited “prototypical” elements of leadership in general are *mission, vision, communication, being an example, trust, collective interests before personal interests, voluntary followed*. Military leadership was mostly described “as above” plus six particular elements. Most frequent aspects are *a quick evolving situation, extreme conditions, forced to quick decision making, flexibility (switching from operational conditions to peace conditions), multiple roles, hierarchical relationship*. Nearby 50% of the female respondents mentioned also “*masculine environment*”.

The aptitudes and skills that have been cited most are: motivate, convincing, plan, diplomatic. The least cited items are examine, delegate, and unify. Thus, the most typical role is *negotiator* and in the second place the role of *producer*. The least typical role is being a *controller*.

There were no significant differences between the samples on the basis of gender, nor Service or personality dimension except for “creative” and “mediation” with higher frequencies among the RMA students, and “systematic” with a higher frequency at the side of the young officers.

A topological analysis– a kind of cluster analysis – in which aptitudes and roles are associated according to the responses, results in five groups of respondents which are all mixed with respect to the qualifiers. Going from the top of the Figure to the bottom, we see that Group 1 is strongly associated with motivator and to a lesser extent with counsellor, G5 is associated with director, G2 with producer, G3 with controller, G4 with innovator and finally G5 with director. In an ideal solution, all subjects should be concentrated in the middle of the graph with all roles on circle around them. In other words they do not have a clear-cut image of the roles. It is thus not surprising the solution does not reflect the model of Quinn (Figure 1). Again, there are no significant differences between the aforementioned subgroups.

Figure 1. Topological analysis based on adjectives

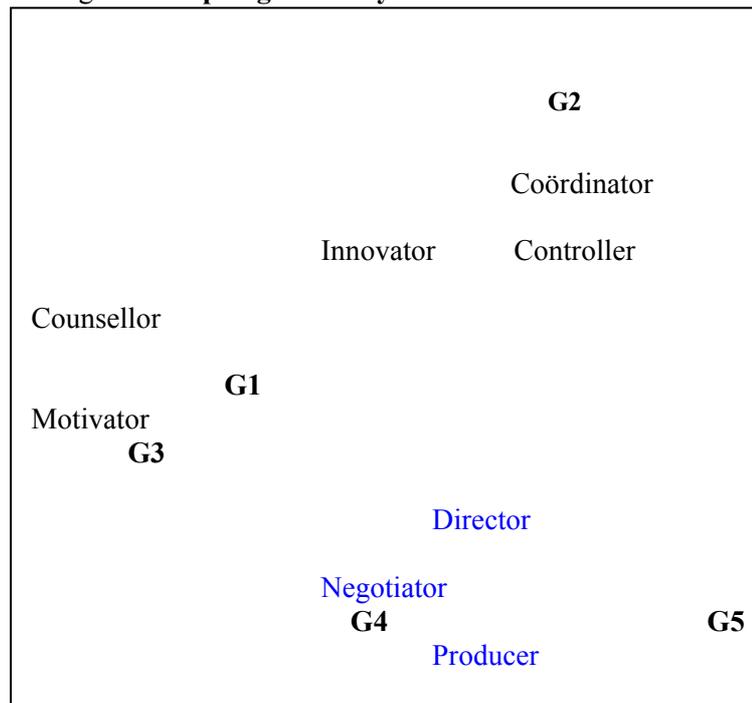


### Results of part B

The three most chosen roles (with nearby the same frequencies) in the given situations are *motivator*, *counsellor* and *director*. The least chosen solution was *negotiator*.

A topological analysis based on the association between the most preferred role in a given situation results again in five mixed groups and does not reflect the model of Quinn. In other words, they do not master all the roles and they cannot associate them well to a particular situation in an appropriate way.

Figure 2. Topological analysis based on roles

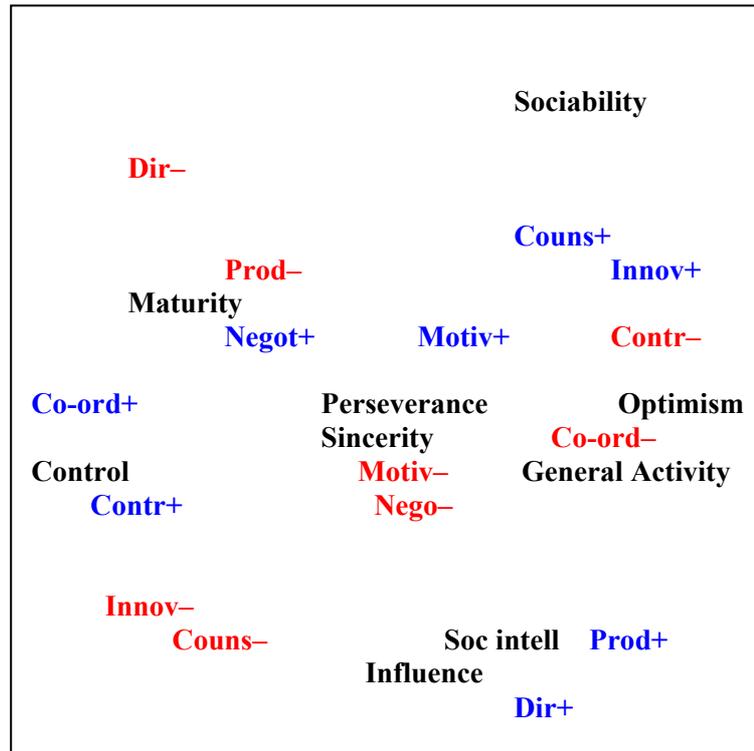


### Results Part C

The two most prominent dimensions are *sincerity* and *activity*. The weakest one is *perseverance*. This is rather surprising but it might be due to confusion with stubbornness.

A topological analysis based on the association between the roles in a particular situation and the personality dimensions shows some interesting associations. The roles are expressed in terms of chosen behaviour (printed in blue and marked with a “plus”) and of rejected behaviour (printed in red and marked with a “minus”). Perseverance and Sincerity are central values. The role of counsellor is associated with sociability, negotiator with maturity, co-ordinator and controller with controllability. Social intelligence and influence are typically associated with producer and director. It should be noticed that the chosen roles are mirrored in the rejected roles. The graph reflects also more or less the model of Quinn (Figure 3). Producer and director appear close to each other, just as co-ordinator and controller. Innovator appears in the right quadrant but negotiator does not. Motivator and counsellor are located too much to the right.

Figure 3. **Topological analysis based on personality dimensions and chosen/rejected roles**



### Conclusion

Our RMA students and our young officers can give a sound theoretical definition of what leadership in general is and they have an image of what leadership means in various situations through instruction and training but this image is far from complete in terms of the roles described by Quinn. Moreover they chose often not the most appropriate behaviour according to the characteristics of the situation at hand.

Thus, in the future our instruction must focus first on rendering that image more complete and training must aim at learning to apply the most appropriated role in the given situation. By doing so we will have the flexible, polyvalent leaders modern armed services need because of the variety of missions that can be assigned to them.