

# DEVELOPMENT OF A QUALITY CULTURE IN THE ACADEMIC MILITARY ENVIRONMENT

**Cătălin CIOACĂ**

„Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy

## **Abstract**

*The fact that the current social, political and economic context causes the military higher education system to undergo very fast and difficult to manage changes, which should be dealt promptly and with the best results, is something undeniable. The motivation for choosing this theme consists of a number of factors such as personal experience of almost two years of involvement in the life of the academic community (The Scientific Council of the Aeronautical Management Faculty, organizing scientific conferences for teachers and students, the Quality Assurance Board of the same faculty, the Entrance Board); the quality as a personal value, the necessity to obtain a practical result and the continuity of the study, the actuality and importance of the subject (the current situation and perspectives of the Romanian military higher education). In this respect, the paper tries to capture the context in which the Romanian military higher education system can develop a mechanism to support quality assurance. The direction proposed starts from the primary beneficiaries of the higher education – the students, this way using a bottom up change strategy and not vice versa as it was mostly done in our higher education system, with results that we can all observe and judge without much effort. The main part includes the outline of an improvement project for the development of the culture quality in the military students of the Air Force Academy "Henri Coanda". The results of the project proposed can be extended to the entire military academic environment in Romania.*

**Key words:** culture of quality, military students, project, mentorship program.

## 1. Introduction

Recent developments in national and international level have highlighted the need to develop a culture of quality. Higher education is forming military experts that will result in a near future the Romanian Army. Simple quantitative growth, "extensive" educational supply can not meet the needs of a knowledge society.

Educational component is of major importance in this regard, not only in terms of quality benefit, but also by integrating quality requirements into national military education. In this context, quality professional benefit acquires special importance. Quality assurance means creating confidence among their beneficiaries, the military system educational expectations [1]. The mission is primarily a military education to ensure efficient preparation of graduates need training military career.

The inclusion of academic education in training the officer is meant to facilitate the conversion in any profession ahead. This increases the sense of security given that the chances of long-term follow a career in the military institution is small.

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

In line with this demand, the current project [2] is aimed at investigating the factors that affect motivation among AFA 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 and implemented in the Romanian military. 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 in 2013. The indirect target customers for this project are: operational units from the national defense system and prospective employers of the graduates.

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 the beneficiary.

That observation was statistically verified through a study made in July 2009 [3]. According to this study, 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 [4].**

**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.**

## **2. Project's objectives**

*The main goal is to enhance students' motivation for performance in order to connect military instruction with leadership requirements.*

### **Primary objectives:**

1. 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 2010, 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 2010, 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 2010, new SOPs to evaluate students' activities will be in place.

2. A minimum 30% rise in students' yearly motivation for performance as a result of developing and implementing a mentorship program;

By September 2011, an optimal profile for managerial entry level positions will be developed, consistent with beneficiary requirements.

By September 2011, the instruments necessary to establish students' individual profile will be developed and implemented.

By September 2011, a mentorship program, based on optimal profile and individual profiles, will be implemented.

3. 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 2014, the dynamics of students' participation in sports competitions on a volunteer basis will be statistically established.

By September 2014, the dynamics of students' participation in academic activities will be statistically established.

By September 2014, the dynamics of students' participation in extracurricular activities on a volunteer basis will be statistically established.

4. A minimum 30% rise in the number of students whose yearly motivation for performance increased as a result of expectations met alongside project development.

By September 2014, the instruments necessary to identify students' expectations related to educational process will be developed and applied.

By September 2014, a list of suggestions consistent with the findings will be drawn up and submitted for further action.

### 3. The project course

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 project begins on 03/05/2010 and is run over 4 years. It is decomposed hierarchically on activities (Table no.1), meeting strictly defined 4 work packages (WP).

<b>WP 1</b>	<b>Redefine the role of a platoon commander</b>
Description	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.
<b>WP 2</b>	<b>Identification of the skills needed for managerial entry level position</b>
Description	<p>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.</p> <p>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. Consistent with the individual profile established at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 [5] is designed and implemented. Its results should be visible at the end of this project.</p>
<b>WP 3</b>	<b>Establish dynamics of competitive skills during those three</b>

Description	<p><b>years of studies</b></p> <p>During the three years of study, we will identify the academic performance scores of freshmen and seniors, we will identify the number of freshmen and seniors involved in sports competitions on a volunteer basis, and we will identify the extracurricular activities as approved by AFA and contrast them with those favored by students.</p> <p>Based on these results, we will 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.</p>
<b>WP 4</b>	<p><b>Identify the students expectations related to educational process</b></p>
Description	<p>By using a Likert scale, we will draw up a questionnaire focused on identifying freshmen's and seniors' expectations related to the educational process in terms of quality, instruments, evaluations, their professional status upon graduation, as well as their life quality as students.</p> <p>Based on the findings the project team will submit for approval a list of suggestions concerning the improvement of the educational process in terms of quality, instruments, and evaluations with a direct impact on AFA's graduates' professional status, as well as their life quality as students.</p>

**Table no. 1 Description of activities.**

#### **4. 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.

The project has, as final results, the following products:

1. Methodology for selection and recruitment of platoon commanders
2. SOPs for regular duty activities
3. Annual evaluations of students
4. Students database
5. A Mentorship Course that will be piloted on 20 teachers and military instructors
6. A mentorship manual
7. Mentorship curricula
8. Strengthening the link between AFA and beneficiary operational units
9. Detailed presentation of the project on the AFA site ([www.afahc.ro](http://www.afahc.ro))

Concerning the **Methodology for selection and recruitment of platoon commanders**, the candidates for these positions will be tested based on the new job description and skills test. Thus the platoon commanders will also become military instructors.

**SOPs** will cover all regular duty activities from the educational process. Their content will be based on standards of performance and will have the following format: references, summary, introduction, scope, content.

The implementation of SOPs will create the possibility to efficiently complete the entire process of students' annual evaluation. In this respect the **Annual evaluation** will be made based on facts and objective criteria.

**Students' database** will be set up, managed and updated by the IT specialist who is part of the project team. It will be available on Intranet. The database will consist of information about students' ID, individual managerial profile of each student, scholarship performance and extracurricular activities statistics, periodical evaluations.

The **mentorship scientific book** will be elaborated in accordance with the research regarding the individual managerial profile and will have the following format: introduction to mentoring culture; airing up apprentices and mentors; setting the rules of engagement; mentoring guide; case studies; appendix: periodical tests and their templates; references.

The manual will be in electronic and printed format. As a scientific value the condition is that at least two papers written by the authors must be published in scientific communication sessions or specialized magazines which are quoted as B+.

## 5. Staffing, costs and risks

Organizational planning involves identifying, documenting, and assigning project roles, responsibilities, and reporting relationships. It may also include responsibility assignment matrixes, as shown in the Table no. 2.

ACTIVITIES  
TEAM  
Subproject  
manager  
Battalion  
commander  
Company  
commanders  
Platoon  
commanders  
HR  
specialist  
Psychologist  
Head of  
EMS  
Planning  
officer  
Sociologist  
IT specialist

ACTIVITIES  
TEAM  
Military  
sciences  
specialist

## **Table no. 2 Responsibilities and participation for activities.**

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** 4,500 RON (paper, editing a mentorship scientific book, toner for copy machines and printers, participation taxes, CDs), **personnel costs** 00.00 RON (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), **administrative costs** 00.00 RON (all the activities are based on AFA and AF HQs infrastructure).

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 crisis that destroys projects.

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

There are four steps to managing risks: identify them, categorize them, mitigate them and manage them. The risk management plan contains an analysis of likely risks with both high and low impact, as well as mitigation strategies to help the project avoid being derailed should common problems arise. Risk management plans should be periodically reviewed by the project team in order to avoid the analysis stalling and not being reflective of actual potential project risks.

Most critically, risk management plans include a risk strategy. Broadly, there are four potential strategies, with numerous variations. Projects may choose to:

- accept risk, simply take the chance that the negative impact will be incurred;
- avoid risk, changing plans in order to prevent the problem from arising;
- mitigate risk, lessening its impact through intermediate steps
- transfer risk, outsource risk to a capable third party that can manage the outcome.

## **6. Instead of conclusions**

In carrying out a dissemination plan as part of a project, the representatives must systematically distribute information or knowledge through a variety of ways to potential users or beneficiaries.

Experience and literature support the need for a philosophical or conceptual framework for dissemination and utilization processes. The following major elements generally apply :

- Dissemination is a process requiring a careful match among:

(a) the design of products or knowledge, and its context;  
(b) the target audiences; the project describe **general target group** (leaders on managerial entry level positions) and **specific target group** (cadets from AFA);  
(c) the contents, media, templates, and language used in disseminating the outcomes to the general and specific target audience. That involves far more than the simple distribution of paper or products. Thus the main ideas of the articles and books published within this project will be spread out throughout Air Force units by using formal means of communication such as INTRAMAN and military postal services. The templates commonly agreed upon are in accordance with military rules and regulations.

- The goal of the dissemination plan should be utilization; utilization may mean different things to different members of a target audience; in some cases, it may mean rejection of a product or research finding. The critical element of utilization is that the research outcome must be critically and thoroughly digested, and the individual must fit the new information with her or his prior understanding and experience.

- One of the most effective ways to increase utilization - and to improve the quality and relevance of research - is to involve potential users in planning and implementing the research design itself; this is one of the most innovative aspects of the project, because direct and indirect users will be involved; in the project proposal we also pointed out the **contribution of the project to transversal policies for education and personal development** in terms of the impact of the project on the target group and participation in the project itself.

The **categories of entities that will directly use the results** or implement the outputs from the project beyond the participating institutions are other institutions from the military educational system, who will act as multipliers of proposed methodology at the national and local level.

## 7. References

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