



Training in management, an imperative for leadership

Earth Thought Notebooks

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Because he is a commander of men and an organisational manager, the military leader must both affirm the specificity of his vocation and convince himself of the usefulness of civilian managerial sciences. This is the condition of his operational effectiveness and his ability to influence the future of the organisations in and with which he serves. Under the combined notions of management and command, the author in fact restores the notion of fullness of command.

The officer is in command; he doesn't manage. This is the adage commonly accepted within the armed forces, where this subtle semantic distinction sometimes serves to summarize the specificity of the officer's role. Nevertheless, it must be said that over the last few decades, management and command practices have come much closer together. While obedience "without hesitation or murmur" [1] seems out of fashion, the notions of "piloting" and "governance", traditionally specific to the business world, are becoming more and more important in military thinking [2]. 2) This apparent convergence between civil and military operations in fact hides the confrontation of two contradictory logics. On the one hand, the hardening of operations reminds the officer of the demands of his state and the virtues of "traditional military command". On the other hand, the growing weight of accounting, social and budgetary logics is fuelling a certain movement to transform the armed forces, where management and consultation logics take precedence. Thus, the traditional fundamentals of command seem to be opposed to the precepts of modern management. Rightly convinced of the primacy of command, armies then tend to neglect the contribution of managerial sciences even though their purpose is a priori not without interest for the military world. Applied to organizations, these sciences aim to shed light on "the global management of the organization through a set of policies (...) that are coherent with each other and that converge in the direction of the strategic project and are reflected in the organizational culture" [3].

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The primary vocation of the officer, to command

Questioning the art of command and the training of the leader first requires going back to the very essence of being a soldier. Command, in its military sense, is in fact marked by the particularity of the profession of arms. "The military chief can order to give death and assume the counterpart, that of losing his own life as well as that of his men," [4] the Chief of the Armed Forces Staff reminded the officers of the last joint seminar of the military colleges. Tending towards the hypothesis of armed confrontation, the officer cannot ignore this reality. The question of death, whether it is given or received, underlies the notion of command and characterizes its particularities.

From this specificity stems that of command. This "complex art" [5] has neither recipe nor formula, but is based on a few great immutable principles. To command is first of all to show authority because the officer must be able to demand from his men total obedience in the name of the accomplishment of the mission received. To command is also to set an example because it is the fundamental condition of credibility and the means of "seeking to deserve love", according to the expression of the Marshal of Belle-Isle [6]. Finally, to command is to give meaning to action because the soldier fights first for his leader and his brothers in arms, not for political objectives [7]. 7] Commander thus consists in "giving birth to the intelligence of solidarity, the duty to submit to it, the right to impose it and the impossibility of evading it", said Colonel Ardant du Picq. This requirement distinguishes the essence of military command in a subtle but essential way from any other type of responsibility.

The growing weight of the officer's managerial role

Stressing the specificity and requirement of command should not, however, mask the "managerial role" of the officer. The military commander is also a manager, i.e. a person who administers and manages a company. Financial constraints, the weight of administration or the central role of logistics naturally link operational efficiency to performance and management requirements. Beyond the question of profit, obviously foreign to the military state, the officer is indeed, as General Nivelles himself described himself in 1917, a "captain of industry" [9].

9] The techniques and attitudes of the chief are intrinsically as much a matter of the art of command as of the sciences of management. Contrary to what a simplifying vision of history might lead us to believe, no military leader has marked history solely by the strength of his charisma. "At the bottom of Alexander's victories, we find Aristotle", said General de Gaulle [10]. The fundamental specificity of military command should not lead armies to ignore the managerial role of their officers.

The managerial role of the officer has been considerably strengthened in recent years. This dynamic is first and foremost the result of societal changes that have had an impact on military operating methods. "We are now at a time in our history when the primacy of the economy tends to justify everything through the prism of rationality and accounting efficiency alone" [11], General Georgelin stressed in 2009.

11] Recent internal reforms within the armed forces further consolidate this dynamic. There is an obvious paradox here, since the army has been undergoing a profound transformation since 2008 to refocus on its core business. These reforms should logically have reinforced the notion of "fullness of command" as established by the 1882 law on the administration of the army [12]. [12] This did not happen. Freed from the responsibility of support, the chief is now forced to negotiate, convince or "contract" where he used to order.

Command of men and management of organizations are thus today more than ever associated, interdependent [13]. These evolutions have naturally reinforced the interest that management sciences and techniques represent for the staff officer.

Training in organisational management, a military imperative

Recognizing the reality and importance of the officer's managerial role requires conclusions to be drawn in terms of training. This is the translation of the precept laid down more than two centuries ago by the founder of the Special Military School: "The greatest immorality is to do a job you don't know". The aim is obviously not, however, to train officers in financial management or compatibility. The contribution of managerial sciences goes beyond this simple framework and the managerial role of the officer is not of this order.

To train the staff officer in managerial sciences is to strengthen his ability to influence the functioning of the organizations in and with which he serves. At each level of responsibility, demonstrating authority, leading by example and giving meaning takes place in different ways. To say this does not in any way contradict the immutable nature of the leader's virtues. Direct leadership ("front line" command), organizational leadership (authority exercised within a staff or through different levels) or strategic command[14] do not use the same intellectual levers or attitudes[15].

15] Social and managerial sciences explore these nuances and reveal the conceptual underpinnings attached to them. They are of primary use to the officer. The military leader must not, for fear of contributing to trivializing the military state, deprive himself of exploiting its lessons. On the contrary, he must take advantage of them and build on the legitimacy he has acquired through his contact with the troops to develop his own organizational and strategic leadership skills. If this comparison is not correct, it is interesting to note that these subjects account for nearly 20% of the teaching programmes of the Command and Staff College and the War College among our American allies.

Managerial sciences, a concrete aid to leadership practice

For the military leader, the most obvious contribution of the social sciences lies in the teachings of group dynamics. Influence and conviction in a joint, interdepartmental or multinational structure or working group is not exclusively a matter of intuition and charisma. The work of Kurt Lewin, Richard Hackman[16] or Daniel Kahneman[17] demonstrates this. Moreover, they bring a useful conceptual light to the understanding of cognitive, sociological and human phenomena that govern the life and decisions of a group. The officer must take advantage of them to manoeuvre effectively, take the initiative and, in the end, impose his ideas. Technocratic combat is, like war, "a science for the greatest, an art for the mediocre and a trade for the ignorant" [18].

The officer will also be able to find in the managerial sciences a precious help to develop the capacities of adaptation and innovation of the organizations in which he serves. Indeed, reforming or adapting the operating methods of an administrative structure requires more than the strength of conviction. It also requires processes and methods. It is based above all on concepts that many academic publications have visited and that should be appropriated [19]. 19] If, as history has shown, military victory requires adaptation and innovation, the officer must be initiated into the theories of change management.

Preparing the military leader for the exercise of responsibilities means, finally, giving him or her the keys to understanding decision-making processes. Here again, managerial sciences are a valuable aid. G. Allison's work on the essence of a decision offers first-rate insight specifically adapted to the environment and the needs of the staff officer [20]. 20] This Harvard professor and former special advisor on military affairs to President Reagan explores the rational, procedural and political dimensions of any decision of a political-military nature. The staff officer must make them his own in order to bring his full intelligence to bear on the decision-making process.

Very concretely, managerial sciences provide the military with the necessary levers to manoeuvre in the hushed universe of "matrix organizations" where the notions of authority and rationality prove insufficient to win the decision. Indeed, the staff officer cannot simply demonstrate the validity of his analyses or needs. Managerial science teaches him the importance of taking advantage of bureaucratic and procedural machinery to present his ideas at the right time and to focus his influence at the right level. Similarly, organisational theory teaches him to anticipate the interests of different parties in order to avoid, or on the contrary exploit, the struggles for influence inherent in any complex organisation.

It must be said that the staff officer's daily mission is to lead battles of ideas. In order to win, he must have the necessary theoretical tools at his disposal. The managerial sciences, and more particularly those related to the management of organizations, are a valuable asset in this respect. It would be suicidal to deprive oneself of it.

Ultimately, preparing the military leader for the exercise of responsibilities is, of course and first and foremost, to guarantee his ability to command men with authority and conviction. But it also means providing him with the academic and conceptual bases necessary to understand the inner workings of any human and bureaucratic organization. The officer must have neither complexes nor reluctance to seek in the social and managerial sciences precepts whose application can strengthen his credibility and effectiveness. On the contrary, the recognition of his ability to "fully command" could paradoxically depend on the ability of armies to draw inspiration from civilian management methods.

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