

ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF ACADEMIC EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING ON NAVAL LEADERSHIP

Vergil CHIȚAC¹
Mustafa Taner ALBAYRAK²
Octavian TĂRĂBUȚĂ³

¹ Rear Admiral, Professor PhD, Rector of Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy, Constanta, Romania

² Captain (r) Assoc. Professor PhD, Piri Reis University, Istanbul, Turkey

³ Captain, Assoc. Professor PhD, Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy, Constanta, Romania

Abstract: Leadership is the simultaneous interaction based on a common communication language, aiming to achieve a target characterized by complexity, dynamism and a variable degree of uncertainty. Training knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the leader will follow the principle of lifelong learning. Leadership in the naval academies/maritime universities should be studied and applied continuously from the first year of study and ending when obtaining the first rank of officer. Subsequently, modern leadership skills will be developed to the level of the naval hierarchy organization and the position within it. The role and influence of academic education and vocational training on naval leadership is of utmost importance. These are implicit elements of any sides of the triangle of leadership – authority, responsibility, accountability. The authors attempt to analyze the factors that determine the ratio of academic education vs. vocational training, through several perspectives of both participants and beneficiaries of the education process.

Key-words: naval leadership, academic education, vocational training, Marine.

1. INTRODUCTION

Naval leadership, as capability/competence of leading naval organizations, has as its final objective the optimal decisions for the mission entrusted. Given the different levels of authority of the officers throughout their careers, this competence is a lifelong one. Within the education and training institutions of Member States of the EU and NATO & IMO leadership is not only a practical operational topic but also the organizational culture of the civilian and military students. However, the present national system of naval education considers leadership as a simple discipline that ensures only vocational command skills. The study of leadership is isolated without emphasizing the interdisciplinary and permanent nature of this concept, leadership being treated fragmentarily. Command and control of naval organizations is mainly based on the attribute of authority vested into an individual according to chain of command regulations. Leadership is consciously applied from relatively complex levels of naval organizations and not at all hierarchical levels. The need to develop the concept of leadership is required by the following goals:

- Professionalization of leadership and control of the naval organization.
- Increase of the efficiency and effectiveness of maritime personnel.
- Provide leadership under the new national, EU and IMO requirements.

Leadership is the simultaneous interaction based on a common communication language, aiming to achieve a target characterized by complexity, dynamism and a variable degree of uncertainty. Taking this into account, the authors consider that the competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) necessary for the leader should follow the principle of lifelong learning. Leadership in the many naval academies and maritime universities should be studied and applied continuously from the first year of study and ending when obtaining the first rank of an officer. Subsequently, modern leadership skills will be developed to the level of the naval/maritime hierarchy organization and the position within it.

The role and influence of academic education and vocational training on naval leadership is of utmost importance. These are implicit elements of any sides of the triangle of leadership – authority, responsibility, accountability. The authors will attempt to analyze the factors that determine the ratio of academic education vs. vocational training, through several perspectives of both participants and beneficiaries of the education process.

Education and training (E&T) of the naval officers is a question of paramount importance for any

effective commercial fleet or navy. As most of the European countries are connected together within organizations of the European Union and/or NATO and IMO, the necessity of designing a compatible E&T system is increasing. Meanwhile, the newly born concepts of “smart defense”, “pooling and sharing” and the new STCW’s Manila amendments refer also to building a common E&T system, or at least compatible national ones. The main reason for that is, obviously, to inculcate the same professional and transversal competences for the European naval officers.

This paper discusses the ratio between pure academic education (AE) and vocational training (VT) that are both needed in forming the competences, from the perspective of an institution assigned to deliver officers on board naval or commercial ships. The authors, after an overview of AE & VT and their roles in building the naval officers’ competences, analyze the causes of the present ratio AE/VT and try to foresee some courses of action for planning balanced but nevertheless compatible E&T systems.

2. ACADEMIC EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING ROLES IN BUILDING THE COMPETENCES

Academic education is mainly descriptive (declarative) knowledge that focuses on reading material, being told information, and discussing material. It also tends to have a strong focus on writing, although some academic disciplines focus more on this than others. Academic teaching emphasizes the understanding of *concepts* in a *theoretical setting* rather than applying them in a practical setting. That is why graduates from academic schools tend to have broader, less-applied skills.

On the other hand, vocational training is procedural knowledge. Students are taught *task specific* rules, skills, actions, and sequences of actions employed to reach goals. These are achieved mostly by the means of practical activities, where hands-on training is often used. Rather than designing concepts, students would be actually doing a task or building something, according to the definition of “learning by doing”. Military training that strongly relies on *procedures* is a good example of what VT is and does. However, despite its advantages, we should note the limitation of VT as procedural knowledge, namely its job-dependence.

In 1996, in his report to the UNESCO, Jacques Delors stated the four final objectives education and training should accomplish: “To know, to do, to be and to live in the community”. As professional and transversal competences of a naval officer can be divided in three categories - technical, operational and leadership, we need

to outline the features of AE and VT. From this perspective, academic courses are concerned with developing knowledge, vocational courses are concerned with developing skills. The traditional way would separate academic education from vocational training, but in the era of a society increasingly driven by industrial, economic and technological challenges, AE & VT should be non-exclusive. So the “battle” between *critical thinking* and *applied skill* has to be thoroughly analyzed in order to make the perfect balance that solid competences require.

3. THE BALANCE OF ACADEMIC EDUCATION & VOCATIONAL TRAINING OF NAVAL OFFICERS

The key question we should answer is actually “How much AE and how much VT the naval officers need, and at what stage of education”? AE is implicitly required as most European naval academies and maritime universities deliver higher education study programmes. In the meantime, there is currently a surge in demanding VT i.e. skills at early stages of officers’ education and training. Why is that? Because the results of AE are not as immediately visible as those of VT and enough decision-makers lack or don’t afford the patience of a long term educational programme. As an argument of us, we can quote Michael Gove, UK education secretary: “For many years our education system has failed properly to value practical education, choosing to give far greater emphasis to purely academic achievements”.

If so, what is the ratio we should combine AE & VT? Taking in account not only the initial formation of a naval officer, we should also consider his/her continuous learning. In order to get the proper balance, let us first look at the conditions that determine the current ratio between AE and VT as we know it in Europe. As we may guess, there are many objective and subjective variables that decide the amount of AE vs. VT. We will present them in a brief succession. The causes of different AE/VT ratios throughout the naval schools lay in the more or less different environments they act in and they can be grouped as:

- Political (laws of education, national doctrines and specific regulations of MoDs);
- Social (diploma recognition in civilian society, expected years of service, readiness for civilian afterlife);
- Financial (amount of money assigned to education);
- Cultural (history, traditions of each nation).

Nonetheless, on top of these we shouldn’t neglect at all the new pan-European concept of *Lifelong Learning* that establishes the continuous character of the educational process for every individual. So the ratio is changing also during the career: one can acquire competences from the academy, application school, IMO operational level courses, master and doctoral degree studies, then post-graduate specialty courses and leadership & staff courses or IMO managerial level courses eventually strategic/political studies. Along officers’ career path, AE is growing and VT is shrinking in their proportions.

The complexity of the combination of these factors is obviously awesome. Whoever looks for an in-depth image of these parameters in the EU/NATO countries will notice that each element can make this ratio to be significantly different in these military education systems. That is why setting a proper balance of AE & VT for the European naval officers is a matter of hard study and open minds, as well.

4. COMPATIBILITY AT THE CADET/YOUNG OFFICER LEVEL

Unfortunately, the likelihood of the study programmes is impeded by the national AE/VT ratio. Generally, although the learning outcomes are similar or even the same, the study programmes differ in many European states. Moreover, despite the attempts of making a choice between national education systems’

with developing abilities at performing tasks, while attitudes and values are imparted by both AE and VT.

stability versus its reformation for the sake of quality improvement, the diversity of naval education systems increased. That is why compatibility is weaker at early stages but improves later, as the cadet is climbing the educational gangway.

How can we measure the degree of compatibility among systems? – mainly in exchanges of students or teachers. There are currently powerful European means of increasing it. Compatibility is strongly aided by educational exchanges – most efficient means at this time. Erasmus University Charter (student and staff mobilities for exchanges at the higher education level) allows naval academies and maritime universities to take advantage of co-funding of their exchange expenses. There is also the European initiative for exchange of young officers – the “Military Erasmus”, which is still very generous but lacking funding. Bilateral cooperation is still a good way of exchanges at a smaller scale but it is nonetheless very effective.

Another very effective ways of exchanges experiences and good practice procedures regarding the AE/VT ratio are the trans-national projects funded by different European instruments. The authors present such a means currently underway that is the MARINE project.

MARINE is a cross-border cooperation project and stands for the “Maritime network of education for the development of the maritime culture in the Black Sea basin”. It is undertaken under the 2nd Call for Proposals of the Joint Operational Programme “Black Sea Basin 2007-2013”, Priority 3: “Supporting cultural and educational initiatives for the establishment of a common cultural environment in the Basin”, Measure 3.1 “Promoting cultural networking and educational exchange in the Black Sea Basin communities”. The partners are the “Mircea cel Batran” Naval Academy, Romania, the “Piri Reis” University of Istanbul, Turkey, the National Maritime Academy of Odessa and the Technical University of Moldova, Republic of Moldova. The project started on March 12 2013 and will last for 24 months.

The overall objective of this joint project is the development of the maritime culture in the Black Sea basin through emphasizing the common maritime traditions of the partner countries and enhancing the preparedness of the professionals involved in the maritime industry (maritime/river transportation, shipbuilding, fisheries, offshore oil/gas extracting industry, ports, environmental research, humanities and so on). In order to efficiently store the data and share information on maritime culture in the western Black Sea area, an integrated educational network will be developed (the MARitime PLATform - MARPLAT). As the backbone of the joint Action, MARPLAT is envisaged as a modular, updatable design in order to continuously serve its role and even to expand after the completion of the project. According to the specific objectives, the estimated results are:

- Maritime history events (International conference, experts’ seminar, cross-border exhibition);
- Maritime education, training and research conferences, study programmes and short mobilities for teachers and students, held among the partners;
- Direct promotion of the maritime heritage of the Black Sea basin’s peoples by the means of a monograph, a documentary film and other materials disseminated mainly to high schools.
- Design and implementation of the maritime education platform (virtual portal) MARPLAT as the main forum of the joint Action MARINE.

- Design of new maritime river transportation and port management curricula/syllabuses for P3 - the Technical University of Moldova (TUM), which will be the first maritime & river transportation study programmes in the Republic of Moldova.

As the readers can notice, the objectives of this project are related not only to the skills and knowledge of the future mariners, but also to their attitude, which are focused together to a higher leadership competence of naval officers.

5. CONCLUSION

The debate on the question “Is there a unique model of naval education appropriate to all EU/NATO states?” is very complex and requires intricate analysis. For those who recognize clearly the necessity of greater compatibility through a balanced AE/VT ratio, we suggest here some courses of action. Firstly, a general agreement on AE/VT ratio at the bachelor degree level should be set. From the perspective of the study programmes planning, that will be based on an agreement on a minimum set of outcomes/learning results for the cadets. In order to do this, the Bologna process – establishment of the European Higher Education Area - should be the guidance which will lead to increasing the role of the “Military Erasmus” initiative. Thus, the European naval academies and maritime universities would avoid educational endogamy.

Secondly, of course, there is a set of complementary ways of implementing the proper common competences, such as softening the reluctance in changing national policies, increasing awareness at the higher command/political level. Modular construction of study programmes, synchronization of modules and increase of use of English language for both staff and students are also required for a better educated and trained European naval officer.

REFERENCES:

- [1] *** Division Officer Leadership Training Course, Department of the Navy, USA, 2006
- [2] *** Division Officer Leadership Training Facilitator Guide, Department of the Navy, USA, 2006.
- [3] *** Man the Braces! - Naval Operational Leadership and Leadership Training, Royal Norwegian Naval Academy, Bergen 2009
- [4] Zlate, M., Leadership and Management, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2004
- [5] Covey, R.S., Efficient Leader Ethic, Alfa Publishing House, 2000
- [6] *** Maritime Network of Education for the Development of the Maritime Culture in the Black Sea Basin, Application Form, Constanta, 2012.