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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE CHILEAN NAVY

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Abstract

Leadership development is considered an essential tool for success, both in military and civilian organisations. In times when adapting to change has become a continuous challenge, the Chilean Navy's leadership development model might need to be analysed using the experiences of other navies and other Chilean civilian organisations.
This essay summarises a research done as part of the MA 'Leadership', at the University College of London. It includes experiences obtained from the British Royal Navy, and the insights of a group of Chilean civilians and naval interviewees. The conclusions discuss about the key components that a leadership development programme in the Chilean Navy should have.

Keywords: Leadership development, leadership skills, professional learning, adaptive capacity.

Nowadays, leadership development is considered an essential tool for success, both in military and civilian organisations. In armed forces, since the relevance of leadership in the exercise of command, some institutions have created educational establishments to design and perform leadership learning and training activities. The present essay summarises a research about key components that a leadership development programme in the Chilean Navy should have, from the lens of the literature, the experiences of the British Royal Navy and the leadership perspectives of a group of civilian and naval interviewees.

The essay is divided into four paragraphs: one, a contextualisation of the importance of leadership in the Chilean Navy and the description of the British Royal Navy's leadership development model; two, a review of relevant literature; three, a description of the methodology employed and a summary of the research findings; four, the conclusions obtained.

Context

In the Chilean Navy, leadership development is mainly focussed on officers' education, being the main purpose of their initial training in the Naval Academy. In the case of ratings, leadership development is not included in their initial formation, and it occurs during the 'command course' as sergeant, with nearly 20 years of service. Although this leadership development model has given positive results during the history of the institution, it might lack of some developmental activities during the careers of both officers and ratings. The above, since command and leadership styles have changed in today's armed forces, and because of the level of preparation and knowledge of its members (St. George, 2012; Sims, 2015). The absence of a leadership development programme as part of the career of all servers might be a pending challenge for the Chilean Navy, where learning from the experiences of other navies could be useful.

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In the British Royal Navy, leadership development is in charge of the Royal Naval Leadership Academy (RNLA) which, jointly with the Britannia Royal Naval College, has the mission of developing leadership skills among officers and ratings (RNLA, 2016). The British Royal Navy leadership development model is based in the doctrines of the Defence Leadership Centre (DLC), and is part of the professional learning policy of the Institution (DLC, 2004).

Figure 2 Action Centred Leadership (RNLA, 2016).

One of the main characteristics of this model is that it is seen as a 'whole career process', in a framework denominated 'Maritime through career development' (MTCD). MTCD consists of different courses and activities of personal and professional development, considering that along officers and ratings individual careers 'the skills required will change from the early task-centred leadership to a more strategic approach' (St. George, 2012, p. 71). It includes activities outside the common work environment because 'time and space away from the normal workplace is required to conduct a critical self-examination of their personal understandings of how leadership works' (DLC, 2004, p. 92).

MTCD is focussed on different command, leadership and management skills according to officers and ratings' ranks, positions and responsibilities, and is based in two main theories: action centred and situational leadership. Action centred leadership was the first theory taught in the British Royal Navy and it argues that 'a leader must consider and balance the task in hand, the strength of the team and the needs of the individual' (St. George, 2012, p. 76). The situational leadership theory added three aspects to this approach: 'the situation and its urgency or importance; the capability of the team and the individuals in it; the kinds of professional expertise available' (p. 78).

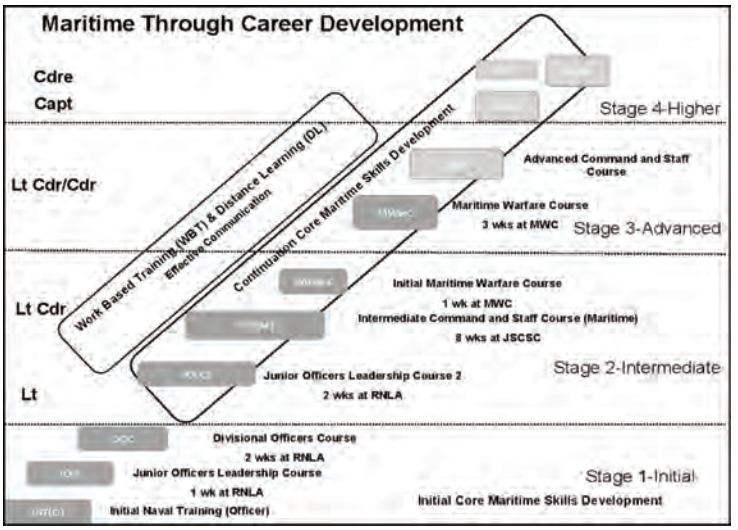

Figure 1 Officers MTCD (RNLA, 2016).

Literature review

Leadership is a concept that has been a matter of study for a long time (Day et al., 2014). As it is expressed by the Defence Leadership Centre, 'there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept' (DLC, 2004, p. 2). Maccoby describes leadership 'as a relationship that exists only as long as people follow the leader' (2007, p. 19). And as he affirms, in this relationship leaders are

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followed not only for their qualities but because people believe that they are taking them to a good and better place.

Leadership involves motivating others to act because of their own beliefs and convictions, it provides direction to a team and it exercises influence over others (Haslam et al., 2011; Earley, 2017). It is considered a significant matter for the performance of an organisation (Pernick, 2001), and it is agreed that the lack of leadership could drive an organisation to failure in the process of adapting to straining situations and assuming change (Eichholz, 2014).

Since the nature of military institutions where servers must be committed to give their lives in case it is needed, leadership behaviours have to be linked to the values of the organisation because they derive from personal qualities 'but also from the core values shared' (St. George, 2012, p.12). These core values have to be part of the culture of the institution, which is defined by Eichholz (2014) as the organisations' blood.

Leadership and adapting to change

In today's society, all types of organisations need the ability to predict and manage change. Organisational adaptation is a hard but purposeful work that requires leadership with defined goals, building an 'adaptive capacity' at all levels (Stoll et al., 2006; Eichholz, 2014). An adaptive capacity is the ability to manage tension situations in a way that allows an organisation to recover equilibrium by means of positive changes. And to make positive changes, problems have to be faced as challenges and opportunities (Barrett, 2004).

Another important component for organisational success when facing change is structure, which generates the holding environment for making members of the organisation feel safe (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002). In the process of building a solid structure, Collins (2001) 'good to great' leadership theory might be useful: first, getting the right people to join the team; second, getting the wrong people out of the team; third, locating each individual in the appropriate position according to their motivations and skills; fourth, deciding the direction where the team should go.

During periods of calm, it is commonly agreed that an adaptive capacity is not needed since 'keeping on doing the same things we have always done may not be a bad strategy at all' (Eichholz, 2014, p. 19). The issue about dealing with change during periods of equilibrium relies on the understanding that nowadays, organisations need to improve and develop themselves to achieve a long-term sustainability (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002). Therefore, where to centre the efforts when exercising leadership might be a difficult challenge.

Immediate demands are difficult to be ignored. Wulf (2014) argues that a leader should be able to give his maximum efforts to the principal issues,

Figure 3: The road to be a leader (Hudea, 2014).

and only the necessary to the secondary tasks. Davies (2007) affirms that immediate tasks are commonly associated to short-term measures and the principal issues of an organisation are linked to long-term development. Focussing in the immediate tasks generates the feeling that an organisation is performing positively and no change is required. But when leadership behaviours are centred in the organisations' long-term development, an adaptive work is essential.

Leadership development

Leadership development mainly refers to the extension of the abilities and skills of an individual, to influence effectively and positively an organisation for achieving success. Today, organisations are investing important resources in formal leadership development programmes (Hirst et al., 2004). Hudea (2014) says that the road to be a leader must accomplish three main steps: First, a leader must learn how to lead himself. Second, a leader must learn how to lead individuals using an appropriate set of communication skills. Third, a leader must learn to lead a group of people, building a positive holding environment.

In leadership development, around 70% of learning comes from experience and only 30% from other activities like education, training and mentoring (Hudea, 2014). Experience, the most important aspect in the development of leadership skills, is based on doing things since 'we become professionally experienced while working in our field of activity' (Hudea, 2014, p. 112). Nevertheless, it is agreed that a combination of experience and oriented learning activities is essential to develop effective leadership behaviours.

	Task	Basic Questions
1	Create Program Selection Criteria	What kind of candidates is the organisation looking for?
2	Define Leadership Competencies	What does it take to be a good leader in the organisation?
3	Establish an Application Process	How can I become a participant in the program?
4	Assess Current Leadership Skills	How do I stack up as a leader right now?
5	Provide Developmental Activities	What specific things do I need to do to become a better leader?
6	Align Structures to Reinforce Program	In what ways the leadership development programme is reinforced by other human resources systems?
7	Develop Leaders in Context	Can the group(s) I lead be part of the developmental process?
8	Plan for the Next Generation of Leaders	How can we ensure we have the right mix of leaders today and tomorrow?
9	Evaluate the Leadership Development Program	Are we getting a good return on our investment?

Table 1 Nine essential tasks for a leadership development programme (Pernick, 2001).

When talking about the characteristics of a leadership development programme, Day et al. (2014) affirm that different interpersonal and intrapersonal processes have to be addressed:

a) Interpersonal processes:

- Social mechanisms: To enable positive relationships between members, delivering space for both innovation and communication.
- Authentic leadership: To build relationships driven by trust, developing an authentic follower.

b) Intrapersonal processes:

- Experience and learning: Previous experiences have to be considered to decide which activities should be included.
- Skills: Specific abilities, personalities and motivations are required for different leadership roles.
- Personality: A person that is conscientious about his or her personal issues could be more likely to perform effectively as a leader.
- Self-development: Related with the orientations for work, mastery and career-growth.

As processes that have to be sustained over time, leadership development programmes should involve different tasks. Pernick (2001) argues that these tasks have to answer nine basic questions:

In leadership development, powerful questions are essential. Vogt et al. (2003) argue that 'effective "knowledge work" consists of asking profound questions and hosting wide-ranging strategic conversations on issues of substance' (p. 2). In his perspective, by means of powerful questions an effective leader fosters a 'breakthrough thinking' that generates interest, motivates reflection and induces more questions.

Methodology and findings

After the review of the literature, the main research question was refined to:

What should be the key components for the design of an effective leadership development programme for the Chilean Navy, considering the experiences of different chilean non-military organisations and using the leadership development model of the British Royal Navy?

Taking in consideration the scale and purpose of the work, four specific sub-research questions were elaborated:

- What should be understood as leadership in the Chilean Navy?
- Up to what extent leadership skills can be learned and trained?
- How leadership is developed in chilean non-military organisations?
- Which are the leadership challenges for the Chilean Navy?

The research took the design frame of a case study, including twelve semi-structured interviews to chilean civilians and naval participants. These interviews allowed the researcher to link the experiences of the British Royal Navy to the culture and idiosyncrasy of the chilean society and the Chilean Navy. The study followed an interpretivist approach, understanding knowledge as a resource that is constructed by social interactions where all perspectives and ideas are valid and worthy (Briggs et al, 2012).

Q1. What should be understood as leadership in the Chilean Navy?

Since the relevance that leadership has in the exercise of command, in the Chilean Navy it is commonly associated to a skill to earn trust and to mobilise others, principally subordinate and junior staff. Notwithstanding the above, considering the context where the Institution develops its activities nowadays, it should not be exclusively linked to senior staff, being able to oversee authority.

Leadership should be understood as a relationship that inspires by example, providing a common vision and direction to a team. It should go further than the specific task of the unit, developing new capabilities, generating new challenges and being a key tool for adapting to change. It must be linked to core values, coherent to leader's behavior and the organisation's moral purpose, and constructed by social processes and the culture of the organisation.

Q2. Up to what extent leadership skills can be learned and trained?

Leadership skills involve both innate and learned behaviors. In leadership development, personal experiences are essential but they have to be combined with learning and training activities.

Considering that the Naval Academy's main purpose is to develop leaders, it can be inferred that the Chilean Navy agrees that leadership skills can be learned and trained.

Hence, there are two aspects that should be considered when talking about leadership development: the specific innate conditions required to develop a particular set of leadership skills, and the activities and spaces that a programme should have for leadership learning and training, inside and outside the working environment.

- **Q3. How leadership is developed in chilean non-military organisations?**

Leadership has taken an important place in chilean non-military organisations professional learning, mainly as a tool for wellbeing, to develop identity, to improve team work and to generate new capabilities. Leadership development activities emphasise the significance of building positive and trustful relationships, creating common views to guide and motivate others to learn new things.

Personal experiences are very important. Therefore, leadership development in chilean non-military organisations considers spaces to learn from personal mistakes and errors, taking people out from their comfort zones to create new challenges and opportunities for improvement. Learning activities are contextualised to the characteristics of each organisation, in accordance to their structures, purposes and values.

- **Q4. What are the leadership challenges for the Chilean Navy?**

The Chilean Navy might lack of a structured set of leadership development activities along the career of both officers and ratings, orienting servers' leadership behaviors according to their particular ranks and jobs. In some branches, it might also lack of appropriate situations to challenge members' values and decision making processes, since in times of peace their environment could miss real tension situations and actions. Leadership development should consider the appropriate personal skills to interact not only with naval servers but also with civilians, where different codes are present. In this perspective, in some ranks and roles adaptive skills might be more relevant than technical knowledge.

For officers, leadership challenges might be associated to define the appropriate tools to develop leadership skills, and to establish which specific skills should be learnt and trained at each stage of the career. For ratings, the challenge could be linked to the relevance of leadership in their professional careers, in terms of their development as individuals but also as an organisational improvement tool.

Conclusions

- Leadership is important in the Chilean Navy not only because of its relevance in the exercise of command, but since the significance it has in today's society as a tool for adapting to change. Leadership has to align servers' hearts behind an organisation that is bigger than all its members, where the vocation to serve the country has to be over any personal aspect. It should go over authority, as a personal development tool for both leaders and followers.
- The creation of a leadership development programme should start with a leadership doctrine that defines a common vision and an appropriate balance between task, teams and individuals. This doctrine should include core values, with the institution's leadership premises in accordance to today's chilean society since the Navy, up to an important extent, is a representation of it.
- When creating a leadership development programme, three perspectives should be considered: individuals that will be part of it; servers' responsibilities and duties; learning and training activities. The first, to address individuals' qualities and abilities as human beings, generating personal visions, passions and interests in accordance to the organisation's purpose. The second, to consider each stage of the career to include learning and training activities for specific abilities and skills. The third, to include activities inside and outside the working environment, taking servers out of their comfort zones.
- Even though leadership is a skill that can be learnt and trained, it involves personal conditions that might be oblivious to training. Particular leadership skills should be required before

starting each learning stage. In officers and ratings' admission processes, these skills might include communication abilities, personality and emotional intelligence, contextualised to the complexities that life at sea has.

- As a military Institution, the context of the Chilean Navy demands servers to be prepared to manage tension situations. Hence, the lack of real situations might negatively affect servers' attitudes when facing crises, individually and as part of teams. Branches and specialities where training environments are far from what is experienced in real operations might miss circumstances where values, personalities and decision-making processes are tested. The absence of combat operations could be one of the reasons why the Chilean Navy has turned to be more a bureaucratic organisation than an action-driven one.

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