Anti-leadership in dispositional groups

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Abstract:

Toxic leadership (anti-leadership) in dispositional groups manifests itself at different levels of command and control; ranging from competence formation to commandery. It should be noted, however, that in the case of dispositional groups, the tasks are performed under very specific conditions. Working at the limit of one's capabilities and the threat of losing one's health and life or, as in the case of the military – taking the lives of others, makes this environment mentally and physically extreme. There is no room for revision when things fail to follow the plan. It is impossible to pause during the execution of a task, to look at it from a different perspective and think of a different way of doing it. The time and events move at an unimaginable speed. Decision making must be, therefore, quick and accurate, and the personnel in charge should be well prepared. Anti-leadership is far more damaging in dispositional groups than in organisations outside them. This makes it all the more important that leaders, commanders and managers are properly selected and properly prepared for their leadership roles.

Keywords: leadership, dispositional groups, authority, anti-leadership, toxic leadership, command and control

*Leadership is a matter of intelligence, trustworthiness,
humaneness, courage, and sternness.*

Sun Tzu *The Art of War*

INTRODUCTION

Leading an institution, a tactical unit or a task force requires a certain skill set. Being a commander is not easy, but it is very important, not to say fundamental, in terms of shaping morale, for example. The commander in command groups has the additional task of creating a new image of the world in the minds of his/her subordinates. The most important role in the uniformed services is therefore that of the commander. The inability to manage subordinates instead of a monolithic task group, who are able to perform tasks far beyond their objectively and subjectively assessed capabilities, or even tasks considered unfeasible, turns them into a group of people without purpose, motivation or desire to do anything. It introduces into their behaviour pathological elements that are far removed from ethical canons. A commander is to a soldier what a parent is to a child in terms of shaping the basic behavioural algorithm. Whatever his/her rank, the commander is the most observed and imitated subject of the subdivision, squad or tactical unit. The quality of the whole organisation depends on the commander's attitude and behaviour.

1. SPECIFIC NATURE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE DISPOSITIONAL GROUPS

Society's dispositional groups are a very specific occupational group within the range of human professions available. They are created to perform tasks in environments where an ordinary worker might say 'thank you, I'm not going there'. Dispositional groups, true to their name, have a servant role to the society in which they function. They are at its disposal. The word 'disposition' comes from the Latin *dispono*. It means to set apart, to order, to apply, to dispose. So considered, the disposition is precisely linked to the ability of people or social groups to behave in certain ways. Dispositional groups are social groups that are formed reflexively in relation to larger social structures, taking into account immediate or permanent needs in a given community. According to J. Maciejewski, the creator of the concept of dispositional groups, their disposition is realised in the sphere of general security in relation to the social group in which they function. Maciejewski distinguishes between disposition in the broad sense, as a link to a generally accepted attitude towards typical activities, and in the narrow sense, as a specific disposition defined by the scope, speed or intensity of intervention[20]. This can be illustrated more clearly using the example of the armed forces. In the broadest sense, the armed forces are a dispositional group that retains the ability to perform tasks arising from its assigned

function, which includes ensuring the integrity and sovereignty of the state. In turn, the composition of the armed forces consists of specialised structures, for example: air defence units, rapid reaction forces or special services, which manifest specific characteristics related to their specificity, constituting a special disposition, i.e., a narrow disposition. The disposition of the members of the task forces is contained in the action performed, which is the subject of their professional activity. The main manifestation of their disposition is considered to be the function they perform in counteracting and combating the effects of threats to areas of collective life. These activities should not be the domain of amateur actions, but should be activities qualified by high skills and qualifications, which allow them to perform the tasks according to their purpose. These are usually the so-called extreme environments. It follows that the members of the task forces should consist of highly qualified, competent personnel who have been properly vetted at the recruitment stage. Such vetting and preparation will enable the tasks to be carried out effectively and, in turn, ensure high public confidence. Thus, task forces must meet the condition of professional groups. According to E. Freidson, a professional group is "(...) a closed group, access to which is determined by the opinion of the professionals themselves; the training of professionals is carried out in close contact with their environment, and the internal supervision of the group dominates over other types of control, for example by state institutions; professionals are also characterised by a different professional culture" [11].

Dispositional groups are groups with a highly hierarchical structure. The vertical structure creates a strong interdependence between the participants, based on the level of the hierarchy and the formal function of the individual. The highest position is held by the command, which results from the functions and competences required. Members of the command therefore enjoy high prestige and formal (official) authority. Official authority, also known as institutional authority, is a direct result of the position held in the hierarchy and the function performed, and is so tied to it that it disappears with the loss of the function – the position, which enables the leadership of others. The functionality of the system in question, both internally and in relation to the external environment, is guaranteed by the arrangement of functions in dispositional groups. This particular balance requires certain specialised dispositions on the part of the members performing various roles. This system, made up of actors, resources and organisational culture, should form an interdependent structure. The effectiveness of the dispositional groups, due to the specificity of the activities, depends on the level of team chemistry. Each member should know his/her place, tasks in the structure and the difficulties or risks s/he may encounter. In order to achieve this state of effective cohesion, it would be necessary to start with the correct selection of candidates for specific functions. The dispositions that a candidate should have are essential in order to acquire, during training,

the appropriate qualifications needed to carry out the tasks set effectively. It should be stressed that qualifications are not something that can be acquired once and for all. Therefore, the specific nature of work (service) in the dispositional groups imposes on its members permanent necessity to maintain and improve the qualifications acquired. The members of these groups are obliged to constantly train their psycho-physical abilities and skills and to constantly improve their professional knowledge. The selection of candidates should not end with the initial qualification. At the point of entry into the aptitude group, selection takes place only at the level of the aforementioned definition of aptitude in the broader sense, i.e., only at the level of the general predispositions that qualify one to function in the dispositional group. These dispositions do not necessarily correspond to the specialised competences required for the individual functions or service positions. Specialised competence, as a cognitive domain, correlates very strongly with the leadership ability. This is due to the fact that most of the functions and positions in the dispositional groups are related to the management of people working in teams.

2. THE ROLE OF AUTHORITY IN DISPOSITIONAL GROUPS

As stated above, the function or official position held confers official, institutional or formal authority on the subject. Unfortunately, this is not a sufficient attribute for the effective management of human teams. By relying on formal authority alone, a manager is unable to exercise the leadership function effectively. Such reliance alone can therefore lead to management pathologies. In the management of human teams, and especially in dispositional groups where management becomes inseparable from leadership, the possession of personal authority is essential for effective management (command). The definition of authority is rather ambiguous. The term itself is derived from the Latin word *autoritas*, which means influence, solemnity, obedience and recognition. In the PWN Popular Encyclopaedia, we find the term authority explained as: "a category or psycho-social phenomenon described in the human sciences to denote a significant influence exerted by a person or institution on the development of the mind or on relations between people, who submissively accept its claims or norms, while feeling respect and recognising its solemnity, superiority or competence" [8]. In other words, an authority can be considered a person worthy of respect because of the competence. Following this narrative, at this point we can refer to the reflections of E. Fromm, who, in relation to authority, said the following: "The fundamental issue is the distinction between having authority and being an authority. Almost all of us, at some time in our lives, act in a role of authority. It is only possible to understand the two modalities of

authority when we realise that the concept has a wide scope in which two different meanings can be distinguished – authority can be rational or irrational. Rational authority is based on competence and promotes the development of the person dependent on it. Irrational authority is based on power and its purpose is the exploitation of the subordinate"[12]. Man has a constant internal need for authority. According to V. Pareto, it is one of the necessary conditions for the formation of a community, along with the need for dependence, affect, esteem or fear [25]. M. Weber also identifies authority as an individual, irrational, inner need, based on a belief that is not determined by interests[29]. In the theory of C. Homans and P. Blau, authority is located in the paradigm of exchange in the process of transforming power into authority. Blau believes that leaders who respect the principles of fairness and reciprocity in exchange relations with subordinates undergo a transformation in which competition gradually replaces areas of integration[4]. Romans added that: "(...) power and authority need not be identical (...). Persuading people to achieve individual benefits by following the instructions of a superior builds authority in a very significant way. This is in line with the approach of J. Adair who, in his three-dimensional concept of leadership, places great emphasis on the individual benefits that an individual achieves by submitting to a leader in order to build his authority. A leader who does not give proper importance to building and shaping authority, in the broadest sense, will not be able to effectively manage the human resources entrusted to him/her. The building of authority consists of several areas that are equivalent and closely related to each other. This means that a lack of competence in any one of them will result in the leader's failure to develop authority, which leads to the absence of personal leadership in the group.

3. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

The first of these areas is professional ethics. The performance of tasks in dispositional groups is most often associated with working in difficult and extreme conditions. These are often life-threatening and health-threatening situations, but also situations of intense internal conflict. Due to the highly hierarchical structures, the work in the dispositional groups is also associated with a high degree of authority, and therefore a high degree of responsibility for the subordinates entrusted to the leader. In view of the above, professional ethics plays a prominent role here, because in extreme conditions, strong and deeply rooted ethical principles will guarantee the team's performance. It is the ethical principles that will keep the team whole and ready for action under such conditions. Without going into the peculiarities of the institutions belonging to dispositional groups,

it is possible, following Beauchamp and Bowie, to adopt an ethical canon for dispositional groups that includes five elements: respect, service, justice, fairness and community[2]. In order to create an atmosphere of respect, subordinates must be treated as the objective aim – such an approach serves as an expression of respect toward them. The ethical perspective of respect here goes beyond the traditional understanding of the concept; and, in addition, it includes the ability to listen to the subordinates, empathy and tolerance for their points of view, and their empowerment in the sense of acceptance of their personal views and values[16]. It is important to emphasise that it is unacceptable to treat subordinates as instruments for the pursuit of the particular interests of others, but that the aim should be to give each person the right to shape his/her own desires autonomously.

And here we also see a reference to J. Adair's three-dimensional concept of leadership. J. M. Burns[6] defines a leader as one who develops his/her followers' awareness of their own needs, values and goals, and yet helps to integrate these elements into his/her own assumptions. The second element of ethical leadership is the question of service to others. In this respect, the leader's role is to position the subordinates in their own assumptions and plans as a core value. The leader should do this by creating work teams, delegating authority, building affiliation or mentoring. The ethical responsibility of the leader at this level is to do no harm. The primary duty of an ethical leader is to care for the subordinates, to serve them, to make decisions which benefit the subordinates, and above all not to harm the subordinate's welfare. Dispositional groups are learning organisations, i.e., they are capable of creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and of modifying their behaviour and responses to new knowledge and behaviour[13]. In this respect, their leaders should be committed to serving the formulated vision. The idea of service is included involved here in the process of clarifying and reinforcing the vision, leading to its priority in the perceptions of the leader and the subordinates[15]. In summary, the principle of service is contained in the leader's willingness to focus attention on the subordinates, to put the interests of others before his/her own, and to take actions that have only positive results for the whole. Another element of ethical leadership is equity. This is expressed in the requirement for managers to treat all subordinates equally and to act fairly towards them. All actions towards employees should be transparent and based on moral principles. According to J. Rawls, the goal of justice should apply to everyone working together. This principle can be written into the biblical guideline of the golden rule of conduct: "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."[9].

The fourth canon of ethical leadership is honesty and integrity. Sincerity and honesty build trust, confidence and credibility, and, therefore, respect and authority. This is the basis for effective interaction in interpersonal relationships. Honesty should be interpreted in a much broader sense than simply telling the truth. It also includes openness and presenting reality as clearly and as fully as possible. It is very important that the leader is authentic and sensitive to the feelings of others. Honesty in this context means much more than not being deceitful. The concept of honesty also takes on a broader meaning here. A leader should understand that honesty in an organisation means: not making unrealisable promises, not hiding behind imaginary obstacles, not limiting assurances, not taking responsibility for actions that may in any way affect the sense of dignity and humanity of the subordinates[26]. The final element of the ethical leader is the creation of a community. The leader is required to take action to move the group towards a common goal designed to produce positive outcomes for both the leader and his/her team. This imperative is encapsulated in the definition of leadership as a process of influencing others to achieve a common goal. This process requires an ongoing transformation of the attitudes, behaviours and mindsets of those involved. Rost believes that a leader, together with the team, should not only focus on specific goals, but also see the needs of the whole community. J. M. Burns also admits that the transformation process should lead to an increase in moral standards[6].

4. THE PLACE OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The second area is cognitive development, which concerns both specialist and general knowledge, including building and motivating a group. If we want to think of an effective leader, we need to put a lot of emphasis on his/her cognitive development. There are two types of cognitive training: the first is specialised cognitive training, which is defined by professional competence and the function performed. The second is the general cognitive area, which is an internal reflection of reality and the formation of the self. The level of cognitive resources possessed has a direct impact on the ability to analyse, synthesise and deduce[30]. It shapes the predisposition to think independently, evaluate reality and make decisions[30]. It influences the ability to form interpersonal relationships and takes part in the formation of self-awareness[1]. A low level of possessed cognitive resources reduces the ability to cope with stressful situations, which is confirmed by the work of R. H. Moose and A. S. Billings[3]. They define the individual's cognitive resources as an element of a complex system, accompanied by personality and dispositional factors, forming

a psychological reference to "coping". In the work of A. Antonovsky, these are referred to as a sense of coherence, which is a "prism" of perception of the external world through three interacting dimensions: comprehensibility, controllability and meaningfulness. The author of this concept believes that low saturation or lack of any one of these dimensions results in a lack of ability to accurately assess reality and thus to cope with difficult situations. Low cognitive resources do not allow one to achieve a perceptual distance both from oneself and from the experienced reality, which directly affects the disruption of the construction of objective self-evaluation and flexibility in thinking[18]. This limits the acquisition of the psycho-physical qualities necessary to work effectively with a social group.

Another area is emotional intelligence. By this, we mean the ability to understand, control and manage one's own and other people's emotions, the ability to motivate oneself, as well as empathy and social skills[14]. Other authors give a four- or five-dimensional definition of emotional intelligence. In the four-dimensional approach, it is understood as: perceiving emotions, supporting thinking with emotions, understanding emotions and managing emotions. In the five-dimensional approach it comprises intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence, general mood, coping with stress and adaptability[22]. Emotional intelligence fulfils its role by supporting the subject's cognitive processes. At this level, it is positively correlated with social communication. It plays a role in building self-esteem and self-awareness. It promotes the formation of stress resistance and general psychophysical endurance, increasing the individual's level of personal security. Emotional intelligence influences the ability to recognise group dynamics, which helps to create a motivational atmosphere and facilitates the leader's flexibility of perception. Low levels of emotional intelligence lower the threshold for anxiety states and increase the likelihood of depressive states[10]. Anxious states are so much more dangerous than feelings of fear because in the former, the feeling is associated with something indefinable, something we cannot precisely name – and it is difficult to overcome something we cannot define. We can conclude that anxiety is more of a mental state associated with a feeling of threat to something that is not a concrete threat[7]. Anxiety is a complex mixture of feelings and thoughts with considerable diffusion, associated with bad moods, inner fears about tomorrow, a feeling of inability to anticipate and control threats. As shown above, anxiety is a precursor to pathological behaviour, especially aggressive behaviour. Emotional intelligence is also positively correlated with general mental and psychosomatic health[28], which may be related to the link between emotional intelligence and the cognitive domain mentioned above. A study by M. Mikolajczak and O. Luminet[24] showed correlation between

the level of emotional intelligence and the perception of task difficulty. Individuals with high levels of this intelligence perceive difficult events as tasks, while those with low levels perceive them as threats. The simple link between these correlations and effective leadership in dispositional groups, where most tasks are performed in difficult environments, should be emphasised. The level of development of emotional intelligence also has an impact on the incidence of personality disorders. In the work of L. T. Leible and W. E. Jr, Snell showed a negative correlation between the 'understanding of emotions' dimension and up to twelve personality disorders listed in the DSM-IV. These include: paranoid personality, schizoid personality, schizotypal personality, histrionic personality, narcissistic personality, antisocial personality, borderline personality, avoidant personality, dependent personality, obsessive-compulsive personality, passive-aggressive personality and depressive personality. Similar correlations were found with the 'ability to regulate emotions' dimension, in which all of the above are present, with the exception of the histrionic personality. In turn, the dimension "monitoring one's own emotions" is negatively correlated with: schizoid personality and antisocial personality[19]. Low levels of emotional management are also associated with high levels of cynicism, flattery and immorality. As we can see, the possession and development of emotional intelligence, which until recently has not been taken into account at all, is extremely important in building authority and, behind it, leadership competence. Its absence directly prevents the creation of an environment for the effective management of people, and even more so in dispositional groups.

5. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

The last of the areas is social communication. An extremely important area, without which the others would not exist. Communication is the only channel of contact between the subject and the environment. Communication, by naming the experienced reality, gives it reality. An unnamed object, event or person simply does not exist.

Persons in verbal interaction co-construct their own social realities in which they function. This involves giving meaning to everything a person encounters for the first time. The transmission of given meanings to other individuals functioning within a social group creates an external reality, the world in which all members of a social group function. This is because people do not complete their development during their foetal life, as is the case with animals. We have to create our own reality, which is a relatively permanent part of the human culture[5]. Communication is the creation

and the negotiation of identities and social situations. Consequently, mishandling interpersonal communication leads to conflict situations. Conflict in a work team does not only prevent group building, it also leads to group breakdown. A leader who is unable to communicate will not be able to articulate his/her intentions, will not be understood by the group, and may feel rejected. At this point, it is important to stress that leadership is not just about setting tasks or giving orders. At the level of communication, it is the use of rhetoric to reduce conflict and, through communication, to motivate people to act, including carrying out assigned tasks. Here, too, giving orders is of secondary or even tertiary importance. Deficits in this area lead to growing frustration, which can very quickly develop into psychological insecurity. Insecurity is a precursor to social shyness[18] and this leads to the emergence of anxiety. Anxiety is a very strong emotion with a negative connotation that severely disrupts personal security and restricts communication channels. The onset of anxiety disrupts the body's homeostasis and activates defence mechanisms to restore it as quickly as possible. It also leads to the emergence of aggressive behaviour. Both the activation of psychological defence mechanisms and aggressive behaviour lead to the emergence of toxic leadership, which is based on the leader's management of fear (anxiety). This state is reinforced by the leader's false belief that the group's fear increases the group's respect toward him/her. This belief stems from disturbed cognitive processes induced by anxiety states. What we have here is a shortened perceptual distance to oneself and to the experienced reality, which promotes mental rigidity and, in fact, perceptual distortions. A second problem that correlates with the lack of communication skills is the low level of cognitive development. There is a feedback loop here. The level of communication depends on the cognitive level achieved and this is developed through proper social communication. As we can see, all the elements highlighted above overlap in their areas of influence and are of considerable importance in building leadership competence.

CONCLUSION

Toxic leadership, or in other words anti-leadership, can manifest itself at all the levels described above, in dispositional groups as in other organisations. The difference is that dispositional groups perform their tasks under very specific conditions. Working at the edge of their capabilities, risking health and, in the case of the military, the lives of others, makes this environment psychologically extreme. There is no room for do-overs when things do not go according to the plan. It is not possible to pause while carrying out a task, to look at it from a different perspective, to think

of a different way of doing it. Events and time move at an unimaginable speed. The anti-leader is the detriment here. Apart from the damage caused by low commitment to service, low morale, avoidance of work (sick leave) or high turnover of trained staff, a toxic leader causes far more damage in such institutions than in other organisations. The health and lives of the subordinates are at stake. This makes it all the more important that leaders, commanders and managers are properly selected and adequately prepared for their leadership roles. A member of a dispositional group is in a difficult job and one must develop a subjective sense of safety in order to function well. Personal security is essential for morale and personnel development. A soldier or officer operating at the limit of their capabilities and in an environment that objectively threatens his/her health and life must develop at least an illusory island of safety. A superior is responsible for such an island. S/he must be able to motivate the team well – create an atmosphere in which the subordinates feel secure enough to carry out the tasks assigned to them with great energy and commitment, thereby resulting in high morale. Creating a working team, which is what this activity boils down to, is one of the basic ethical canons of leadership. Other canons include respect, service, integrity, elements that build authority in the eyes of subordinates. A leader who does not base his/her behaviour on ethical canons very quickly moves to the 'dark side' of toxic leadership. S/he begins to lead through fear. This kind of leadership in dispositional groups makes no sense. It can only be artificially maintained during preparation for the actual action (training). In real situations, however, it leads to the complete destabilisation and disintegration of work teams. Ethics constitutes the most solid pillar of correct behaviour in the management of people, and its strength is particularly evident in conflicts and difficult situations. These five ethical canons described above are the sine qua non for the formation of a leader. The aforementioned authority, without which a manager cannot hope to become a leader, is made up of the competences contained in the knowledge and professional skills attributed to the profession and function exercised, as well as psychological competences, including emotional intelligence, which deserves special emphasis. These features enable effective management of human teams. Both a lack of professional knowledge and a lack of knowledge and skills relating to the management of people quickly lead a commander to toxic management. This is because, on the one hand, the commander carries out tasks that should be carried out by the superiors and, on the other hand, s/he lacks the competence to build up the authority necessary to develop obedience in the team commanded. From a systemic point of view, it is precisely the failure to take into account the aptitude of the commander candidate, or the lack of preparation for the leadership position, that leads to the Peter Principle, i.e. the leader exceeds the level of incompetence.

Again, fear management comes into play. Toxic leadership has serious consequences for the organisation and its people. Psychological abuse, manipulation, unethical behaviour and lack of accountability not only damage the health and morale of employees, but also have a negative impact on the performance of the organisation. Emergency services are set up to ensure the safety of the community in which they operate. So the question must be asked: can we afford poisonously managed uniformed services? And by extension: Can we afford not to keep the public safe? It is therefore imperative that steps are taken to identify, address and prevent toxic leadership so that forces can develop in a way that is sustainable and conducive to the success of all its members, and effectively keep society safe. It is worth protecting the organisation in advance against the infiltration of an unsuitable candidate into its structures. To this end, it is necessary to ensure that recruitment processes are properly conducted and that the competence development of the future commander is prepared to a high standard.

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