

**Eraldo Olivetta**

Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics  
University of Turin - Italy

## **The Military Leadership: does empathy play a new role?**

Janowitz (1959) already stressed the importance of "the quality of leadership" for the efficiency of military units.

Even earlier, Stouffer (1949) had designated the junior officers as key figures for group cohesion (and therefore operational efficiency), already addressing the overlapping of the formal and informal role, and the need to distinguish between two different environments: the front, understood as the operating theater characterized by greater risk and therefore stress, and the rear, or as we could say today, all the non-combat situations and therefore those characterized by lower levels of stress.

Shils and Janowitz (1948) emphasized the importance of the primary ties among the members of small military groups and underlined the "situational" social factors of group relations and the cohesive ability of relationships, and basic needs, regardless of shared beliefs or ideological commitments (Nuciari 1990). Within these primary bonds, the role of the officers and non-commissioned officers involves establishing a good relationship with their subordinates, and regulating and supervising their behavior with detailed rules. However, the role's requirements were limited to focusing on aspects such as: paternal behavior, a combination of toughness and kindness, small demonstrations of affection, and using terms like, for example, "kinder".

Later on, Stewart (1990) emphasized that the role of leadership, through vertical cohesion, must channel the horizontal links into the right direction of the organization's objectives. According to Stewart, this should be done by showing concern for their men, by setting a good example themselves, by earning the trust and respect of their subordinates, and by sharing the hardship and danger with them, as well as benefitting from joint training.

However, if on the one hand, the function of leadership in ensuring operational efficiency especially of small units is accepted and confirmed, on the other hand, military sociologists have also repeatedly stressed the peculiarity of the military profession, in itself different from any other profession, which therefore makes military leadership different from that of other civil organizations.

In his study (1998) which listed the characteristics of true leadership, Ulmer stated that the very nature of the military profession (the armed forces are unique; they even require the sacrificing of one's life; the senior leaders become such within the organization; the organizational effectiveness is based on a warrior *ethos* based on the team spirit, where this *ethos* can facilitate both the achievement of their objectives and in isolating the organization from any change) limited the exportability to military organizations of those features more commonly found in the leadership roles in civil organizations.

Comparing how the characteristics for the formation of leaders are carried out in both military and in civilian organizations, Ulmer drew attention to certain aspects, and for the purposes of this study, it is useful to mention three of them:

- Unlike in civilian organizations, in the military greater importance tends to be given to the reference values and, in particular, to loyalty, respect, integrity, courage, honor, and self-sacrifice;
- The measurement techniques of the organizational climate are far more advanced in civil organizations than in the military;

- Decision-making in civil organizations tends to be done by using multiple sources of information, including those provided by subordinates, whereas that happens less in military organizations because it is feared that this could represent a threat to the authority.

So no mention is made of the "use of feedback" until 1991 when Bartone and Kirkland presented it as one of the key variables in their four-phase development model.

In Italy, however, in 1999 the handbook for the commanders of the Army explained that, based on variables such as the situation, preparation and motivation of subordinates, leadership styles could be either of a directive type, or participatory type, or that of delegation, referring to the Likert model (1961), but without going so far as to fully and explicitly stress the aspects of feedback and empathy.

Again in Italy, Pullano (1996), in citing the qualities of leadership, including those concerning the person of the leader him/herself and their position with regard to the environment, also refers to their relationship with others (charisma, fairness, authority, and availability).

But we must wait for Bagni (1998) to see an explicit appeal to the concept of feedback, when he stated that the commander has to "pay attention to their subordinates and their feedback".

Therefore, summing up what has been said, from the examination of the studies carried out on the issue, the role of leadership for the cohesion and operational efficiency is shared and confirmed. At the same time, we have pointed out the peculiarities of the military profession and its diversity from other civilian professions, with the result that the leadership of the first cannot be identical to that of the second. However, scientific production has also noted an evolution of this concept, beginning, especially in relatively recent times, call for the concept of feedback that, in any case, still does not coincide with that of empathy. As we have seen, leaders should in fact care about their men, worry about them, have a paternal behavior that combines hardness yet benevolence, while respecting the formal aspects of their role, especially in non-combat situations.

From the sociological point of view, the officer who is called on to command a unit (platoon, company, etc.), comes to occupy a particular status or a specific place in the system of relationships considered as a structure (Parsons 1951) that characterizes the organization to which one belongs. The status of commander corresponds to that of playing a role, that is to say, what an actor does, in relation to the other actors, because of occupying that particular status (Parsons 1951). On the one hand, this role can be seen as a set of attitudes, values, ways of thinking and then acting, that the membership organization assigns to the social position of a leader; on the other, it can be understood as a complex whole of the types of social behavior considered most appropriate for a leader by the social actors who enter into a relationship with him/her, due to the fact of that particular status (subordinates, colleagues, superiors, etc.). In other words, on the one hand, the role of leader is defined by the organization to which they belong (Army), which in turn defines what it means to be a "leader" and how they should behave as such. But on the other hand, the leadership role is also defined by the questions and expectations of the other individuals who enter into a relationship with that actor precisely for the fact that he/she occupies that special status with regard to them (Gross et al. 1958).

So in the first case, as well as in the second, there are expectations regarding the leader. If by role of leader what is meant is what they *should be* or *should do* for the fact of having formally obtained that status, these expectations are normative.

In addition to this should be their duty, as experienced by the person themselves or, in other words, the role as perceived by the actor occupying that particular status. In the specific case of leadership roles in military organizations, the perceived role is definitely influenced by the officers' training, through which the leadership model considered more correct and what could be called

"institutional" is transmitted, as well as by their experience "in the field " commanding units of different sizes in different operating environments.

As with any role, also that of the Leader tends to vary over time: in different eras, the models of military leadership have maintained some fundamental aspects over time, while others have changed. Some of the changes that have taken place in recent years in the armed forces as they have been moving from the Institutional model to the Occupational model (Moskos 1977) are of particular importance for the purposes of this paper.

In most Western countries, with that move from mass armies based on the draft to all-volunteer forces composed precisely of professional volunteers, the occupational model has tended to take on increasing importance.

In this context, it is reasonable to assume that, while aware of the specificity and uniqueness of the military profession (Segal and Kramer 1977), the soldier who has made this particular career choice tends to conceive of the role of leader (and also the subordinates) somewhat differently than in the past, thereby creating an expectation of their commander which slowly but steadily leads to a changing of their role. If we also consider that the sub-military culture tends to be influenced by the culture of the society one belongs to (parent culture) and that the changes taking place in society at large also tend to result in changes of the military institution (Olivetta, 2012), it is reasonable to expect that the expectations of the role of Commander will also tend to change.

Therefore, the changes occurring in the society to which they belong, the resulting transformation of the military institution, and the related changes in the sub-military culture, especially the transition from the institutional model to the occupational one, may have brought about a change in the way of conceiving the role of both the leaders and the subordinates. However, the preparation of officers in Italy, while taking these changes into account, still seems very much focused on the more formal aspects of the role, on formally attributed authority and hierarchy and hardly giving the necessary emphasis to empathy between leaders and subordinates.

However, the experience gained in recent missions in different theaters of operation would seem to prove otherwise.

The hypothesis of this work stems from these consideration: while taking into account the peculiarities of the military profession and the resulting differences between military and civilian leadership, the social actors belonging to the organization in positions of military command would seem to refer, at least in the stressful situations typical of combat, to a concept of leadership by explicitly stating the importance of relationships, of consideration, of reading the feedback coming from their men, as well as empathy, that in fact seems to be closer to that of civilian professions than it was in the past and, above all, more than is still institutionally foreseen in the Italian military organization itself.

The leadership model, at least the one that emerges from the research which will be discussed later, is seemingly becoming more and more similar to Goleman's transformational leadership (Goleman et al. 2002). In certain cases (problem with the soldier's family, death of a man, etc.) good commanders should be able to recognize the problem right from the early signals, they should talk to their men showing that they know how to listen to and understand them, in order to then be able to intervene by engaging in actions that can help them.

As part of the Research Project, "*Officer and Commander in Asymmetric Warfare Operations*" of the European Research Group on Military and Society (Ergomas), interviews with 43 commanders who participated in missions in contexts of asymmetric conflict were conducted by Italian scholars belonging to the Working Group "The Military Profession". All those interviewed had held positions as the Commander (platoon, company, battalion) or as mentors.

The sample was designed with semi-structured interviews carried out with the in-depth interview method, in order to grasp the essence of the interviewee's thinking and therefore, of their experience.

Among the variables studied, the analysis of field experiences and study of the Commanded Unit were also included. In the first, operational experiences, baptism by fire, and any other combat situations were also included, while in the second, particular attention was paid to the study of the Unit's Morale and to the influencing factors. Among these variables, the officers were also asked how their soldiers' morale had been during the mission, what factors had had an impact on it, and how they had dealt with managing both the situations stemming from the troop's morale, and the factors that had precisely given rise to them. It is precisely as part of this study, working out the answers of respondents about their experiences in missions abroad, that one can get an indication of what the idea of leadership is in their collective imagination and therefore considered more effective in such operational theaters.

The research results clearly showed recognition by the interviewees of both the function of moral cohesion and operational efficiency of the units, and the role of commanders in maintaining morale high.

In order to demonstrate the hypothesis of this work, among factors<sup>1</sup> that can affect the morale of the troops deployed in situations of asymmetric conflict that emerged from the sample, it can be useful to focus on three of them in particular:

1. The particular context of operational theaters
2. The baptism by fire, the loss of life
3. The family situation

1. One of the factors mentioned as being able to influence the morale of the soldiers is the particular context of the theaters where the missions take place.

In missions in situations of asymmetric conflict, however effectively the logistics may be organized, it is inevitable that difficult situations will arise where it can be more difficult to satisfy some basic needs (for example: use of showers, living conditions in tents, etc.).

*Nobody was asking to have caviar. However, at times the basic conditions were lacking. If I have been out in the cold all day long, when I return I'd like to be able to take a shower. If the showers do not work for three days, people begin to get fed up. Or if it rains three days in a row, and for three days, you practically need a boat to get around.* [Platoon Commander – aged 30]

According to the respondents, the particular context in which the mission is carried out and its related conditions of stress seem to amplify uncomfortable situations that may naturally come to be created in a military mission. The relevance lies not so much in the fact of the seriousness of the specific situations as it does in the fact that under stressful conditions such as those accompanying the missions, the capacity to endure may diminish, and facts that in other contexts would not be particularly serious, might negatively affect the unit's morale instead, especially when they have been accumulating.

*The fact is that everything there is amplified. All it takes is a trifle. Unpredictable situations that come to be created can lead to some small misunderstandings in an environment with few people but a forced cohabitation nonetheless, thus exploding into dramas that, in the end, are resolved with "a glass of water".* [Platoon Commander – aged 30]

If, on the one hand, involvement in operational activities, when these involve a high risk, can lead to a greater stress, on the other hand, according to some respondents, the routine and more or less long situations of scant operation may adversely affect the morale of units. Boredom may therefore be detrimental to the morale.

---

<sup>1</sup> The factors mentioned are: the length of the mission; the stressful situation in periods of intense operation; the routine of periods of a lack of activity; the environmental conditions of the operating theaters and satisfying basic needs; the separation of one or more members of the unit; baptism by fire; the loss of life; and the situation of their family at home.

With respect to this factor, according to respondents, the task of the commander is to boost the soldiers' morale by keeping them constantly busy, motivating them, giving them objectives to be achieved, and stimulating and gratifying them as to their achievements. But also to put the problems, if magnified by the specific context, into the right proportion and ease the sharpness and tensions that can come to be created at a relational level.

To do this, the leader must first be able to understand, in their own men, the signals of any discomfort that is being created, whether it be tension due to stress, or boredom caused by routine or disappointment at the inability to meet a primary need, or difficulties in relationships with a partner, or any other factor. Therefore, the leader has to pay attention to the behavior of their men, know how to manage conflict by finding a way to talk about it all the subjects and understanding their different perspectives, and thus be able to solve their differences.

2. Another factor that can have a significant effect on soldiers' morale and that, in the description made by the respondents, can be useful in verifying the hypothesis that this work aims to demonstrate, is the encounter with their first combat situations (baptism of fire), the first intensive high risk events (IED strikes, etc.) and, above all, the injury or death of a comrade. *Of course the first time you get shot at you feel pretty shocked. Then, after the second time, it becomes routine, and you go by the rules.* [Platoon Commander - aged 33]  
The death of a comrade is described by the respondents as the event that can have the most effect on the unit's morale. The same is true, albeit to a lesser extent, for events that may cause people to be injured.

*Morale was affected when there was news of the death of a colleague, also of the other armies of the coalition. As I noted a decline of morale, I tried to keep people engaged. So the cohesion of the group helped.* [Platoon Commander – aged 38]

*Upon returning from the mission in which there had been exchanges of fire, it was very important to talk among ourselves, and make comparisons within the platoon: that helped the individual paratroopers a lot.* [Platoon Commander – aged 41]

Some respondents expressed reservations about the effectiveness of sending specialized psychologists into the operative theater when these serious events are experienced. The latter, they point out, actually tend to be considered 'out-group', seeing as they had not started out with the other soldiers at the beginning of the mission. On the contrary, it seems that a much more important role, and partly to substitute that of the psychologist, is played by the Chaplain, to all effects considered an *in-group* member.

According to respondents, in these cases commanders should, first of all, rationally analyze the event with their men, studying the details and circumstances, the actions of everyone's, behavior that may represent the best practices and those instead that need to be corrected or improved. The platoon commanders interviewed often mentioned the need to "speak of what happened" with their men, underlining the almost "cathartic" aspect. Faced with the most serious events, he/she should then promote and encourage the "esprit de corps" (team spirit) and the ability to "be a group", in order to promote the support of the primary group. But, above all, in order to be closer to their men, the squad and platoon commanders have to be able to recognize the signs of a lowering of morale in the latter so as to intervene promptly.

3. A third factor mentioned by the commanders interviewed in the sample that can especially influence soldiers' morale is family.  
The family, the primary group *par excellence*, can enter into competition with the primary group in the operating theater (squad or platoon), also favored by the improvement of the possibilities

of communication (mobile phone systems, Skype, etc.). Therefore, these are two *greedy institutions* (Segal and Blair 1976, Bowen and Orthner 1989; Moelker and Kloet 2003; Farina 2004; Sertorio and Nuciari 2009; Nuciari and Sertorio 2009) that can be in competition with each other, asking the social actor (the soldier engaged in mission) to meet the exacting demands of them both.

According to respondents, the family's ability to affect a soldier's morale can take place on two different levels:

- One is the support that the family can guarantee for a spouse who is employed in a mission with an attitude of understanding, and ensuring their emotional presence and moral support;
- The other is the possible problems that the family may have at home and that the soldier engaged in mission is not able to handle.

*While one would expect that the family never fails to support to those who are on a mission, perhaps in some cases in which a person was having troubles, it would end up with them accusing the spouse in the theater of operations, blaming them for not being present to deal with them. [Battalion Commander – aged 45]*

In the experiences gathered from the research, it was always a matter of serious cases such as the health of their children or spouse, death, or conflict between spouses that was leading to separation, etc. In all these cases, the primary family group seems to prevail over the primary "unit" group, thereby seriously undermining the soldiers' morale to the extent of forcing the commander to arrange for them to be repatriated. The experiences reported below confirm what has just been said.

*If you get a call from home and they say: "your father is sick," then that man is lost. He's lost in the sense that he is not thinking of anything else, just about going home. If they get a call from home about important things, they just turn off. So, since they are turned off, it is no longer useful to keep them there. In principle, if you can, you send them home. [Platoon Commander – aged 30]*

*Not being able to take action on the problems of their own family drives them crazy! It makes it really hard for them. The cases that I have had were almost all irrecoverable: we had to send them home. [Battalion Commander – aged 45]*

*Then also because being there, I think all your emotions are a little amplified and the distance from home makes you perceive the problems as being bigger. They already are, just for the fact that you're not Someone who is on a mission should not be concerned with family problems and they should be reassured about those who are at home. This is what would make it so that someone could manage to withstand there: so it is not just a feeling. [Company Commander – aged 34]*

With regard to this particular factor of influence on the morale of the unit and the individual soldiers, some respondents with a higher leadership role and with significant experience at home have complained about a substantial weakness of the institution in terms of supporting the families, especially with respect to what happens in other countries. The need for solutions regarding family support was stressed, also for the serenity and therefore, the morale of their spouses on a mission.

*Someone who is on a mission should not be concerned with family problems and they should be reassured about those who are at home. This is what would make it so that someone could manage to withstand a long period of permanence in mission, away from home. [Battalion Commander – aged 45]*

According to the interviewees, in the cases when a problem arises with families of their own soldiers, commanders should be able to recognize the problem right at the early signals. They should talk to their men, showing them that they know how to listen and understand, and then be able to intervene by implementing the appropriate action to help them.

Again, the sample studied stressed such actions as "talking", "listening", "getting to know" and "understanding" their men.

*It is our role to know our men and, when you see someone who is a little off, to approach them and talk with them ... You can't know someone unless you talk with them.*

[Company Commander – aged 32]

These actions may ultimately be summed up in the expression "caring for their people". This focus, in turn, calls for and coincides with the concept of empathy.

From the brief analysis of the answers given by the commanders interviewed about these three factors that can influence the morale of their soldiers, what also emerged was the role of commander in managing them and, consequently, some aspects of the leadership model to which they were referring.

Here we wish to draw attention to at least three of these aspects:

- First of all, it should be noted that respondents consistently referred to situations of particular stress, such as precisely that of the missions in situations of asymmetric conflict. It is exactly in that context that, on the one hand, the need arises for the commander to cope with suddenly and quickly changeable situations, and on the other, to pay more attention to relations, allowing more room for the informal rather than the formal behavior. Respondents point out however that, once they have returned from the mission, at home the model of leadership tends to change, with the prevalence once again of the aspects largely related to the hierarchy (status), the discipline, and the formal relationships within the group.

*Upon returning, there were no major problems of re-adjustment. If anything, there was the need to resume a bit of the formal discipline that had slackened while on a mission.* [Platoon Commander – aged 31]

This aspect confirms what has been stated in the introduction to this work both concerning the fact that the military organization is different from other organizations, and recalling the studies which emphasized the need to distinguish between combat situations and therefore of greater stress, and those of non-combat, with less stress.

- A second aspect that emerged from the interviews is the role of the primary group with regard to cohesion and operational effectiveness. In the accounts of their experiences, respondents stressed the importance of the commanders who are closest to the staff of the unit: the squad and platoon leaders.

*In any case, the squad leaders also do a lot for the morale. I have had fairly experienced staff members and some were even a bit older. They kept everything in line and so everything went well.* [Platoon Commander – aged 41]

The role of squad leader is revealed in relation to the smallest number of men under their control, and by directly belonging to the primary group, his integration within it, and being considered by their subordinates as in-group.

*Surely the squad leader, having 8 people, could enact a more comprehensive enforcement. Then since you are living in dormitories and in daily contact with your people, maybe you knew to say "look, yesterday he had a fight with his wife on the phone", and so I did not have him go out on patrol. I replaced him with another person who was thinking straight."* [Platoon Commander – aged 30]

This results in a better understanding of people and therefore a greater ability to recognize the signs of a decline in morale, both in the individual and the unit. In turn, this increased capacity is linked by respondents also to experience gained in previous missions: the greater the latter, the easier and more effective would seem to be the recognition of the indicators of stress and declining morale. Such recognition would therefore put them in a position to intervene promptly with action that is considered appropriate, and perhaps already experienced in previous missions.

The commander of smaller units exercise this important role with respect to morale especially in terms of knowledge of their own men. Such knowledge, respondents point out, is obtained by "talking" with them, listening to them, and giving them support at the first sign of abatement.

This aspect confirms what the studies mentioned at the beginning of this work showed concerning the role of the primary group in promoting cohesion.

- The third aspect, and certainly the most important one for the purposes of this work, regards how commanders should manage the factors that have been mentioned above and be able to affect the morale and unit cohesion. In practice, according to the sample, what they should do in the situations described above: to analyze "what should be done and how" means, in essence, and as already mentioned, to study the role of leader to which the commanders who were interviewed were referring.

At the end of a brief review of the factors that can affect morale, the respondents always insisted on the need for knowing how to recognize the signs of the possible waning and discomforts, and that in order to do so, the commander must know their men.

In order to know their men, the sample of the commanders interviewed repeatedly mentioned such actions as "talking", "listening" and "understanding".

*It is our role to know our men and, when you see someone who is a little off, to approach them and talk with them ... You can't know about someone unless you talk with them.*

[Company Commander – aged 32]

The action that the respondents ranked first was "talking" with their people, both to know them better and to be able to recognize the distress signals that reveal possible declines in morale.

*Talking with people is essential. Maybe at a gathering, and therefore, a moment that is formal.*

*Or if you see that something is wrong with someone, you take them aside, and you go and get a beer with them, and talk about it.* [Platoon Commander – aged 30]

*Lower-level commanders also have the task of being close to the personnel and cheering them up. It is also our role to know our people, to approach them when you see that someone is a bit off, and to talk with your people. You can't know someone unless you talk with them.* [Platoon Commander – aged 30]

Connected to the first, the second necessity mentioned in the sample was that of paying attention, of being able to "listen" to their people. It is not enough to "hear" what your people tell you; you must know how to "listen".

It is only by listening to their men that the commander is able to understand and support them at the first sign of abatement. This support seems to be of particular importance in all three cases discussed above, but it seems particularly essential if the individual has personal or family problems. Specific training with psychologists that focuses on precisely this function would be useful during the commanders' preparation just before leaving for the theater of operations of their mission.

As mentioned when dealing with problems regarding families, "talking", "listening" and "understanding" could be summed up in the expression "caring for your people". This attention



to their subordinates, and the ability to listen and talk with them seem to require a capacity for empathy, which is also a bit *sine qua non* for recognizing signs of a lowering of morale. Good leaders must be able to "step into the shoes" of their subordinates so as to understand their behavior better and develop appropriate intervention strategies if necessary. They must be able to understand what the soldiers are feeling and thinking, and to perceive their state of mind and emotions.

*You have to understand who they are your people, what their expectations and needs are, and then be able to give them the right answer.* [Company Commander – aged 32]

*Being a leader means bearing the responsibility and the personal problems of your men.* [Company Commander – aged 34]

*A good leader is also someone who solves any problems and puts you in a position to work in a certain way.* [Platoon Commander – aged 30]

*The commander is the person that everyone looks to when there is a problem. In certain situations, you really feel that people's eyes are looking right through you while they are waiting for an answer.* [Platoon Commander – aged 30]

Valuable insights about the characteristics of leadership in these operating environments have emerged from the experiences of the respondents engaged in various leadership roles in recent missions abroad of the Italian Army: according to respondents, leaders should be empathetic. But empathy is one of the skills of Goleman's model of transformational leadership: it is the first (Empathy) among the skills of the third dimension (Social awareness). According to Goleman (2002), it is expected that the leader is able to tune in to a wide range of emotional signals, capturing the unspoken but perceptible emotions of the individuals or group. By listening carefully, he can manage to grasp their perspective.

If the three aspects mentioned above are useful for testing the assumptions, before proceeding, it would be useful to focus more on one final point: the respondents considerations concerning the professional content of the mission. All the commanders expressed particular satisfaction with the participation in the last mission that they were involved in.

*I learned things during the mission that I probably would not have learned in two or three years of training at the academy.* [Company Commander – aged 32]

But the value of training is explicitly recognized also with regard to the aspect of leadership and styles of leading.

*It is an exceptional personal and professional experience that all leaders of people should have. It greatly enhances the primary group.* [Company Commander – aged 37]

*I would not say that commanding a platoon in Afghanistan is the only real control but in any case, there are few other occasions for this kind of experience. When you are leading people in critical situations where everything that happens is under the responsibility of the leader... he tells you what to do, he takes responsibility for everything. Perhaps that's the true experience of being in command.* [Platoon Commander – aged 29]

Reiterating the educational value of experience in mission from all points of view, including that of the commanders, the commanders interviewed also confirmed that in Italy the role of unit commander is formed mainly in mission, through direct experience and sharing the experience of those who have already participated in previous missions. This, however, in itself involves a change in styles of leadership in mission, compared to use at home.

*When the young officers from the training institutes arrive, they find soldiers who are much better prepared than they are and with experience that the officers have not had yet. Therefore, their leadership must be exercised in a different way than in the past: in a way that is more collaborative, taking into account their different personal skills);[Battalion Commander – aged 51]*

Research conducted involving the Italian Army officers who in recent years have held leadership roles in missions in environments of asymmetric conflict seems therefore to fully confirm the original hypothesis.

In addition to confirmation of the role of commanders in the development of cohesion and thus for the achievement of the operational efficiency, there is also the confirmation of the role of the primary bonds mentioned by Shils and Janowitz (1948) and the role of leadership which, through vertical cohesion, must steer the horizontal ties in the right direction toward the organization's objectives (Stewart 1988).

The experience of the Italian officials also confirmed the overlapping of the formal and informal role with the need to distinguish between combat environments and non-combat environments, with their different stress levels and therefore, we have mentioned the need for a leader figure who is flexible and capable of adapting to different situations. This overlapping of the formal and informal role also confirms the particularity of the military organization, which is rarely found, at least at this level, in other types of organizations. But, if right from the first studies, cited among the characteristics of good leadership such as "caring" and "worrying" about their men and the need to "establish good relations" with them, we have seen that what appears to confirm the original hypothesis is "how" this should be done. In the past, and apparently still confirmed in Italy at least on a formal level according to institutional indications, the reference model seemed at most to be paternalistic, but without ever making any explicit references to empathy. Commanders who have been directly involved in the field seem to have evolved leadership styles that are more relationship-oriented thanks to their experiences in mission. The leaders' role, as defined by the applications or expectations that their men have with regard to them does not correspond, at least not exactly and rigidly, to the role as defined by the organization to which they belong. And not even the role as they had perceived it, seeing as the commanders interviewed showed that they were already "ahead" of the organization to which they belong: their reference model is that of a kind of leadership which is more attentive to signals coming from their soldiers that may be the indicators, and thus the alarm bells, of any discomforts that might affect operational efficiency. What the Italian commanders were referring to was empathy. But being empathetic means something more than just "taking care of my men." As we have seen, above all, the diversity lies in "how" or the way in which this must be done. And once again, the indications repeatedly emphasized by the respondents are clear: by talking, listening, and understanding.

The platoon commander who, as we have seen before, gleans signs of discomfort in one of his soldiers and invites him to have a beer back at the base, and by talking with him, shares his serious family problems, is integrating formal aspects of the role with informal ones.

Thus the hypothesis that military leadership is coming to resemble that of civil organizations seems to be confirmed, at least for these aspects, and only in situations of greater stress (such as in theaters of operation), mainly at the hands of the commanders directly involved (especially squad and platoon commanders), that is to say, those considered part of the primary group.

Does empathy play a new role? Could be. In any case, for the sample that was studied, in a stressful situation of war, a good leader must be able to direct the emotions of the group in order to guide the latter towards the achievement of the group's objectives. In other words, the leader must have emotional intelligence (Goleman 2002). The more difficult the task to be accomplished is - and we have seen that a commitment in mission may involve high levels of stress - the greater the empathy and support from the leaders must be.

## References

- Bagni, M. (1998). Il leader nell'organizzazione militare. *Rivista Marittima*, 131(6), 129-134.
- Bartone, P. T., & Kirkland, F. R. (1991). Optimal leadership in small Army units. In R. Gal & A. D. Mangelsdorff (Eds.), *Handbook of military psychology* (pp. 393–409). New York: Wiley.
- Bowen, G.L. & Orthner, D.K. (1989). *The Organization Family. Work and Family Linkages in the U.S. Military*. New York: Praeger.
- Farina, F. (2004). *Forze armate: femminile plurale. Il femminile e il maschile del militare nella transizione dalla comunità maschile al sistema di guerra*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Goleman, P., Boyatzis, R., McKee, A. (2002). *Primal Leadership*. Boston: Arward Business School Press.
- Gross, N., Mason, W., McEachern, A. (1958). *Explorations in Role Analysis*. New York: Wiley.
- Janowitz, M. (1959). *Sociology and the Militay Establishment*. New York: Sage.
- Likert, R. (1961). *New Patterns of Management*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill.
- Moelker, R. & Kloet, I. (2003). Military Families and the Armed Forces. A two-Sides Affair?. In Caforio, G., *Handbook of Sociology of the Military*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publisher.
- Moskos, C. (1977). From Intitution to Accupation: Trends in Military Organization. *Armed Forces and Society*, 4(1).
- Nuciari, M. (1990). *Efficienza e forze Armate*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Nuciari, M.& Sertorio, G. (2009), *Military Families and Deployments Abroad Italy. In Search of Adequate Answers for a New Issue*, in Caforio, G., *Advances in Military Sociology: Essays in Honor of Charles C. Moskos*, Bingley: Emerald.
- Olivetta, E. (2012). *L'Istituzione inevitabile*. Roma: Bonanno.
- Segal, D. & Blair, J.D. (1976). Public Confidence in the U.S. Military. *Armed Forces & Society*, 3(1).
- Segal, D. & Kramer, R.C. (1977). Attitudes toward Unions in the Ground Combat Forces. In W. Taylor & R. Arango, R. Lockwood (Eds.), *Military Union: U.S. Trends and Issues*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Sertorio, G. & Nuciari, M. (2009). La famiglia militare è una famiglia come le altre? Discorsi privati in cerca di soluzioni pubbliche, *La Rivista Militare*, 5.
- Shills, E.A., & Janowitz, M. (1948). Cohesion and disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1, 280-315.
- Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito. (1999). *L'Esercito degli anni 2000: (vademecum/agenda per i comandanti)*. Esercito Italiano.
- Stewart, N.K. (1988). *The South-Atlantic Conflict of 1982. A Case Study on Military Cohesion*.

Alexandria: U.S. Army.

Stouffer, S.A. et al. (1949). *The American Soldier*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The Social System*. London: Routledge.

Pullano, L. (1996). La leadership militare. Teoria e pratica nella società moderna. *Rivista Marittima*, 7, 105-109.

Ulmer, W.F. (1998). Military Leadership into the 21st Century: Another Bridge too Far?. *Parameters*, 28, 4-25.