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Socio-emotional intelligence for successful higher military education. A case study approach

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Abstract

Socio-emotional intelligence is a core competency in the field of higher military education. There is a growing interest in increasing socio-emotional skills in military professionals due to performance-related reasons. In this context, the training of the future operative officers is a topical issue, a challenge to the higher educational system. Socio-emotional intelligence is a reality that should be studied not only for psychological and educational considerations, but also for social and professional reasons. This paper aims at analyzing the socio-emotional competency in students attending bachelor courses to become operative officers. The first two sections of the paper state a conceptual framework to sustain socio-emotional intelligence assessment. A composite model articulating five factors of the socio-emotional competency is depicted. Socio-emotional skills represent a product of the emotional development and social learning, increasing subjects' performances both in personal and professional activities. The persons who develop them have the advantage of successfully coping with personal and professional challenges. Starting from the third section of the paper, a research study is briefly described and discussed. The research focus was to assess the socio-emotional competency of the students in intelligence field in order to design a training program. In addition, the paper proposes a training program design to improve the socio-emotional competency of the students participating in the research. The training program is aimed at developing and improving dimensions of socio-emotional competency by using specific well targeted training strategies, methods and tools. The training program addresses the five dimensions of the socio-emotional competency in order to improve professional skills, but also social and individual life quality.

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1. Introduction

To know how to manage emotions and how to communicate effectively with others, so as to fulfill the goals, one relies on his or her socio-emotional intelligence. That is why it is important to understand what the emotions are and how they influence human life, activities and interactions (Rimé, 2008).

Socio-emotional intelligence is considered to be a predictor of life satisfaction, of mental and psychical health in terms of positive interactions, with peers and family (Negrescu, 2008). The formation of higher qualified human resources is guided by the assumption that there is a high level of socio-emotional intelligence as a purposeful academic success, but above all, the social and professional success (Negrescu, 2008). In addition, in the context of higher military education, socio-emotional intelligence has been considered a core-competency (SEC). The socio-emotional intelligence remains a controversial subject; there is still debate about the legitimacy of the construct, the superiority of one model or the other, the measurement and the ability to form and develop socio-emotional intelligence. The proof of time has shown that even the IQ is just one piece of the puzzle. The others are about to discuss (Heuer, 1999). Despite many researches related to this concept, there is still a lack of programs for the development of social and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2001), particularly in young adults, namely students, because the focus is on their professional training at the expense of their social and emotional development. It will not be long until emotional intelligence will be tested in the context of the recruitment interviews, until the standard trainings will include sections about emotional intelligence, and this will play an important role in the promotion of employees' decisions.

Concluding, in intelligence field, SEC is intricately related to professional activities and requirements. An operative officer is required to manage effectively his or her emotions, to develop authentic communication relationships, to act empathically and to be a self-regulated person. Social and emotional competencies may develop and may lead to personal and professional performance, as argued before. Therefore, SEC is a product of the emotional and social learning leading to the self-optimization and professional performance. The subjects with a high level of SEC have an advantage in coping with personal and professional challenges. Mainly in the context of this article, we analyse the results of a study investigating the socio-emotional competency conducted on students in intelligence field.

2. Conceptual framework

There is still a lack of consensus regarding the distinction of what is social and what is emotional in the structure of the socio-emotional intelligence. The two areas are interwoven, and exactly as the social function of the brain overlaps the emotional centers (Parkinson, 1996 *apud* Goleman, 2007). Goleman (2007: 101) argues there is no appropriate separation between an emotion's generative factor and interrelations it sustains or generates. Social interactions lead one's emotions (Goleman, 2007: 101). There is an interchangeable relation between cause and effect roles. Over the past 150 years, emotional intelligence and social intelligence have evolved in parallel, sometimes crossing, sometimes being mistaken due to the proximity. For the first time, in 1990, John d. Mayer and Peter Salovey stated a definition of the emotional intelligence in an article published by the journal *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*. The authors refer the emotional intelligence as *the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions* (Salovey & Mayer, 1990: 189). From this point on, the concept of emotional intelligence is gaining much ground in the academic field.

Howard Gardner (1993) describes the tendency of human subjects to ignore what is going on during the networking of individuals, calling this myopia. As Neacșu (2010) argues, many theories in the field do not stress the importance of the social intelligence. Philip Ewart Vernon (1933) is the author who has offered the broadest definition of this concept. He defines the social intelligence as the ability to get along with others, in general, a real sincerity in society, knowledge about social issues, sensitivity to stimuli offered by other members of the group and also the intuition of temporary moods or personality traits that might explain them. The literature offers various

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