



*Bardera, M. P.\* , García-Silgo, M.\*\* y Pastor, A\*\*\**

*\*Psychology Commandant, UME (Military Emergencies Unit), \*\* Psychology Captain IGESADEF (General Health Inspectorate for Defence), \*\*\* Psychology Lieutenant, Army (General Arroquia Quarters Services Unit).*

*E-mail: [carlos@pangeaintelligence.com](mailto:carlos@pangeaintelligence.com)*

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## STRESS MANAGEMENT IN THE ARMED FORCES

### Abstract

*This paper addresses the sources of stress that military personnel face and discusses the variables that serve to buffer its impact on health, safety and effective job performance. These variables (such as a positive outlook, positive thinking, coping strategies, self-control, realism, personality hardiness, self-efficacy, altruism and spirituality, amongst others) are being incorporated by the different surrounding armed forces into psychological strengthening programmes for their staff (for instance, the programmes Comprehensive Soldier Fitness or Trauma Risk Management).*

*In this spirit, one variable that is proving to be of great relevance is leadership. Transformational leadership shields well against occupational stress, yet its application in rigid or excessively hierarchical organisations, such as armies, often comes under question. The alternative lies in value-based leadership styles (for instance, ethical leadership and authentic leadership).*

### KeyWords

*Occupational stress, psychosocial hazards, resilience, leadership, positive psychology.*

## STRESS MANAGEMENT IN THE ARMED FORCES

### I. INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the last decade, different psychological strengthening programmes have made their appearance in military spheres, the objective of this type of activity being to buffer the effect that stressors linked to the military profession have on military staff. Be that as it may, this interest in incorporating techniques that stem from psychology into military training is not as recent as it may seem. For example, documented evidence shows that the US military had already been employing stress management and stress resilience programmes for military personnel who were to serve in counter-intelligence roles during the Second World War<sup>1</sup>.

Current psychological strengthening programmes used within NATO use evidence-based models (meaning that their effectiveness has been proved empirically) and originate in positive psychology. Some of these programmes are fairly well known, such as CSF (Comprehensive Soldier Fitness)<sup>2</sup> used by the US military or TRiM (Trauma Risk Management) of the Royal Marines.<sup>3</sup>

One of the variables that carries most weight in these programmes is leadership.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Quoted by Bardera and Silgo (2013): “candidates for espionage positions were sent to an assessment centre on a farm in Washington where they not only took part in tests with pen and paper and interviews but also exercises that determined whether they could withstand the stress and severity of work behind enemy lines. This week on the farm aimed at determining all the strengths and weaknesses that the subjects might have possessed. The personality study was a key element in these centres”.

2 For more on CSF, please refer to: JUANES-CUARTERO, Antonio P: “Comprehensive Fitness Soldier. En busca del soldado resiliente” [Comprehensive Fitness Soldier. Seeking the Resilient Soldier], *Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies Position Paper*, Vol. 42, 2012.

3 For a review of resilience programmes used in the armed forces, see: GARCÍA SILGO, Mónica: “Revisión de programas de resiliencia basados en la evidencia en los ejércitos” [Review of Evidence-based Resilience Programmes Used in the Armed Forces], *Sanidad Militar [Military Health]*, Vol. 69 (3), 2013.

4 See GARCÍA SILGO, Mónica and CASTELLANOS, Jose Luis: “Preparación psicológica a través

Leadership styles that served in the past are now being called into question. The conflicts of the 21st century and military tactics in difficult situations require leaders to inspire positive psychological abilities, to motivate and to generate commitment among subordinates; those who do so are “authentic leaders”.

This document shall address these issues by dividing them into three major blocks: Psychosocial hazards in a military context, psychological training programmes to manage stress and the role of the authentic leader as a buffer against stress in the armed forces.

## 2. PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS IN A MILITARY CONTEXT

Over the last decade, the European Union has been drawing attention to the emergence of psychosocial hazards in the workplace and making this type of risk a focal point of EU strategies on occupational safety and health since 2002.

In Spain, the Seventh National Working Conditions Survey (2011) concluded that professionals working in the field of security and defence (thus including military personnel) are one of the groups most exposed to occupational hazards, especially those of a psychosocial nature. These data are no different to those obtained by other armies in our region and this has led the Human Factors and Medicine (HFM) department at NATO to create the Mental Health Advisory Team in order to research and react to this problem. Their research work has shed light on the psychological variables at play in the health and welfare of military personnel, as well as empirically corroborating action taken to improve them. Although they are few in number, our armed forces have also developed research and other activities in the same vein and these will be mentioned below.

At this juncture, it is worth specifying what we mean by hazards of a psychosocial nature. The International Labour Organisation (1986) defines psychosocial hazards in terms of interactions between job content, the way in which work is managed and organised and environmental conditions, on the one hand, and the competencies and needs of workers on the other. Cox and Griffiths (1995) define psychosocial factors as aspects relating to the design, organisation and management of work, and to its social and environmental contexts, which have the potential to wreak physical, social or psychological damage.

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del liderazgo” [Psychological Preparation through Leadership], *Revista Ejército [Army Journal]*, Vol. 863, 2013.

According to the reference bibliography, there are six sources of stress that may present risks of a psychosocial nature to workers, these are:

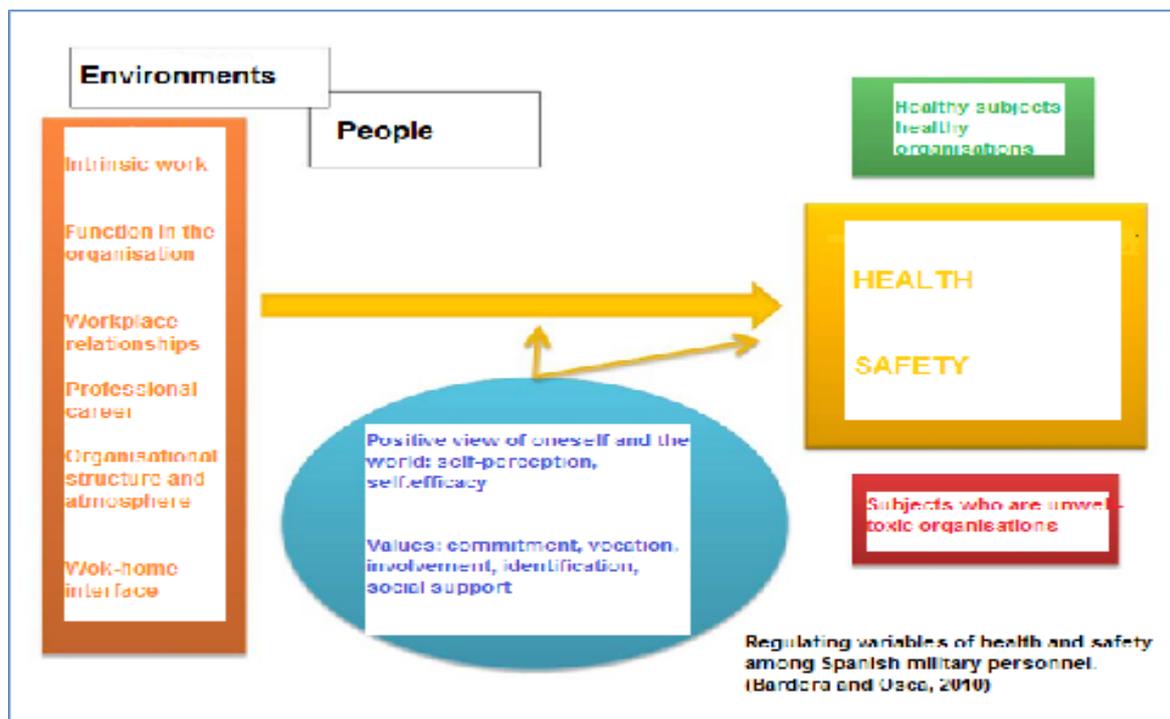
1. The “intrinsic aspects of work”, which are connected to the content of employment; such as, for instance, being overworked or long working days. In a study of Spanish soldiers in the Spanish army carried out by Bardera in 2010, it was found that the specific skills required by a position were directly related to absenteeism, job satisfaction, risk perception and the accident rate.
2. “Role stressors” are linked to ambiguity and role conflict that is to say when tasks to be carried out by the employee are not clear or if they contradict one another. Osca et al. found that the soldiers who clearly understood tasks assigned to them suffered less from emotional exhaustion and uneasiness but showed higher personal and professional self-fulfilment, the same results having previously been obtained by Bliese and Castro when studying NATO soldiers.
3. “Workplace relationships” are a highly relevant stressor in military professions, although they can also represent a protecting factor. In this regard, Stetz, Stetz and Bliese studied the effect that the social support of colleagues and superiors had on job satisfaction and welfare in “the military police” and found that, although social support buffers stress well, it does not function in the same way in all situations or for all subjects.
4. “Professional development” can be a source of stress for a variety of reasons, such as professional insecurity or role incongruity. There are few studies on the impact of these stressors on military personnel. In research carried out a few years ago with Spanish soldiers, career-related variables, far from being a stressor, were a source of professional motivation<sup>5</sup> although it is true that the study was conducted with staff regulations and rules for promotion in place that are no longer in force.
5. Stressors arising from the “organizational climate” would include aspects such as communication and relationships. López-Araujo, Osca and Peiró established the link between these work environment stressors and the job satisfaction of Spanish soldiers.
6. Finally, with regard to “work/family life” stressors, the most recent research has highlighted that these types of variables are very closely linked to socio- economic aspects. Although regulations can buffer these types of stressors, in military contexts

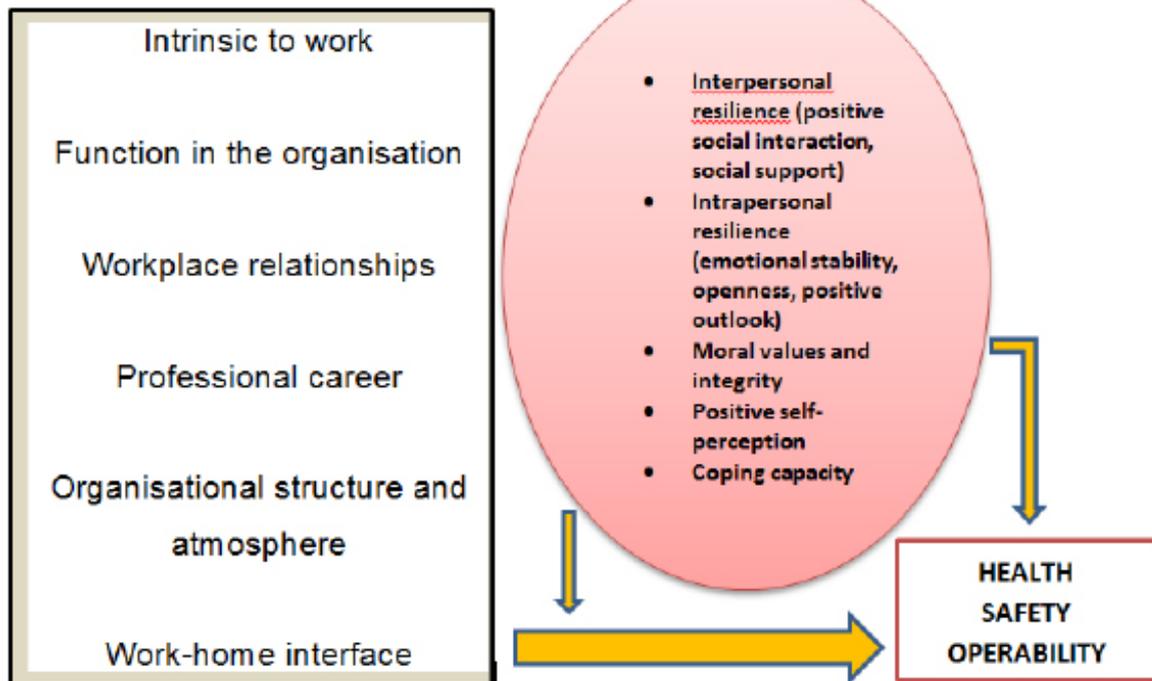
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<sup>5</sup> BARDERA, Pilar: *Antecedentes psicosociales en la salud laboral de militares españoles [Psychosocial Background in the Occupational Health of Spanish Military Personnel]*, doctoral thesis, Madrid: UNED, 2010.

matters are always complex, since as several authors state, the family and the army are two “voracious institutions” that require an individual to attend to them almost fully at a psychological, temporal and existential level, so much so that they can even place demands on one’s life.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to understand that the presence of these stressors in military contexts does not necessarily have to endanger health, safety or staff performance since a series of individual and group variables exists that are able to cushion or regulate the impact that these stressors have on subjects. Several of these variables are clearly identified and form part of the psychological training programmes in use in armed forces. By way of example, Thomas et al. showed that the more optimistic subjects exhibited fewer post-traumatic symptoms in deployment situations in operational zones, including when entering into combat, than less optimistic subjects. Bardera and Osca also ascertained that subjects with a more positive perception of themselves were protected against these stressors (see Diagram 1). Diagram 2 illustrates an overall model.



**SOURCES OF STRESS****3. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES TO MANAGE STRESS**

Psychological training is a method used by psychologists or trained professionals that consists of instructing other people so that they develop certain psychosocial skills with a view to being able to effectively confront adverse situations from the present, past or future. According to Bates et al., psychological training in military environments comprises the integration and boosting of mental, emotional and behavioural abilities and skills in order to optimise performance and reinforce the resilience of fighters. Although this method initially emerged as a treatment technique for clinical cases, with the rise of positive psychology, the model focused on taking action to cure, it has become a more positive model, where action aims to strengthen,

engender skills, well-being, satisfaction and, in passing, to prevent. At present, both models coexist. The positive model for mental health was initially recognised by the WHO<sup>7</sup> and it is the trend adopted on the whole by national<sup>8,9</sup> and international<sup>10,11,12,13</sup> organisations working with the health and well-being of people in general and of workers, the military or at-risk groups more specifically. It should be underscored that psychological training has become part of the security and defence strategies of various countries,<sup>14,15</sup> broadening conventional training with its exclusively physical and technical focus to another form that additionally also includes psychosocial aspects.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, this positive model, often channelled into the word “resilience”, has become very popular in political, social, business and economic spheres, although the concept had already been in use for some time in the world of engineering and materials processing. In psychology, this model has been revolutionary, giving rise to a paradigm shift.

These training programmes aim to develop the most innate and acquired form of a person’s capacity for resilience when faced with the more or less day-to-day physical

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7 WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization, as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19 June-22 July 1946, signed on 22 July 1946 and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

8 NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR HEALTH MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY, Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs, 2007.

9 NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR HEALTH MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY, Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs, Social and Equality Policy, 2011.

10 INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION: *Emerging risks and new patterns of prevention in a changing world of work*. Geneva, 2010.

11 WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION: IV International Conference on Health Promotion, “New Players for a New Era: Leading health promotion into the 21st century”, *The Jakarta Declaration on Health Promotion in the 21st. Century*, Jakarta, Indonesia, July 1997.

12 MENTAL HEALTH DECLARATION FOR EUROPE, Declaration of the Ministers of Health of the Member States in the WHO European Region, who met at the Ministerial Conference held in Helsinki from 12 to 15 January 2005.

13 GREEN PAPER: Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union, European Commission, Brussels, 2005.

14 NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH DIVISION, *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Santa Mónica, CA: RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institution, 2012.

15 NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: A SHARED PROJECT, Department of National Security, Spanish President’s Cabinet, Spanish Government, 2013.

16 ADLER, Amy B., DELAHAIJ, Roos, BAILEY, Suzanne M., VAN DEN BERGE, Carlo, PARMAK, Merle, TUSSENBROEK, Barend, PUENTE, Jose M., LANDRATOVA Sandra, KRAL, Pavel, KREIM, Guenter, RIETDIJKL, Deirdre, MCGURK, Dennis and CASTRO, Andrew: “NATO Survey of mental health training in Army recruits”, *Military Medicine*, Vol. 178 (7), 2013.

and psychosocial stressors. In this psychological context, the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (22nd edition) defines resilience as the “human capacity to cope flexibly with extreme situations and to overcome them”. Meanwhile, scientific and specialist literature envisions resilience in the face of adversity in three ways.<sup>17,18</sup> As a resistance process or basic capacity; as the capacity to recover, adapt and rebalance; or as growth after a traumatic event.

Concerning the well-deserved relevance of psychological training in the present day, it is worth highlighting numerous research papers (those cited in this article, *inter alia*) which have observed that certain resilience programmes protect against depression and facilitate better adjustment and adaptation, reduce levels of cortisol in states of high stress and show positive effects over the long term. Military trials have demonstrated that such training improves coping strategies as well as emotional intelligence, positive thoughts in stressful situations, optimism and the seeking out of social support when required.

The specific factors included in the most relevant resilience programmes of today have demonstrated significant regulatory effects when it comes to stressors or hazards and health and well-being. These factors can be grouped into three main areas of resilience (biological, psychological and social) and are addressed depending on whether they are internal or external to the subject. Internal factors refer to qualities that depend solely on the individual, both from a biological and a psychological perspective. Meanwhile, external factors are connected to a person’s environment and, as a result, do not depend so much on the individual although this (by means of their internal competencies) may sometimes exert an influence on him or her.

The external factors with most empirical evidence include social support.<sup>13,19,20</sup> This factor can flourish in different settings, such as families, organisations or communities. Family support is one of the external factors that has the most impact on individual resilience. As for organisational contexts, such as the military for instance, group cohesion, alongside teamwork and a positive unit environment, constitute priority subfactors. This is the reason why leadership (a dimension included in the working

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17 REICH, John W., ZAUTRA, Alex J. and HALL, John S. (Eds.): *Handbook of Adult Resilience*, New York: Guilford Press, 2010.

18 MEREDITH, Lisa S., SHERBOURNE, Cathy D., GAILLOT, Sarah J., HANSELL, Lydia, RITSCHARD, Hans V., PARKER, Andrew M. and WRENN, Glenda: *Promoting psychological resilience in the U.S. military*, Santa Monica, CA. RAND Corporation, 2011.

19 LEE, Jennifer E.C., SUDOM, Kerry A. and MCCREARY, Donald R.: “Higher-Order model of resilience in the Canadian forces”, *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, Vol. 43 (3), 2011.

20 GARCÍA SILGO, Mónica: “Revisión de programas de resiliencia basados en la evidencia en los ejércitos” [Review of Evidence-based Resilience Programmes Used in the Armed Forces], *Sanidad Militar [Military Health]*, Vol. 69 (3), 2013.

environment) is a matter of such relevance in the teaching and training of military commanders. On that account, one of the strategies aimed at occupational risk prevention on the one hand and the development of subordinates' resilience on the other consists of training the officer in those leadership factors that impact positively on morale, performance, efficacy, well-being, satisfaction and the health of soldiers. Leadership training is thus a way in which human resources in the armed forces can indirectly address resilience. Other external organisation resilience factors are (*inter alia*): Support provided by material and technological means; information and access thereto; technical training; the development of codes of conduct and technical instructions. Finally, community support is associated with having friendships, being integrated within groups and participating in social, spiritual and ceremonial activities etc. Some of the resilience programmes implemented within military populations take these external factors into account (in addition to the internal ones, which we will mention below), going as far as to provide psychological training to families in the units themselves or creating community support networks. This was what underpinned the design of the US Army training programme Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2).

The internal factors that have shown to have a regulatory effect on health and performance include biological factors, such as, for instance, physical strength (understood as physical training, nutritional habits and a healthy lifestyle) and psychophysiological ones, among which the following stand out<sup>1,13,21,22</sup>: a positive outlook; positive thinking; positive coping strategies; self-control; realism, acceptance or self-awareness; a hardy personality (comprised of commitment, control and challenge dimensions); self-efficacy; altruism; spirituality (related, or not, to religion); and professional experience. Some internal factors are, in turn, directly related to having beneficial interpersonal relationships and with providing and receiving social support (a social factor), whilst others are linked to the capacity to control and reduce physiological anxiety responses in stressful situations (a biological factor).

With regard to training sessions for psychological training programmes, these can be intensive over a short space of time or spread out over the course of several months. In turn, they can be imparted to groups or to individuals, although in military academies or units these sessions tend to be given to groups. The didactic methodology should be interactive, avoiding conferences where only the trainer speaks, and including case studies, personal experience provided by the subjects themselves and identification of the psychosocial stressors that affect each person. It is for this reason that groups cannot comprise a very large number of people. Special attention must be paid to practising cognitive and behavioural strategies for each resilience factor, as well as using resilience skills to deal with psychosocial stressors that may arise between training sessions and subsequently sharing and analysing this experience with the psychologist or group trainer. Depending on the objectives sought with the programme, more or fewer training modules will be implemented, on the understanding that the greater the number of factors addressed and the more biological, psychological and social

areas coached, the greater the increase in subjects' capacity to demonstrate resilience when faced with adversity. It is advisable, not only in order to increase a programme's effectiveness rate, but also with a view to consolidating subjects' sense of self-efficacy, to use objective and quantitative indicators of change, that is to say, by means of evaluation instruments in phases prior to the programme and subsequently in the short and long term. Finally, follow-up stages can be included in order to consolidate the positive changes achieved.

There exist various bio-psychosocial or psychosocial training programmes that are employed within the security and defence context, such as the above-mentioned CSF2. We can cite other examples, inter alia: National Guard Resiliency Program, Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Air Force Landing Gear, Marine Corps Operational Stress Control, Gallup, Heartmath, National Security Agency Employee Engagement Program, or Trauma Risk Management. Similarly, NATO's Science and Technology Organisation is developing and validating a psychological training programme with a view to increasing the resilience of members of the military whilst these are still in the initial stages of recruitment.

Before their implementation, it should be required that the efficacy of psychological training programmes be demonstrated in randomised controlled trials and that training of trainers be validated too. Psychology is a science and, as such, its work must be based on evidence. Conversely, psychological training (in recent years this has become popularly known as coaching) has been (before the dawn of the coaching era) and remains a technique given to practices based on intuition, tradition, subjective strands, professional intrusion, as well as the trivialisation of its principles, instruments and methods. Lastly, in order to create effective, high-quality psychological training it is necessary to design these from a professional ethics perspective, something that bears a direct relation to basing action on scientifically demonstrated criteria.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND STRESS IN A MILITARY CONTEXT**

Leadership emerges as a fundamental variable for stress management, whether it be a protection factor or as the primary cause thereof. For Ivancevich and Matteson, leadership perhaps represents the most powerful form of influence amid all work-related aspects. Yet what is leadership? What does leading others entail? Or how can a leader's influence define the development of strengths and weaknesses amongst subordinates? According to Northouse's definition, leadership is a "process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". We can find nuances in this definition that depend on our theoretical perspective, whether that be situational,

transactional, transformational or from other theories; yet in broad brush strokes, all of these encompass the essential elements covered by Northouse's definition in his paper.

The study of the relationship between leadership and stress has been present for various decades. The first research papers,<sup>21</sup> had already begun to note the possibility that leaders' behaviour could exert an influence on the levels of stress experienced by subordinates. There are currently a large number of studies that have proliferated concerning the leader figure within organisations. The supervisors and managers who find themselves in this position play a vital role both vis-à-vis the health and conduct of the organisation but also to that of followers or subordinates. The conduct of a leader can have a buffering or multiplying effect on the stressors that influence the welfare of employees, to the extent in fact that elements of leader's behaviour can be considered stressors themselves. It is according to this logic that Peiró and González-Roma determined that a leader's stress significantly and positively predicts the average stress level of team members. As a consequence, the relationships between superiors and their subordinates harbour one of the most common sources of stress within organisations. Shamir, Zakay, Brainin and Popper state that relationships between leaders and their followers may have a direct or indirect influence on job performance and the occupational welfare of all members of the organisation. Inadequate leadership can contribute to the emergence of negative experiences among employees that endanger their well-being, leading to low levels of overall and professional satisfaction and in higher levels of work-family conflict<sup>22</sup>. Evidence of the link between negative or toxic leadership and burnout can be found in literature<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, if one considers the regulating role that leaders' behaviour plays regarding stress, tension or employee welfare, we may also point out that a leader's positive conduct can improve the working environment and have a direct, positive influence both on the satisfaction and involvement of subordinates<sup>24</sup>, thereby directly affecting performance and the organisational engagement of workers.

21 OAKLANDER, Harold y FLEISHMAN, Edwin A.: "Patterns of leadership related to organizational stress in hospital settings", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 8 (4), 1964.

22 TEPPER, Bennett J.: "Consequences of abusive supervision", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43 (2), 2000.

23 I.e. SELTZER, Joseph and NUMEROF, Rita E.: "Supervisory leadership and subordinate burnout", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 31, 1986; GIL-MONTE, Pedro and PEIRÓ, Jose María: "Un estudio comparativo sobre criterios normativos y diferenciales para el diagnóstico del síndrome de quemarse por el trabajo (burnout) según el MBI-HSS en España" [A comparative study of regulatory and differential criteria for diagnosis of burnout syndrome according to the MBI-HSS in Spain], *Revista de Psicología del trabajo y de las Organizaciones* [Journal of Workplace and Organisational Psychology], Vol. 16(2), 2000.

24 VAN KNIPPENBERG, Dan, DE CREMER, David and VAN KNIPPENBERG, Barbara: "Leadership and Fairness: The State of the Art", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 16 (2), 2007.

Transformational leadership is the leadership model that seems to have amassed the greatest amount of empirical evidence in terms of positive leader behaviour as something that fosters job satisfaction, engagement and professional performance and thereby serves to counter or regulate stress. This style of leadership goes beyond models based on rewards and punishments and manages to inspire high levels of involvement and endeavour among subordinates as they work towards the goals that have been set.<sup>25</sup> Transformational leaders go beyond the ties between them and their subordinates by virtue of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and by considering them on an individual basis. In adopting this style, they change the perceptions and values of subordinates, as well as their professional expectations and aspirations, aligning their own beliefs or self-identity with the vision of the leader or the organisation.<sup>26</sup> Díaz, Gómez and De la Garza identify a series of key behavioural aspects within transformational leadership: “Identifying and articulating a vision, ensuring that actions reflect a set of values for be followed, uniting cooperative efforts towards the pursuit of a common goal, motivating and instilling enthusiasm with a view to improving the quality of followers’ performance, affording support to followers while respecting them and attending to their needs and feelings and, finally, stimulating reflection on the tasks performed”.

As regards stress, it has been shown that transformational leaders encourage subjects facing stressful situations to take a positive approach or make a positive assessment, so that they perceive such situations as challenges.<sup>27</sup> Schultz, Greenly and Brown found that this type of leadership promoted the coherence of goals, clarity concerning the professional role and job satisfaction. It also impacted on employees’ beliefs and interpretations surrounding their position. There are thus increases, generally speaking, in well-being and a reduction in stress perception that contributes to the emergence of proactive coping mechanisms at work, which inexorably results in not only satisfaction but also boosts organisational involvement and professional performance too.

Notwithstanding the empirical evidence that exists surrounding the merits of this leadership style, the model has received criticism, with claims that the strategies used by transformational leaders are susceptible to manipulation or may be used to the benefit of the leaders themselves. To a certain extent, this has led to a distinction being drawn between “genuine” transformational leaders and those who are “self-

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25 See: BASS, Bernard: *Transformational leadership: industrial, military, and educational impact*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1998; BASS, B. and RIGGIO, Ronald: *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2006.

26 See: BURNS, James: *Leadership*, New York, Harper & Row, 1978; SHAMIR, Boas, BRAININ, Esther, ZAKAY, Eliav and POPPER, Micha: “Perceived combat readiness as collective efficacy: Individual- and group-level analysis”, *Military Psychology*, Vol. 12, 2000.

27 LYONS, Joseph B. and SCHNEIDER, Tamera R.: “Leadership and stress: The effects of leadership style on stress outcomes”, *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 20, 2009.

serving”. This, coupled with the disappointment that many citizens or subordinates feel regarding the actions of their leaders and the current backdrop of economic and social crisis, has led to the emergence of leadership models that, without departing from the core postulates of transformational leadership, entail the exemplary nature of a leader’s behaviour, as well as his or her morality and ethics, serving as a role model for followers. Such is the case for the ethical leadership proposed, for instance, by Brown, Trevino and Harrison in 2005, or the authentic leadership of Avolio et al. (2004). Furthermore, “apparently” long-forgotten leadership models have made a comeback, and despite their absence they are regaining prominence today. This is the case for shared leadership,<sup>28</sup> in which the leadership function is assumed collectively by the group; as well as supportive leadership,<sup>29</sup> which highlights leadership behaviour aimed at meeting the needs of subordinates and to provide the tools required to effectively carry out their work, a postulate that to a certain degree can be identified with the “individualised consideration” of transformational leadership.

Despite the proven efficacy of these types of leadership as regards protection and reducing stress in the workplace, doubts remain as to whether these can be applied to rigid or excessively hierarchical organisational structures, which can be the case in the armed forces. If they are indeed implemented, there is uncertainty about whether they would provide the same level of protection against stress as in other organisations.

Military leaders do not only task themselves with the protection and welfare of their soldiers. They also ensure that soldiers are prepared physically, technically and tactically, and this preparation must be commensurate with the characteristics of every single position held by their subordinates. Moreover, they must concern themselves with their own military training, as part of which they must marry their role as combatants, in tandem with responsibility for managing their staff, with all the vicissitudes that this may involve, such as family, economic or professional problems. They work in a changing context and have to adapt to and combine periods of training or instruction with deployment in operations areas for prolonged periods of time. The fact that military deployment is becoming increasingly more modernised is, to a certain extent, changing the traditional doctrine of “the art of warfare”, with ever-greater emphasis placed on high technology, alongside small combat units that are agile and extremely specialised. This obliges leaders to be ever more versatile and capable of applying their skills to a wide variety of contexts.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, as Bass (1998) points out, the leaders

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28 See: YUKL, Gary: *Leadership in organizations*, 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1998; PEARCE, Craig L. and CONGER, Jay A. (Eds): *Shared Leadership: Reframing the hows and whys of leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pub, 2003.

29 RAFFERTY, Alannah E. and GRIFFIN, Mark A.: “Dimensions of transformational leadership: Conceptual and empirical extensions”, *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 15, 2004.

30 BROWN, Robert and SIMS, Douglas: “Transforming in peace and war”, *Military Review*, May-June, 2005.

of the future will have to gain the trust, loyalty and esteem of their subordinates, attending to their needs and conveying challenges, a sense of unity and work, as well as communicating objectives as shared objectives that are attractive when looking to the future. Military leadership must thus be understood as “the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization” (Army Department, 2006).

In this emerging form of military leadership, the provision of information and participation in the decision-making process become crucial elements when preventing or reducing stress amongst subordinates.<sup>31</sup> A leader cannot content him or herself with merely giving orders to subordinates, he or she needs to try to engage them with their work and bolster the pursuit of common goals; they need to be close to subordinates and go beyond typical relationships, in such a way as to allow for better confrontation of stressful situations. Transformational leadership seems to provide a positive response to these requirements, although there has always been doubt as to whether in combat situations, with stress levels at their highest, a leader must act in a transformational, or supporting, manner instead of an approach that is better adapted to the situation at hand.

This is the reason why it has been considered that, although it seems to have been proven that a transformational leadership style allows individuals to better tackle stressful situations, it is possible that, on occasions, combining this type of leadership with transactional leadership, based on a conceivable exchange of rewards and punishments, can result in a more effective form of leadership, as proposed recently by Alarcon, Lyons, Schlessman and Barelka.

Another aspect which seems to be gaining increasing relevance, above all in the pursuit of an effective type of military leadership, are the motivation, ethics and values of the leader, which, by means of influence that this leader has on the group, can set an example that helps or serves as a blueprint for subordinates. This is primarily because the transmission of these values plays a fundamental role in the transformation of the individual interests of each subordinate into collective interests. For Shamir, House and Arthur, the exemplary conduct of a leader, underpinned by ethical and moral values, inspires followers to engage more in missions, to make personal sacrifices when carrying out missions and to go beyond the call of duty.

Therefore, we cannot dismiss the effectiveness of styles of leadership such as the ethical or the authentic, as alternatives to conventional leadership models, since, in addition to sharing the same theoretical basis as that of transformational and supportive leadership when it comes to transcending traditional relationships with

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<sup>31</sup> FALLESEN, Jon J., KELLER-GLAZE, Heidi and CURNOW, Christina K.: “A selective review of leadership studies in the U.S. Army”, *Military Psychology*, Vol. 23, 2011. DOI: 10.1080/08995605.2011.600181.

subordinates, supporting them as far as is needed to boost both their involvement and their job satisfaction and always seeking the best way to cope with stress; they also add an ethical element which also seems to delve deeper into well-being and organisational commitment.

What does indeed seem to be dominant, and may even surpass the potential level of effectiveness seen in transformational leadership and other styles when it comes to the best possible way of coping with different stressors both for the leader and his or her subordinates, is the leader possessing a “hardy” personality, and the formation of a common social identity together with the group of subordinates.

Resilient people generally perceive stressful experiences as interesting and stimulating, viewing them as situations over which they can exert a certain level of control and which they can tackle as personal challenges allowing them to learn and grow as individuals. As a consequence, resilient leaders will be able to ensure that, by means of their own influence, their subordinates positively tackle stressful situations by sharing their reasoning regarding the situation and group experiences in a positive and constructive way.<sup>32</sup> This style of coping does not only lead to better performance and well-being of subordinates but it also mitigates one of the effects that has been of most concern to armed forces after deployment, that is the desertion and dropping out of its members. Since it is seen as a something to emulate by subordinates, this type of leader personality will have a positive effect on group reinforcement and the improvement of unit cohesion, thereby boosting a combatant’s level of preparation for dealing with stress.

Research shows that leaders not only influence the stress felt by subordinates individually but also collectively, which directly and indirectly leads to a sense of well-being by creating a shared sense of social reality, that is to say: a shared sense of values, missions and priorities.<sup>33</sup> This collective approach to tackling such situations is especially important in environments where stressful events cannot be controlled. In the case of military combat environments, the way in which soldiers identify with their unit, and thus reinforce group cohesion, will play a fundamental role in mitigating the effects of stress and in achieving maximal performance within the unit. For Shamir, Brainin, Zakay and Popper, the identification of soldiers with their unit is possibly the best predictor of effectiveness and preparation for combat.

Despite the burgeoning of studies on leadership within the armed forces in different countries in recent years, the trend does not seem to have progressed further than an initial stage. Concerns about the impact of leadership on the management

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32 BARTONE, Paul: “Resilience under military operational stress: can leaders influence hardiness?”, *Military Psychology*, Vol. 18(Suppl.), 2006.

33 BRITT, Thomas, DAVISON, James, BLIESE, Paul and CASTRO, Carl: “How leaders can influence the impact that stressors have on soldiers”, *Military Medicine*, Vol. 169 (7), 2004.

of military personnel seems to have become especially relevant with field research moving to the general academies themselves. This is where the officers of the future are trained, those who in the medium and long term will occupy positions key to the development of effective leadership. We can find numerous examples in literature of research into leadership among future officers at West Point, as well as the cadets of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), *inter alia*. Yet without a shadow of a doubt, the most significant consequence of the results achieved by such prominent research has been the deployment of specific leadership training programmes, especially the transformational ones, such as the broad programme developed by the Canadian Army, promoted by the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute; or, for instance, the inclusion of leadership training into exercises done at the Royal Officers' Academy in Norway.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The comprehensive training of soldiers must not overlook psychological training. Staff should receive training and information about the psychosocial hazards that must be faced. Strategies must be provided in order to tackle these risks, as well as adjustment and adaptation mechanisms so that the impact of these threats does not lead to a decline in their health, safety or performance.

These psychological training programmes must be validated by empirical means and address variables whose impact on subjects has been proven. Some of the suggested variables have been discussed in the sections above, most emanate from the positive psychology approach and the concepts of a hardy personality, coping strategies and resilience.

Of particular note is the impact of the leader. Some leadership styles can prove to be “toxic” for those who have to “endure” them, reducing performance, commitment and involvement in work and magnifying stress. Most of the sources cited in the bibliography recognise that the transformational leadership style is the style that attains the highest levels of involvement, endeavour and welfare among subordinates. These are the leaders who motivate, inspire, engender enthusiasm and encourage those under their command, exhibiting a clearly-defined system of values and a consideration of people on an individual basis. Nevertheless, they have also been criticised for their capacity to manipulate.

In a military context, leaders need to be versatile and gain the trust, loyalty and commitment of subordinates. Transformational leadership seems to be the most appropriate style in such circumstances, although doubts have always been raised

about whether leaders must pursue a transformational *modus operandi* in combat situations, instead of one more directly adapted to the situation in which they find themselves.

At present, there is growing interest in studying the impact that ethics and values in armies has on the commitment, involvement and welfare of staff. Among the papers that are beginning to be published in this vein, those focusing on ethical leadership attract attention. The values that have always been present within the armed forces thus return with leverage, serving to protect against health problems and stress, and guaranteeing a successful mission.

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