

ERRORS IN THE PERCEPTION OF POWER AND AUTHORITY IN OPERATIONAL NAVAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: The study aims to capture the interactionism of the perceptive system, in terms of high complexity stimuli (power and authority), where the specific activity of the operational, naval leadership is simultaneously considered as reference framework and operating mode, within which "perception is formed, improved and checked, and also, corrected in practice." (Zlate, 1999). The difficulties of the explanatory – interpretative process lies in the complex dynamics of the variables involved: sometimes, the virtual environment, the perception as informational– operational mechanism of primary processing of information, with an important role in (self-regulation of behaviour, social perception with a role in the integration at group level, adjustment of intergroup intra - and interpersonal interactions, their associated operational tasks involving specific activities, under risk and uncertainty, in the naval context. We analyse, from the systemic point of view, the concept of perception as an expression of the subordinate's personality traits in which perceptive schemes, models, scenarios, prototypes, facilitated or inhibited by attention, motivation, expectancy or attitude in "transactional" relation with external determinants (characteristics and intrinsic value of power and authority), characteristics of the naval context (the volume and nature of the perceptual field). In this regard, a number of valid reasons are offered by social psychology: implicit theories of personality, implicit social theories, the theory of personal constructs (Kelly), attribution: the theory of correspondent inference (Jones, Davis, McGilles), the model of covariance (Kelly). The study focuses on the objectuality of the perceptual constructs, in what the correctness of the perceptual product is concerned, and also on the explanation and inventory of some errors of perception, noting that there exist insubstantial discriminations between the perception of power and that of authority. As methodological references, having the value of anchor – ideas, naval operational leadership falls into a broader range of social influence and also into the types of power, that relate asymmetrically; power, as a social, institutional ascendancy is defined as "maximum influence which an agent P can exercise over an agent S, in a given area." (Fortine, 2001), authority is "a predominantly psychological ascendancy, supported by the intrinsic qualities of the actor." (Cristea, 2015). In the psychological context of the missions specific to operational leadership, the behaviour of leaders and followers, will be governed to a great extent by the facts which are perceived to a lesser extent by the objective facts; knowing and understanding the errors of perception will lower or reduce errors, giving rise to performance and effectiveness of leadership activities.

Keywords: perception, power, authority, naval operational leadership, perception errors.

ARGUMENT

In the current period, the complexity of shipping activities attempted to combine pragmatically big gains with little loss so as to increase effectiveness of corporate shipping industry, inducing increased professional demands by using a workforce not only highly qualified, but also psychologically apt for their work. Therefore, career courses are mandatory for sailors and navigators who undergo not only psychological examinations that focus on mental health, but also assessment of certain personality traits that should be compatible with the professional demands of life and work atsea. The psychosocial traits of vocational personality are evaluated since they can be the best indicators of successful fulfillment and of tasks on ships, i.e. high socio-relational potential, capacity for teamwork, tolerance, coping with stress and frustration, assertive communication, leadership skills.

Under such auspices, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) published statistics regarding the number of marine casualties and incidents in the area of EU member states, taking into account the number and type of vessels involved for a period of 4 years (2011 -2014) where there is an alarming increase in number from year to year. (Figure 1)

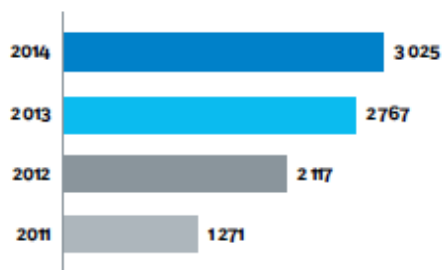


Figure 1 *Distribution of marine accidents and incidents between 2011-2014, in EU*
(Adaptated after <http://www.emsa.europa.eu/news-a-press-centre/>)

What we consider more worrying is that estimates made by EMSA for 2015 grow exponentially, coming to a number of 3500-4000 cases. The study then explores the determinant causes of accidents and incidents at sea, and says that of the 908 events analyzed, 67% are caused by human error. (Figure 2)

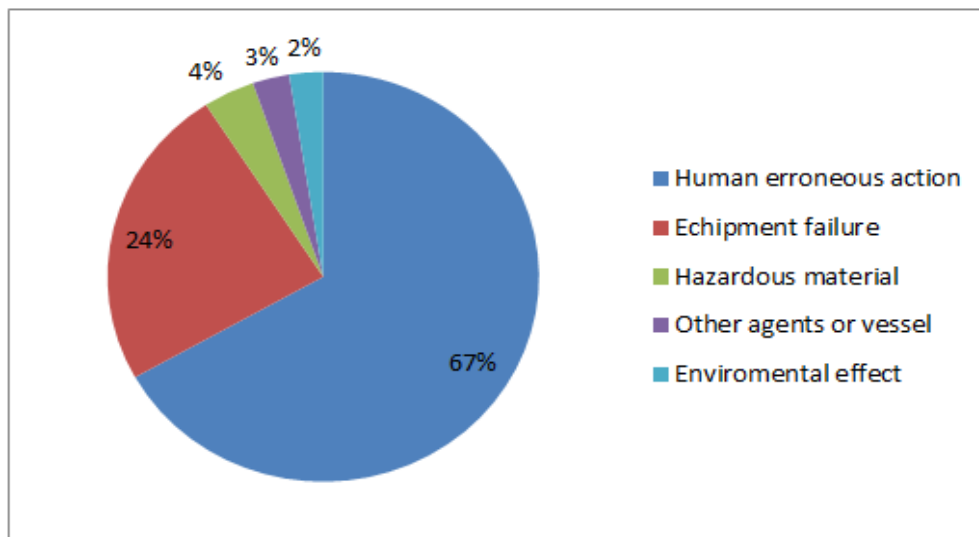


Figure 2 *The distribution of causes of accidents in the 2011-2014 period and the subcategories of human error* (Adaptated after <http://www.emsa.europa.eu/news-a-press-centre/>)

Further analysis of the types of human errors involved in producing such marine casualties and incidents (Figure 3) raised questions in the business and academic community, in what regards the investigation, description, interpretation and development of solutions. It has become mandatory to issue "safety recommendations", most of them being found as social responsibility and leadership in the Convention on Standards of Training, Certification / Certification and Watchkeeping. (STCW).

In these conditions of high complexity and risk, we aim to address, systemically, the following: the naval operational leadership, the virtual environment with the role of mediator and modeler, in order to correctly and objectively asses the perceptual constructs of authority and power on board ships. We wonder, in this context, if the virtual environment increases the number and complexity perceptual type errors, increases the production of errors already known of the psychic functioning or, conversely, its incidence in this dynamic shows only low values. We support this approach on operational definitions of the concept of leadership and also on the assumptions provided by general psychology, applied psychology, social psychology and psychology where organizational and managerial psychology brings important contributions.

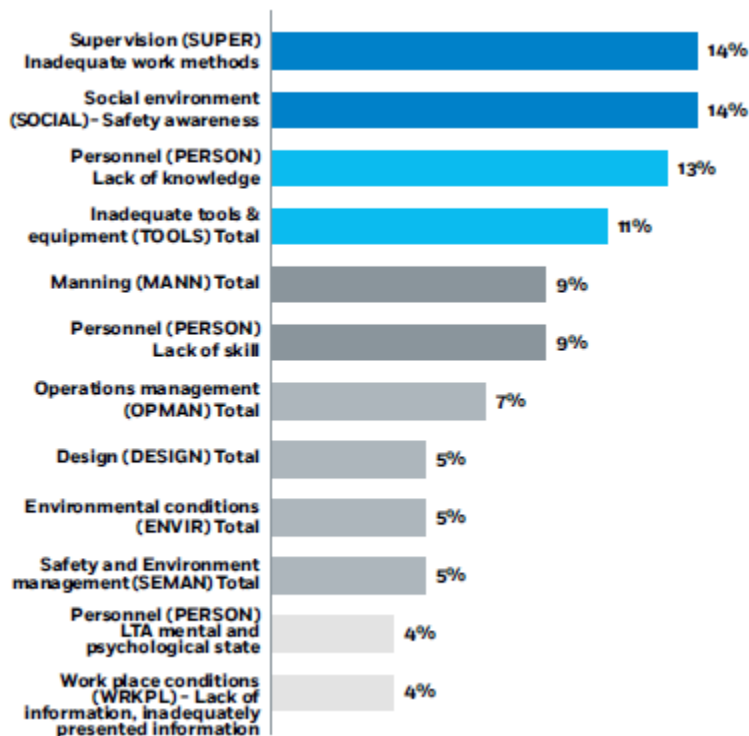


Figure 3 *Contributing factors subcategories related to human erroneous actions* (Adaptated after <http://www.emsa.europa.eu/news-a-press-centre/>)

II. POWER AND AUTHORITY IN NAVAL OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP. ERRORS OF PERCEPTION

It has become a kind of truism that we perceive the world through the lens of our own glasses. In other words, the fine adjustments and readjustments made by the human psychological system are achieved, particularly in relation to perceived reality which becomes what we call objective reality. The concept of perception has been under continuous research, while literature in the field abounds in comprehensive articles on the subject. A thorough synthesis is carried out by M. Zlate who distinguishes three meanings in the concept of perception, i.e. "activity, deformation of the object, and expression of personality." (Zlate, 1999, p. 93) The perceptual activity, according to the aforementioned author, actually points to "an essential regulatory mechanism of the adaptive activity" (Zlate, 1999, p. 98), i.e. the formation of perceptual constructs involves complex interrelations that are set between external stimuli and the personal equation of internal drive, with the clear purpose of optimal adaptation to the external environment.

An essential role in this case belongs to the functional characteristics of the cognitive system by which the selection and processing of information is achieved, so as to allow the relative imbalances caused by external stimuli to be readjusted, thus allowing the system to get a new equilibrium. Basically, personal life experiences contained in the perceptive schemes revive and they cause the perceptual product containing the information patterns to access the perceptual categorizations to make them compatible with the new constructs of reality. In situations of dissonance, the system of mental representations which is strongly personalized generate just prototypes that contain only ambiguous and confusing information. A facilitator or inhibitory role on intellectual mechanisms of perception belongs to the assembly of expectancy, attitudes operating scenarios and models of personal life experiences, putting them in connection with new unfamiliar information. Adaptation may undergo changes when the perceptive field is faced with different intensity effects of disturbing factors. Understanding perception as an "expression of personality" offers much wider possibilities of explanation, both of perception and of the personality system, thus being able to capture the entire dynamic of the mental process.

On the personality level, the focus is laid on the line of character, as an integrative and axiological side of personality especially on the set of attitudes that are objectified in the explicit behavior as character traits. We subscribe to M. Zlate's point of view who describes attitude as the "invariant under which the individual gets oriented selectively, adjusts themselves preferentially, and adapt their behavior through evolution." (Zlate, 2006, p.386) A careful analysis of the attitudinal content reveals a heterogeneous mixture of cognitive elements of emotional origin based on one's will and having the role of psychic mobilization through voluntary effort. Under the system of personality, particular attention should be paid to the relationship established between the hyper-complex components of the personality components: interaction, interdependence, compensation, feedback, expressly role of maintaining or acquiring the balance of the personality system.

To complete the conceptual definition, we must bring into question the concepts of authority and power as external stimuli to be perceived on board ships, virtually mediated, within the environment of specific maritime activities pursued under naval operational leadership. Although distinct, with certain peculiarities in their conceptual delimitation the notions of power, authority and leadership have in common the phenomenon of social influence. Social influence is "the psychosocial phenomenon consisting in the alteration of cognitive-intellectual, attitudinal-

oriented, or behavioral-activation systems that occur as a result of the interaction between individuals, groups, social organizations." (Cristea, 2015, p. 408) This implies that interrelations are actually the transactions of meanings between personalities that influence each other by interaction, causing changes at different levels of personality systems, expressed at the attitude level by changes in behavioral acts. Leadership, considered to be a psychological coordination of the working team, alleges that "the influence that certain individuals exert on achieving the objectives of others in an organizational context." (Johns, 1996, p. 296) around three fundamental elements "group, influence and purpose" (Zlate, 2004, p. 25)

Aboard ships, in this situation of influence mediated by the virtual environment (e-learning platform), the diagrams, models and perceptual prototypes form the perceptual field in a complex manner when external stimuli prove to be either power or authority exercised virtually. A special kind of interactional relationship is thus achieved, i.e. a relationship which modifies cognition, will, and motivation of the subject who perceives; all these are accompanied by the emotional tone. In this case power can be defined as "the maximum influence of an agent P exerted over an agent S, in a given field."(Fortin, 2001, p. 373)The perceptive processes similar undergo modeling in the case of authority perception, the more so as it involves those psychological professional, or character attributes valued by the members of a ship crew in a leader; similarly, the perceptual process may mean a "predominantly psychosocial ascendancy supported by the intrinsic qualities of the actor."(Cristea, 2015, p. 472)

Since the virtual environment does not allow a direct, the face to face type relationship, and different perceptual products interpret the objective reality seeking to give meaning and significance according to one's personal equation, the perceptive schemes containing personal patterns over power and authority, increasing the possibility of errors of perception, are activated. The virtual power holder is the ship owner who communicates on line with the ship crew and thus becomes a manager in whose mind overstated images are projected, while the professional and human authority is taken, also overestimated, by the ship master. As a perceptual error, the projection is sustained by the theory of implicit personality where the power and authority holders are assigned those personality traits which are similar to the ones of the perceiver. The virtually assigned errors tend to increase the importance of motivation, attention, or situations implying activities specific to working at sea, within multicultural, multigenerational, multi-confessional crews, with the entire range of perceptual errors described in the field literature (stereotypes, prejudices, halo effect, irradiation of prestige, social status errors, errors in valuing source of information, errors caused by age and gender ...)

III. CONCLUSIONS

Shipboard perceptive processes undergo specific influences due to several factors characteristic to working in the shipping industry: the external environment which implies risk and uncertainty with routine workloads to be executed quickly, the ship crew that has the characteristics of a social micro group, but do not have a common history since crew members constantly shift in accordance with their employment contracts; apart from this there is a heterogeneous composition of the team/crew: different ages and levels of education, multiculturalism generating beliefs, traditions, different religions. We notice, on one hand, the production of perceptual errors due to human psychic system software, and on the other hand, errors generated by filtering produced by the online environment where power and authority are perceived as virtual exercise.

In this context, the urgent requirements are those requiring adaptation and safety of the ship and naval crew, the reverse situation being materialized into accidents and incidents at sea with huge losses of human lives and material damage. This leads us into creating training sessions aimed at developing and optimizing the personality of all workers in this field, backed by creating situations of social learning, case studies, so as to model the social and leadership skills of the naval crew.

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