

## Is Guidance as a Tool for Leadership Communication Effective for Military Leaders?

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### Abstract

Serving as a military officer requires among other skills strong communication skills. The Norwegian Military Academy (NMA) educates its cadets in the use of guidance as a leadership communication tool. The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether participating in a 5-day guidance course would lead to an improvement of the ability to communicate better with others.

**Materials and Methods:** Forty-nine officers from the NMA participated in the study. The participants served as supervisors in nine exercises related to practicing guidance as a communication tool. Eight of the participants filled out a questionnaire three times during the 5-day course.

**Results:** The results showed that the supervisors felt that they became better at communicating with others and at building and maintaining relationships. Interestingly, trust was found to decline a bit between the supervisor and the person being supervised. However, they felt that they got to know the other person. In addition, the supervisors felt that they increased their awareness of which communication tools that were effective to use to give the conversation its necessary/desired content and form. They also felt that they became more aware of the kind of information they asked for in the conversation. Furthermore, they felt that they were able to communicate more effectively as leaders, and they perceived that their ability to develop others became enhanced by the use of guidance. Finally, the supervisor's felt that their ability to influence the supervised person's attitudes through the creation of new thinking and reflection also increased.

**Conclusions:** The results from the present study suggest that practicing guidance as a leadership communication tool is an effective communication tool for military officers.

**Keywords:** Guidance; Leadership communication; Military leaders; Leadership development; Education; Learning

### Introduction

“Command in combat requires love. A commander must genuinely love his men and win their affections in return, and when the time comes, he must use that love to cause his men to willingly risk and even sacrifice their lives to accomplish the mission” [1]. An officer's professional competence consists of cognitive competence, emotional competence and action competence. In the Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Operational Doctrine (NAFJOD), this is termed being, knowing and acting [2].

More specifically, we can say that cognitive competence is knowledge, understanding and insight based on theory and providing a basis for being able to act adequately in the profession's typical and critical professional tasks [3]. Emotional competence is related to values, attitudes and emotions and reflects the person's ethical and moral awareness of the basis for their own practice. Practitioners must know themselves and be able to understand/recognize their reactions and emotions in order to get an awareness of their own professional practice [3]. Action competence means to have a repertoire of various

alternative courses of action that can be adapted and used in different situations. Action competence can be divided into rational skills, such as problem solving and analysis; interaction skills, such as communication and collaboration; and manual skills that revolve around the practical skills involved in the profession-from fueling a Primus stove to managing complex weapons systems. The basis for establishing a well-oiled unit is mutual trust and shared mental models so that one has a certain common view of the meaning of the mission to be performed.

The Norwegian Armed Forces Basic View on Education (FPG) stipulates that all training in the Norwegian Armed Forces will contribute to the individual formative process by using the individual circumstances and needs as a starting point [4]. The socialization process of becoming an officer is intended to be understood as a continuous and holistic development of the individual. The process includes internalizing an attitude of coping and mastery of oneself as a member of the military profession. We all bring with us our explanatory models that are used to explain to ourselves and others why something happens to us. For some of us, these are clearly more optimistic and inner regulated. It constitutes a distinct difference for

both job performance and life happiness whether one believes in one's own abilities or not [5,6].

The idea behind using guidance is that it generates reflection in the supervised person who sees his or her own thinking, emotions, and actions in a new light and then becomes aware of the expanded opportunities this provides. One of the challenges for the officers at the Norwegian Military Academy (NMA) is to collect and to share information in order to create a common situational awareness. The purpose of this is to achieve an interaction with others that provides the desired efficiency in accordance with the NAFJOD [2,7]. The officer thus needs knowledge and skills in building good relations with others in their own unit. The NMA teaches guidance as a communication tool included in the leadership development process. The process of learning guidance is facilitated for the officers through participation in a five-day course in guidance at the NMA. The interpersonal relationships established in the course create an esprit de corps, that is, feelings of loyalty, enthusiasm, devotion to a group, and mutual trust. Guidance helps the officers learn about themselves and others, their own reaction patterns and those of others, and gives them an understanding of relationships [8].

### Contents of the Guidance Course

The guidance course as leadership communication at the NMA intends to strengthen the leader's cognitive skills in terms of knowledge about how to build and strengthen relationships to enable the employee's resources and expertise. In addition, the guidance course further intends to strengthen the leader's affective competencies through improved understanding of the guide's attitudes and preferences as well as training in empathic communication.

Based on the above, the course therefore rests on the following principles or basic assumptions that make up its contextual foundation: The Norwegian Armed Forces is a collective activity in which much responsibility is given to each individual, so independence and collaboration are important. The Norwegian Armed Forces fundamental values respect, responsibility, and courage are guidelines for reflection and action [9]. The Norwegian Armed Forces leaders need to communicate safely, reflectively and to be able to lead people efficiently. Through the five-day guidance course, it is desirable that the officers will be able to demonstrate basic guidance skills. These basic skills should be based on both knowledge and attitudes to the supervisor role and the leadership role. The personalized learning situation aims to create an environment and a community that is based on the creation of a common language and terminology, where trust and confidence is balanced against an adequate portion of challenges for the individual. The desired outcome of the course is that each participant acquires both the vocabulary for guidance and the practical skills and attitudes, pursued through the experience of increasing mastery and discoveries about what guidance as a form of communication may bring. The feeling of mastery or self-efficacy is important in order to increase the likelihood that officers will adopt what they are experiencing during a five-day guidance course. Wenger's theory of communities of practice underpins this perspective through the emphasis he places on the common opinion formation that takes place in a community of practice [10,11].

### The need to achieve common mental models

Common opinion formation, or shared mental models, which are a more familiar term in the Norwegian Armed Forces, poses much of a

unit's collective action repertoire and decisions [12]. Guidance as a leadership communication tool would strengthen good working relationships and help build a constructive expertise culture where common achievement is the goal. The individuals' participation and adherence to the community must be subject to an open dialogue as they create a personal and professional identity [13].

The officer depends on building strong relationships with his or her soldiers. An important point in this is to be able to "read" social situations, that is, people's reactions and actions. This understanding will then guide active decision making and subsequent action. In order to exercise empathy, one must also be familiar with one's own feelings, values, reflections and reactions, and be able to distinguish them from the feelings, values, reflections and reactions that the other person experience. Empathic communication can build good relationships and reduce conflicts because it involves the ability and willingness to see a situation from another's point of view and understand and accept how others are experiencing the situation without judging.

This should be balanced with a reflected ethical awareness and professional understanding, shared between the individuals in order to achieve a common situational awareness. The Norwegian Chief of Defence Basic View on Leadership in the Norwegian Armed Forces emphasizes that it is the responsibility of the leader to help create a realistic common situational awareness through activating all the team's resources [14]. In Goleman's terminology, this means to be a resonant leader, that is, a leader who is responsive towards the employees' emotions and influence and manage them in a positive emotional direction [15]. He claims the leader must be able to lead the people's feelings so that they will reach their goals. Being a resonant leader is for Goleman to use your emotional intelligence in both positive and negative relationships in the workplace. The leader needs to be able to adjust to meet the employees' feelings in the situation, to guide them from for instance grief and fear to commitment and solidarity. He believes this will create a good team spirit and a positive learning environment where employees work together and resolve their tasks.

Kvålshaugen [16] mentions in her article on authentic and credible leaders that it is the leaders who have self-awareness, creating optimism and faith in the future, and who have endurance, who help to create a positive impact on both the employees' performance and thus on the organization's performance. The authentic leader is considered genuine, trustworthy and consistent. He or she understands what the employees are doing, have professional expertise and spend time talking with employees. Goleman [17] further emphasizes that meeting the employee's feelings and leading the complete person so that good cohesion occurs, will help keep employees' concentration up also in times of profound changes and uncertainty. Good communication is therefore a key competence in leadership.

### Building more trust between the supervisor and the person being supervised

We are here referring to "trust" as the willingness to assume vulnerability to the actions of another group member (leader, subordinate, or peer) based on a sense of confidence in that group member [18]. Trust is necessary and essential for a leader to exercise influence in combat. Soldiers who trusted their leaders allowed them a greater degree of influence regarding the soldiers' readiness to follow directives and motivation to perform duties to complete the mission [18]. Trust is a psychological mechanism that gives the personnel a

feeling of security even in dangerous situations and the necessary willingness to accomplish what it takes to solve the mission. The leader has to earn the trust from his/her group members through actions and communication. If the soldiers trust their leader, they will provide him/ her with clear and timely information. They will not hesitate to give their own personal opinions, which can be very useful. In addition, they get used to voicing possible problems and possible solutions to them [18].

Active listening is a fundamental skill in guidance and good leadership communication. This listening takes place both nonverbally and verbally. On the surface, we are used to listening to verbal messages while we only perceive the nonverbal without actually listening actively to what precisely it says. Early in the guidance course we therefore start talking about the nonverbal signals one may notice, and how the supervisor should respond to these. Then we continue to process verbal communication, which simply consists of confirming the supervised person with words and encouraging their talking. An important part of this communication deals with checking out if you have understood the message correctly. This is done by repeating in your own words what the other person has just said. When the supervisor also summarizes and helps keep a certain progression in the conversation, this will aid the supervised persons thought process. The supervisor and leader must have a fundamental belief that the supervised person has the ability to evolve, to improve his or her performance and to join the mission. This may be expressed by encouraging the supervised person on his or her thinking and reflection around the topic being supervised upon. This can also be displayed through signaling that one also perceives the nonverbal signals being transmitted in those cases where it is appropriate.

### **Getting to know the other person**

To establish positive relationships with the group members the leader can initiate open communication and show that he or she cares. The leader can stimulate the group members to state their opinions, including showing their doubts, and allowing them to be involved in the unit's plans and actions in order to see how they best can fulfill their position. By getting to know the thoughts and feelings of the unit members it will be easier for the leader to know how each person best can participate effectively according to his or her competence and resilience.

The NAFJOD points out that it is a leader's responsibility to give the subordinates the opportunity to develop a good and mature judgment and adapt the tasks to the individual's level of maturity and competence [2]. Personnel seeking guidance should dare to probe into unknown territory through a process that is both cognitive and emotional at the same time, and where they themselves are active. Lauvås and Handal [13] writes in their book that "the characteristic feature of guidance as a pedagogical activity is the presence, the concern and the personal issues that creates the foundation for and characterizes the activity" (p.15, our translation). A supervisor needs to be interested in other people's welfare and have a desire to be a contributor to other people's learning and development. Lauvås and Handal [13] go on to state that wondering about things is central, learning to understand how the other person thinks. With this openness as an underlying basis, we create a possibility for the supervisors to experience how to become better acquainted with the person they supervise.

### **Increasing the supervisor's awareness of effective communication tools**

The communication tools taught in the guidance course vary from verbal and non-verbal active listening to problem framing and reframing. These tools have the capacity to affect the guide's words and therefore also his or her thought patterns and feelings. The course therefore introduces the participants to various types of tools and allows them to practice with these, to see the effect of varying between different approaches and question categories in order to make the guidance more effective. On one extreme, the supervisor does not need to talk at all, maybe just nod, and on the other extreme, he or she will practice verbally confronting the lack of coherence in the guide's narrative or perhaps the lack of coherence between what the body and mouth express separately [19].

### **Becoming more aware of the information they ask for**

It is especially important to sensitize leaders to which questions they naturally ask their personnel without thinking of it, and which questions they may choose to ask when they are more aware of the information they seek to collect. Based on exemplification using type theory combined with learning different ways to ask questions, the officers experience how they can influence the results of the dialogue. By respectively matching or not matching the other's type code, the participants may achieve a completely different result of the rehearsal [20].

### **Communicating more effectively as leaders and developing others by using guidance**

Being able to communicate both cognitively and emotionally with an individual and decide whether you should respond to the verbal or nonverbal message or a combination of them will contribute to the use of one's communication skills. A key element of communication skills is also about ensuring that what you talk about and spend time on is central, important and possible to generalize. This means that if we spend time talking about a single situation or event without talking about how this affects the supervised person, he or she will not become more independent and will not be able to solve problems in the future. The tool used is referred to as problem framing and deals with finding the core issue of the problem.

### **Influencing the supervised person's attitudes through the creation of new thinking and reflection**

A leader influences his or her personnel through attitudes and actions. The guidance course therefore introduces the officers to a set of attitudes that they are asked to discuss and consider. It is not a requirement that they should accept these attitudes and incorporate them in their life, but it is necessary that they become aware of the attitudes with which they encounter other people and the impact this may have. Ethics is particularly important in the military context to maintain soldiers' combat motivation.

### **Language influences our thoughts, feelings and actions, and what you choose to focus on will often be reflected in the employees' actions**

If we as supervisors and leaders focus on everything the supervised person does not manage to do, does not master and all the things he or she does wrong, then this is what we will achieve more of. If, however,

we focus on what we want, it becomes easier for the supervised person to direct his or her energy and expertise in that direction [15,21].

### Thoughts, feelings and action are inextricably linked

The main point here is that what you think of will influence your feelings, and your feelings will in turn influence your action. If you can become aware of this and possibly change your thoughts, feelings or action pattern, you can choose where you will focus your attention [15,21].

### Individuals can develop and influence their own thoughts, feelings and actions

Supervisors and leaders have as their ultimate mission to render themselves unnecessary. Therefore, having the confidence in the individual possessing the ability to influence their own actions, set goals and reach them, will contribute so that you as a leader and supervisor will work more purposefully to support and train your subordinates' independent problem solving. This will affect the supervised person's thoughts, feelings and actions and give him or her an opportunity to develop into an independent, reflective practitioner, with self-respect and experiences of mastery and coping. As mentioned before, language influences our thoughts, feelings and actions, and what you give attention will repeat it.

### One does not need to understand the cause of the problem to help solve it

Very often, the supervisor feels the need for several contextual descriptions and starts looking for a cause of a problem or situation to suggest possible solutions. There are often many different reasons why something has occurred, and it is unlikely that we as leaders and supervisors can or should try to find neither a cause nor a solution. The guide will most often know what to do if they get the time to reflect, and perhaps get a little help on the way if the solution requires any special expert competence. What is important is helping the person being supervised to think and feel of the situation in such a way that he or she achieves a sense of independence and acceptance [6,15,22,23].

### Problems, challenges and actual non-problems

As a leader, one must recognize that people feel they have problems from time to time. Here we characterize the problems as something that touches the supervised person's life in an emotional way without him or her finding their own strength which would be necessary to change the situation. Nevertheless, we as supervisors may help the supervised to find ways to handle the situation that can give a sense of self-control and mastery. Challenges may initially be perceived as problems. The important point here is that through guidance the supervised person may find a way to change his or her view of a problem and look upon it as a challenge instead. Thinking of challenges instead of problems will facilitate a stress-is-enhancing mindset instead of a stress-is debilitating mindset [24]. This positive mindset will aid the supervised person in reflecting around the issue at hand in a more positive way. Non-problems refer to the situations or issues in life that the supervised person really can live well with, but which have become a common thing to "complain" about every day. This indicates that the person does not intend to spend any time to change anything [6,19,22,23,25,26].

### Small changes create major changes

We humans are different from each other's. Some of us are skilled at seeing how a big issue or big problem can be divided into manageable sub-goals, while others find it hard to imagine what must come first and last and how we should work our way toward a solution in something one wish to achieve. For supervisors and leaders, one task is to help the supervised to get a clear picture of how he or she can proceed to approach the achievement of goals, and not at least get a picture of what activities are interrelated and influence each other [22,27].

### Methodology

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether participating in a five-day guidance course would lead to a perceived improvement of the ability to communicate better with others. This is the first-time learning effects of this course have been studied in any way. The feedback from the participants, however, has been very good from the very start in 2002. In recent years, there has been a demand that the education should be evidence based. This small survey helps provide a picture of what the participants feel that they learn and their sense of achievement.

### Participants

A total of 109 participants took part in two separate five-day courses in guidance. Of the 109 total course participants, forty-nine military personnel at the NMA served as supervisors during the two courses. Most participants complete the course as part of their education. Since there also is a demand for such training from other departments there will from time to time also participate personnel working as supervisors or managers elsewhere in the military organization. Thirteen of the participants served as supervisors in exercise 1, eighteen in exercise 5 and eighteen in exercise 9, and they filled out the questionnaire, while the rest of the participants served as supervisors in the remaining eight exercises.

### Procedure

The guidance course consists of a total of eleven exercises spread over five days. In these exercises the participants are required to practice different tools after having received a theoretical lesson about a guidance tool. The aim of these exercises is to practice using different guidance tools. A second aim is to be able to use guidance as an effective leadership communication tool and for the supervisors to build confidence and skill in their supervising role. It was decided that the data collection was to be conducted after the first, the fifth, and the ninth exercise, as this would give a relevant picture of any progress in the ability to use guidance as a leadership tool in one-to-one guidance. The last two exercises are about group counseling and not a part of the present study. A self-developed questionnaire based upon the contents of the guidance tools used in the guidance course was developed. The participants were divided into small groups, consisting of a supervisor, a supervised participant, and one or two observers. The observer's role was to observe what the supervisor did during the exercise and then to comment on what they had seen during the exercise. The participants stayed in the same groups during the course and rotated the roles in the group for each exercise.

## Materials

The questionnaire used consisted of ten questions related to the use of different guidance tools. The first question was “To what extent do you feel that guidance as a communication tool strengthens your ability to build and maintain relationships?”. The second question was “To what extent do you feel guidance as a form of communication helps strengthen your ability to communicate with others?”. The third question was “To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to building trust between the supervisor and the person being supervised?”. For these three questions, the answering scale ranged from not at all (1) to a very high extent (5). The fourth question read as follows “To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to getting to know the other person?”. Here the answering scale ranged from not at all (1) to very efficiently (5). The fifth question was “To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to broadening your perspectives of the subject of the conversation?”. The sixth question was “To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to raising your awareness of which communication tools are effective to use to give the conversation its necessary/desired content and form?”. For these two questions, the answering scale ranged from not at all (1) to a very high extent (5). The seventh question was “To what extent does

guidance as a form of communication contribute to making you aware of the information you ask for in the conversation?”. Here the answering scale again ranged from not at all (1) to very efficiently (5). The eighth and ninth question were, respectively, “To what extent do you feel that your ability to communicate in the leadership role is strengthened by using guidance as a conversation form?” and “To what extent do you feel that your potential to develop others is enhanced through the use of guidance as a form of communication?”. Again, the answering scale ranged from not at all (1) to very efficiently (5). The tenth and final question was “To what extent do you feel that guidance as a form of communication increases your ability to influence the supervised person’s attitudes by creating opportunities for new thinking and reflection?”. For this final question, the answering scale again ranged from not at all (1) to very efficiently (5).

## Results

The data from the guidance questionnaires distributed to the participants were entered into the statistical program IBM SPSS 24.0. Basic descriptive statistics were analyzed and resulted in mean values and standard deviations for each of the ten questions. Table 1 below gives an overview of the answers that the participants gave to the ten questions in the questionnaire.

| Questions   | After exercise 1 (n=13) |      | After exercise 5 (n=18) |      | After exercise 9 (n=18) |      |
|---|-------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|
|   | M                       | SD   | M                       | SD   | M                       | SD   |
| 1. To what extent do you feel that guidance as a communication tool strengthens your ability to build and maintain relationships? <sup>1</sup>  | 3.92                    | 0.76 | 4.36                    | 0.5  | 4.33                    | 0.62 |
| 2. To what extent do you feel guidance as a form of communication helps strengthen your ability to communicate with others? <sup>1</sup>  | 3.85                    | 0.8  | 4.14                    | 0.54 | 4.39                    | 0.65 |
| 3. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to building trust between the supervisor and the person being supervised? <sup>1</sup>  | 4.31                    | 0.48 | 4.43                    | 0.51 | 4.39                    | 0.75 |
| 4. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to getting to know the other person? <sup>2</sup>   | 3.92                    | 0.76 | 4.14                    | 0.54 | 4.17                    | 0.51 |
| 5. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to broadening your perspectives of the subject of the conversation? <sup>1</sup>  | 4.08                    | 0.76 | 4.14                    | 0.86 | 4.33                    | 0.78 |
| 6. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to raising your awareness of which communication tools are effective to use to give the conversation its necessary/desired content and form? <sup>1</sup> | 3.85                    | 0.69 | 4.23                    | 0.6  | 4.28                    | 0.52 |
| 7. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to making you aware of the information you ask for in the conversation? <sup>2</sup>  | 4.15                    | 0.56 | 4.08                    | 0.64 | 4.33                    | 0.52 |
| 8. To what extent do you feel that your ability to communicate in the leadership role is strengthened by using guidance as a conversation form? <sup>1</sup>  | 4.08                    | 0.64 | 4.15                    | 0.69 | 4.33                    | 0.52 |
| 9. To what extent do you feel that your potential to develop others is enhanced through the use of guidance as a form of communication? <sup>1</sup>  | 4.08                    | 1.04 | 4.15                    | 0.38 | 4.17                    | 0.75 |
| 10. To what extent do you feel that guidance as a form of communication increases your ability to influence the supervised person’s attitudes by creating opportunities for new thinking and reflection? <sup>2</sup>           | 3.77                    | 0.93 | 3.97                    | 0.76 | 4.06                    | 0.67 |

<sup>1</sup>Scale ranging from not at all (1) to a very high extent (5).  
<sup>2</sup>Scale ranging from not at all (1) to very efficiently (5).

**Table 1:** Mean values (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the answers to questions given to the supervisors after the exercises.

As can be seen from Table 1, there was a clear tendency for the participants to score higher on the questions in the later exercises

(exercise 5 and 9) as compared to exercise 1. All ten questions received higher scores in exercise 9 as compared to exercise 1. We decided not

to compare the answers given to the questions in exercises 1 and 9 with answers given to the questions in exercise 5. The reason for this was that we felt it would be more interesting to investigate the possible differences in answers from the beginning to the end, that is, from exercise 1 to exercise 9. Comparing the answers given to questions in exercise 1 with those from exercise 9, it becomes clear that the supervisors felt that guidance as a communication tool strengthened their ability to build and maintain relationships, (M=3.92) and (M=4.33), respectively. The supervisors also felt that guidance as a form of communication helped strengthen their ability to communicate with others (M=3.85) and (M=4.39) respectively from exercise 1 to 9. They further felt that guidance as a form of communication contributed to building trust between the supervisor and the person being supervised (M=4.31) and (M=4.39). However, there was a slight decrease from exercise 1 to 9 in the answers the participants gave to this question. Regarding the question as to what extent guidance as a form of communication contributes to getting to know the other person, again there was an increase between the answers given to exercise 1 and 9, (M=3.92) and (M=4.17) respectively. The participants also indicated that guidance as a form of communication contributed to broadening their perspectives of the subject of the conversation (M=4.08) and (M=4.33). In addition, the question regarding to what extent guidance as a form of

communication contributes to raising your awareness of which communication tools are effective to use to give the conversation its necessary/desired content and form, was given respectively (M=3.85) and (M=4.28). In addition, answers to the question to what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to making you aware of the information you ask for in the conversation show high scores. The scores were (M=4.15) and (M=4.33), respectively, for exercise 1 and 9. The question to what extent they feel that their ability to communicate in the leadership role is strengthened by using guidance as a conversation form also received high scores, (M=4.08) and (M=4.33) respectively. The question to what extent they feel that their potential to develop others is enhanced through the use of guidance as a form of communication received (M=4.08) and (M=4.17) respectively. Finally, for the question to what extent they felt that the guidance as a form of communication increases their ability to influence the supervised person's attitudes through the creation of space for new thinking and reflection the scores were (M=3.77) and (M=4.06) respectively.

As we were interested in whether there were any significant differences between the answers given by the respondents to exercise 1 and 9, an independent samples t-test was conducted.

| Questions  | T-value     | Significance level |
|--|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. To what extent do you feel that guidance as a communication tool strengthens your ability to build and maintain relationships?  | t(29)=-1.69 | p=0.10             |
| 2. To what extent do you feel guidance as a form of communication helps strengthen your ability to communicate with others?  | t(29)=-2.15 | p=0.04*            |
| 3. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to building trust between the supervisor and the person being supervised?  | t(29)=-0.36 | p=0.72             |
| 4. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to getting to know the other person?   | t(29)=-1.07 | p=0.30             |
| 5. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to broadening your perspectives of the subject of the conversation?  | t(29)=-0.92 | p=0.36             |
| 6. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to raising your awareness of which communication tools are effective to use to give the conversation its necessary/desired content and form? | t(29)=-2.09 | p=0.05*            |
| 7. To what extent does guidance as a form of communication contribute to making you aware of the information you ask for in the conversation   | t(29)=-0.85 | p=0.40             |
| 8. To what extent do you feel that your ability to communicate in the leadership role is strengthened by using guidance as a conversation form?  | t(29)=-1.27 | p=0.21             |
| To what extent do you feel that your potential to develop others is enhanced through the use of guidance as a form of communication?   | t(29)=-0.29 | p=0.78             |
| To what extent do you feel that guidance as a form of communication increases your ability to influence the supervised person's attitudes by creating opportunities for new thinking and reflection?               | t(29)=-1.09 | p=0.29             |
| *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.   |             |                    |

**Table 2:** T values and significance levels for the answers given by the supervisors to the ten questions asked after exercise 1 and 9.

The independent-samples t-test compared answers given to exercise 1 with answers given to exercise 9. Table 2 below reveals t-values and significance levels for the ten questions answered after exercise 1 and 9.

As can be seen from Table 2, there was a significant effect for the question (Question 2) that asked if the supervisors also felt that guidance as a form of communication helped strengthen their ability to communicate with others, t(29)=-2.15, p<0.05, with exercise 9

receiving higher scores (M=4.39, SD=0.62) than exercise 1 (M=3.85, SD=0.76). There was also yielded a significant effect for the question (Question 6) to what extent guidance as a form of communication contributes to raising your awareness of which communication tools are effective to use to give the conversation its necessary/desired content and form, t(29)=-2.09, p<0.05, with exercise 9 again receiving higher scores (M=4.28, SD=0.52) than exercise 1 (M=3.85, SD=0.69).

For the remaining other eight questions, there was no significant differences found between exercise 1 and 9. This might be due to possible ceiling effects [28], that is, that the answers given by the supervisors after exercise 1 were so high that the continued training in guidance did not have any additional effect when being asked to give answers after exercise 9.

Based on the scores given in question 2 and 6, it may be reasonable to assume that the supervisors find that their communication skills are strengthened because of their heightened awareness of which communication tools that best serves the purpose of the conversation (Question 6). Furthermore, the supervisors seemed quite sure about the effect of using guidance as a tool to build communication and that this helped strengthen their ability to communicate with others (Question 2). However, building relationships and trust in the military context requires more than good communication. In particular, the subordinates also evaluate their confidence in their leader based on professional skills since they must rely on his/her decisions when they are ordered to meet different dangerous situations [29].

Garland [30] has suggested that there exists a social desirability bias where the respondents do not want to give a socially unacceptable answer. This means that people often answer the mid-point instead of what they actually thought. Regarding our participants, this do not seem to have been the case as they answered quite high on the scale for all the ten questions both in exercise 1 and 9. On the other hand, the high scores given to all the ten questions might be a different expression of a social desirability bias. It is possible that our participants scored high because they thought that this was a social desirable answer and expected from the instructor at the course. However, this is not very likely as they were completely anonymous as they filled out the questionnaires.

It has also been discovered that Norwegians in particular tend to shy away from the extremes of rating scales [31]. This does not seem to be the case either with our participants, as the scores given to the ten questions were quite high for both exercise 1 and 9. In addition, for exercise 9, all the ten questions received even higher scores than in exercise 1, indicating that there was an effect of the course, and contradicting the claim that Norwegians tend to avoid the extremes of rating scales.

Another possible explanation for our results is that the answers given by the supervisors might have been affected by a strong feeling of perceived self-efficacy. This may have occurred since they gave their answers directly after having completed either exercise 1 or 9. One of the purposes of the guidance course is to stimulate the participants' feelings of self-efficacy, and it is therefore possible that they felt very confident when giving their answers.

Furthermore, Elstad [32] suggests that if respondents are left to themselves, they will risks losing their focus. Our participants filled out the questionnaires directly after exercise 1 and 9 while being in the proximity of the rest of their group. This might have contributed to keeping a focus upon fulfilling the task of filling out the questionnaire. Vaitl et al. [33] argue that general cognitive impairment can affect an individual's ability to focus. This means that our respondents may have suffered from mental fatigue during the course and the different exercises. This may have affected how they answered the ten questions in the questionnaire. Again, looking at the answers given to both exercise 1 and 9, this does not seem to be a plausible explanation for the high scores given to the ten questions in both exercises. We agree

that the course is mentally demanding for our participants, but we think that they mentally fit enough to fill out the questionnaires.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether participating in a five-day guidance course would lead to a perceived improvement of the ability to communicate with others. A self-developed questionnaire measuring different aspects of guidance was used at three different points in time during the guidance course. Analyzes of the answers given to the questionnaire was conducted for the first and ninth exercise of the course. The purpose of the questionnaire was to measure any improvement in the supervisors' ability to communicate better with others. Several interesting results emerged from the data analyses. It was found that the supervisors felt that they became better at communicating with others. They also perceived that they became better at building and maintaining relationships. An interesting finding was that there was a slight decrease in the perceived ability to build trust between the supervisor and the person being supervised. They also felt that they got to know the other person better. Another finding was that the supervisors felt that they increased their awareness of which communication tools that were effective to use to give the conversation its necessary/desired content and form. A further interesting finding was that the supervisors also felt that they became more aware of the information they asked for in the conversation, and that they also felt that they were able to communicate more effectively as leaders. Also, the ability to develop others was perceived to be enhanced using guidance. Finally, the supervisor's perceived ability to influence the supervised person's attitudes through the creation of new thinking and reflection was also found to increase. A final conclusion is that the results from the present study suggest that practicing guidance as a leadership communication tool can be of good help in communicating efficiently with employees in the military context. It needs to be said that the results in this study is based on the participants' perceptions, and does not need to indicate a true increase in effectiveness in leadership communication. Therefore, more research on this topic is needed, as the number of participants was quite low in the present study. It may also be important to understand why the trust actually decreases between the supervisor and the supervised individual if this phenomenon reappears. Another important aspect to investigate is whether the participants continue to use guidance as a communication and leadership tool in their daily work after the course is ended, and for how long.

As only subjective measurements were used in the present study it is difficult to know, what the results would have been if objective measures had been used instead. For instance, we could have used the observations made by the observers taking part in the exercises. In addition, the Hawthorne factor could also be a possible explanation for the differences in results from exercise 1 to exercise 9 [34]. Just the fact that the participants in the study were given more attention may have inflated the differences that were found. The basis for this is that the data showed consistent results with strong trends indicating improvement from exercise 1 to 9. As the number of participants in the study was quite low, external validity is severely hampered, indicating that more research with a larger number of participants will have to be conducted in the future. However, more research is thus needed regarding whether guidance as a tool for leadership communication for military leaders is effective before any conclusive conclusions can be drawn.

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