

## LACE 2016 - Pozzuoli - Italian Air Force Academy

It's hard for me to explain how many feelings this great experience gave to me. Before taking part in LACE 2016, I thought about it as one of the common experiences you can have while you are studying at university, simply an opportunity to get some work 's skills and nothing more ; but I was wrong.

Since the first days I felt so lucky to be a member of this module but only in the end I realized that this experience was something unique. I really appreciated the whole module's framework and his characteristic elements : several activities , presence of different countries , constant officers' support.

During the week , each day was divided in two main parts : lesson's part and activity's part.

In the first part , someone of the officers had a lesson about several topics as " Chaos theory " , " Complexity theory " , " Strategic leadership " , " Dynamics of small and large groups " , etc.

All the lessons were very important to enrich my knowledge and they gave me different points of view about work's organization , historical events , modern facts and complex systems' dynamics in general ; through these lessons , I managed to understand that is extremely important the analysis and the modeling of complex systems in order to better comprehend the so complex processes of human activities and to make some predictions about the possible evolutions of a complex system.

In the second part , all the module's members were usually divided in groups and the officers assigned us a task to reach. Before each activity , there was a " BRIEFING-PHASE" during which the officers explained us all the aspects of the activity such as rules , instructions and activity's goal. Then , after the activity , there was a " DEBRIEFING-PHASE " to discuss about the participants' impressions , the development of the activity and to analyse all the mistakes that had been made during the activity. I think the second phase was critical because that was the " learning-phase " : in fact , during this phase we were able to think about what we had done before , we could get an increased knowledge of ourselves and we also managed to find some connections between the practical activity and the theoretical lessons.

We can say that these two main parts weren't separated but they were strictly connected through an hidden bond that we were able to see only after the practical activity . The " learning-by-doing method " deals with this hidden bond and it tries to create a link between what we do and what we remember : if we want to remember a concept , the best thing is to put this concept in a real experience , a real activity , otherwise , if we only study this concept with a classical approach , we will easily forget this concept.

I think this is the best educational approach to internalize theories and abstract concepts , and i think that this method should be more applied in both civilian and military environments because in my opinion they lack practicality and exaggerate in abstractness at the moment.

So now, after this incredible week , i can analyse better which were this module's goals and what i learnt from this great experience ; first of all , i think i improved my ability to stay with other people , to share my opinions and to analyse every kind of situation through several points of view , without prejudices . I also managed to broaden my mind staying among different countries' people , accepting differences and trying to create a connection with all the module's participants ; i created strong bonds with some of them and i'm sure we will keep in touch and we'll keep on sharing our thoughts and opinions also in the future.

As regards my work's skills , this module gave me a lot of tools that will be extremely useful for me in the future , especially because they will help me to understand a continuously changing world like this is and they will give me an advantage on my competitors if i 'll be able to use them in the right way , correctly modeling the environment i'll work in and making right predictions about the future developments .

I think the whole module's goal was to give us a method , not a complete understanding of what surrounds us. Human processes are too complex to be treated with the classical scientific approaches but it's useful to study them , searching for some parameters that can help us to create approximate models of real processes. It is also important to remember that world's processes are all strictly connected , so we don't have to stay focused on a " parallel-systems " approach , where every system develops independently from the others, but we have to use a " big picture " approach , where every system is able to influence the others , where everything is interconnected.

In conclusion , i can say that the module exceeded my expectations and it gave me a great opportunity of personal growth that i won't forget for all my life.

I'm really grateful to the whole organizing team of the Italian Air Force Academy and especially to the Lt. Col. Squeglia for the support , the advice and the pleasant conversations during the whole week.

## Unforgettable Week

The last week , I have been involved in this unforgettable experience in the Italian Air Force Academy. I never imagined that this experience would have been so intense, unique and full of feelings.

When I heard that I would be for one week in a place full of young military from each part of the Europe to attend a course in Leadership Agility and Complex Environment , I did not know what to expect. I did not know exactly what were goals of this course and as civil I never had the possibility to interact and live with military, but all I have experienced I will never forget it, thanks to all the guys that I have known and thanks to all the supervisors mostly T.Col. Squeglia.

All the activities were really interesting and stimulating. The lessons gave me a lot of new knowledge about leadership, leader characteristics, the necessity to change (if necessary) and to adapt, furthermore they have opened my mind in order to better understand not only the group's complexity but also gave me advice and guidelines to apply in each situation of my life. The group's activities have been a useful simulation to understand how to cooperate, how to cope with a problem and mostly they showed us how is difficult for a leader to don't lose the group's control to lead it and to accomplish the task and for a follower to find a role in his group in order to achieve the goal.

As we have seen during the activities it is fundamental for a leader to see everything from all the points of view in order to control periodically not only the task's achievement but also the team's status and the emotions and sensations of each group member. What I have said could seem very easy but during the task, in order to accomplish it, the leader could lose the right perception of the situation. Furthermore, what I have really appreciated so far were the debriefings that has been followed each activity; during the debriefing, thanks to the supervisors, we started to see everything clearly because during the activity, in order to accomplish the task in the shorter time, everyone has stopped to work as a team and started to work as a individual. The supervisors explained to us, thanks to their experiences, what didn't work in fact they knew the group's dynamic ad showed us all the problem in each activity.

Lastly the debriefing usefulness was also that gave us the possibility to share our emotions and impressions, then it has been a moment in which everyone has been involved in a conversation that helped us to increase our knowledge and also the understanding in a group.

Another interesting aspect has been the academy life. For a civil the military world is almost a mystery; all of us know what they are but we don't know how they became them. Having the opportunity to stay for a week in the Italy Air Force Academy give me the possibility to see their education, their tight and tough rules, sometimes , personally, exaggerated. Anyway the possibility to talk and to know also the military education abroad, thanks to the military from each part of the Europe gave me a lot of information and knowledge that I never imagined to earn.

Finally, the deal with different cultures was very educational. The ability to share every single

moment of the day and especially the views during group activities has opened my eyes about the difficulties that sometimes there can be when you have to cooperate to accomplish the task.

In conclusion, this experience was very formative. I would recommend it to any other civil student because it represents a unique opportunity for two reasons. The first is undoubtedly linked to the possibility to engage in group activities through which to understand the dynamics of a group and how to achieve the goal not only with people of your nationality but also with people from different cultures. The second is related to the deepening of the theme, rarely addressed in traditional degree courses such as precisely Leadership Agility and Complex Environment.

## A Week of Complexity

For one week the Accademia Aeronautica opened its doors to a small group of international cadets and Italian, civilian university students, to host the annual leadership course. This year the topic of the course was complexity.



I learned a lot. Not what I expected to learn, but things I do not think I could have learned in a classroom. Now, what I expected to learn was some theory about complexity and some leadership models, which we would then apply during some practical exercises simulating a complex environment. What I actually learned was not as academic and staged but instead more real and authentic – I gained some real experience with teamwork in a multinational environment. I learned how to work in an international setting and how hampering assumptions are. I already learned not to make assumptions from my education at home, but in a fairly

homogenous group the consequences of assumptions are far smaller, than in the setting we were in this previous week. I also really learned the value of direction. In the situations I am normally in, and especially in my class of cadets, where we are only four, I have not found direction as necessary, as I did this week. So I really saw a true value to some of the things I had already learned from home and I saw things from whole new perspective in this new, complex environment.



All in all I did not learn a lot of new things as I might have had expected, but the entire setting made me re-learn some things I already knew, and put some previous learning into a new perspective – an international perspective – which is of course very relevant for any cadet, as international operations are a huge part of our jobs.

## LACE Summary Document

Plt Off Thomas-Peter (UK)

This week has provided me with a much deeper insight into what it is like to work in a multinational environment and a far more detailed understanding of how to deal with the problems this creates. It also cemented leadership theory and skills that I had a sound knowledge of already thanks largely to the coaching I had received previously at RAF Cranwell. Furthermore, this week has clearly shown me that different nations have very differing approaches to teaching leadership to its potential officers with both advantages and disadvantages. Lastly this week has highlighted to me my own shortcomings and areas where I need to improve as a young officer to become successful in my career.

The activities undertaken by the participants during the week were wide ranging and varied with a good balance between classroom based work and hands on tasks both indoors and outdoors. The sailing on the first day was a particular highlight and really helped to bring a team spirit into a group of strangers. The lectures throughout the week were informative and filled with interesting theory and valid arguments however it was sometimes difficult to see how the subject matter linked to leadership and management as the title of the course suggests. We learned a great deal on what a complex system is but there was seemingly a lack of information on how to lead and manage in these situations. From these lectures I learned, in great detail, the structures and processes involved with complex systems and were given some practical examples of how these systems can be dealt with in the real world. For my own development it will be useful to get some experience dealing with complex systems in my role within the RAF.

There was good use of group activities throughout the week from the very beginning. This was very useful in breaking the ice between members of the group and encouraged participants from each of the nations and backgrounds to interact with each other creating a much more positive group dynamic. I really enjoyed the irregular team building activities such as cooking as it took a large majority of the participants, including myself, out of their comfort zones, forcing us to work as a unit to produce the final product. During this task I realised how difficult it can be to complete a task when you have issues such as a language barrier and different names for items to contend with. In the feedback session that followed the cooking activity the observers and participants identified the areas where we, as a group, struggled, such as dealing with a language barrier. The observing officers also offered great advice on how to deal with these issues in future. From this activity I can take away valuable lessons in overcoming issues in a pressured environment. These lessons and the advice I received will be extremely useful in my role in the future.

The group work within the classroom was also largely effective at bringing a team together which was demonstrated when it came to writing a document as a group and making a presentation to be delivered on the final day. This activity saw all participants make contributions to the final outcome combining their knowledge and ideas with all team members comfortable putting forward suggestions. During this activity I learned the importance of encouraging communication between all members of a team as everyone had good ideas to put forward to the work. I also saw the importance of playing to your strengths within a team, for example, the best English speaker wrote the paper in order to give it the best structure and a more confident member of the group delivered the presentation. I also gained great experience working in a joint environment during this task which is an environment I had not been prior to this week.

During the week the group undertook a number of small exercises in order to put some of the theory that had been covered during the lectures into practice. I feel this is where the lack of links to leadership during the lectures was largely uncovered. Starting with 'The Bridge' exercise on Wednesday it quickly became clear that there was a very large gap between the participants in terms of leadership experience and ability. This created a number of issues when it came to completing the task as team members began to clash due to their differences in approach. These issues were further compounded by the style of coaching that took place during the exercise which was very standoffish. This allowed the leader of the task to continue to go down the wrong path and demonstrating leadership qualities that are not considered strong leadership traits. I feel this style of coaching did nothing to develop the individual as a leader and only served to degrade their confidence. In future I feel it would be far more beneficial for the observing officers to intervene and suggest the leader and the team expand their ideas and implement new methods of completing a task. This encourages a leader to develop their thinking further and take on ideas from the team when they are unsure of how to complete a task. The consequences of the ineffectiveness of the coaching delivered during this task was clearly visible when the rules of the task were willingly broken by team members in order to gain a result.

The feedback session that followed this exercise was informative and was successful at highlighting areas where the task broke down and also where the leader could have done things differently. The members of each team were encouraged to provide their feedback to the respective leaders and give them areas to work on in future.

This exercise also highlighted areas personally that I will have to develop as a junior officer. I became very frustrated during the task when it became clear I had a very different idea of what leadership and leadership coaching looks like compared to others. In future I must remember that my view is not necessarily the right view for the situation and that rather than become frustrated I would be a more effective team member and leader if I offered my opinions in a constructive and tactful way. I will be involved with multinational environments frequently throughout my career and these were valuable lessons to learn now to aid my development.

The 'Spider Web' activity the following morning provided a great opportunity for all members of the group to put into practice the things they had learned the previous day. This created a much more mindful approach to the task when compared with the day before and the leadership was largely much more successful and enjoyable for those involved. The chance to act on the leadership feedback that had been given the previous evening gave me the chance to develop myself as a follower by taking a less prominent role within the team. By taking on more of a follower role I was able to interact with other team members more which helped to develop my ability to communicate with the other participants from each of the different nations.

In summary I feel this week has provided me with a great deal of information to take away and think about in regards to complex situations and has given me invaluable experience working with young officers from different nations. It also provided a rare opportunity to socialise with people from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures and I will remember these experiences very fondly. Learning from each of the young officers and officer cadets from the different nations has given me a much greater understanding of their approaches to leadership and this knowledge will serve me greatly when I encounter personnel from these nations in the future when working in a joint environment.





## Evaluation Leadership and agility in complex environments

In this article, I will evaluate the week of the *Leadership and agility in complex environments* module. Certain goals and learning outcomes were trained and taught to us. I will discuss these subjects one by one with my opinion.

### Goals:

At the beginning of this module, several goals were set:

- Enhance a common understanding of essential functions and workings of leadership and ethics.
- Interacting with a broader social context.
- Fostering self-development in young officers.

The first goal has been spoken about in the beginning of this course. It consisted of dealing with leadership in complex environments and the ethics. Getting an understanding of this has been a great help in dealing with future problems during exercises. Because of the presence of civilian participants, it can maybe be referred to the civilian environments to get an idea of how these different organizations work. The second bullet was very important for me. It was a great experience to experience the different way of thinking and doing by other cultures. Also knowing the language barriers before going on a mission is for great use. The third bullet which consists of self-development, has been implemented in a great way. By doing exercises, group projects and individual projects, the self-development was strongly developed in my opinion. Also self-assessment was a great way to learn from the mistakes you made. Over all, the goals are formulated and implemented in a great way.

### Learning outcomes:

In this module, there were also three outcomes formulated. I will discuss these outcomes one by one:

- Knowledge: The complexity theory has been a great addition to my knowledge. The presentation was very good. Also the interactivity between the class has been great. The chaos theory has only been touched and not fully discussed. Furthermore, the focus on small group dynamics and big group dynamics were taught well. Only the small group dynamics could be practiced in real life during this course. Also the cognitive models were very clear. I only think this has been touched and not fully taught to us. I find this subject very interesting to go in to details furthermore.  
What could be better was the presentation of transformational leadership. It was very hard to follow and there was little information about the actual transformational leadership. This can be an improvement for next year.
- Skills: The skills we got learned, in relationship with understanding organizations have been very good. I thought this was the most interesting part of the course. Also, which has been mentioned in the point above, the chaos theory has only been touched. I really find this useful in applying in our military organization. Also the skills we applied, such as writing a document, was a great way to deal with a complex or a chaotic environment in which the leader needs to make rapid decisions and compromises. This comes in very handy in every organization these days. And I don't only mean in the military but also in the civilian organizations.
- Competences: Competence training has been a great addition to this course. Giving the students the freedom to be a leader or to do a certain task, are great ways to know yourself, but also training and improving your competences. During the course, I have seen hidden strengths occurring within our group. I was no longer thinking about barriers (such as language) but in possibilities and experiences. Also knowing my place within different cultures has been a great addition to my competences and confidence. Teamwork skills were

getting better and better. Also understanding the language barrier caused some boundaries, but besides that, it has also proven to be informative. Knowing how this works now, I can take this experience with me in future missions with a lot of cultural differences.

Overall, I think this was a very informative module in which I have learned a lot. Dealing with cultural differences, training my leadership skills, discovering hidden strengths within a diverse group and dealing with complexity were very interesting. I think this also needs to be included in the next courses.