

TRANSFER OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES: THEORIES, MECHANISMS AND BARRIERS

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the article is to analyze the possibilities of transferring leadership competencies developed in the military environment to civilian organizations.

Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on a critical review of the literature in the field of leadership theory, military leadership, competency transfer, and organizational adaptation. The article identifies key competencies developed in the military context, including decision-making under pressure, crisis management, psychological resilience, mission orientation, and effective communication. Particular attention was devoted to mechanisms facilitating competency transfer as well as structural, organizational, and personal barriers limiting their adaptation in the civilian environment.

Fidings: The analysis indicates that leadership competencies developed in the military possess significant transfer potential, especially in organizations operating under conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). At the same time, the transfer process does not occur automatically and requires both the adaptive abilities of the individual and appropriate organizational support mechanisms, such as mentoring, onboarding programs, and competency validation systems.

Originality/value: The article contributes to the literature by integrating perspectives from leadership research, military studies, and learning transfer theory within a coherent analytical model. The results of the analysis indicate that the effective utilization of the leadership competencies of former military leaders may strengthen organizational resilience, improve crisis response capabilities, and support the development of adaptive leadership in civilian organizations.

Keywords: military leadership, leadership competencies, competency transfer, civilian organizations, psychological resilience, crisis management.

1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations operate under conditions of high volatility, uncertainty, and complexity, described in the literature as the VUCA environment. In such realities, leadership becomes one of the key factors determining organizational effectiveness. As Yukl (2008) indicates, leadership effectiveness in a dynamic environment depends primarily on leaders' ability to adapt, make decisions under

conditions of incomplete information, and mobilize teams around clearly defined goals. Particular interest among researchers is aroused by military leadership, which develops under extreme conditions – including time pressure, incomplete information, and responsibility for the lives of subordinates. The military environment constitutes a unique context for the development of leadership competencies, because it accumulates factors rarely occurring simultaneously in civilian organizations. Research on leadership in extreme contexts indicates that military leaders develop particular adaptive abilities, psychological resilience, and the ability to operate in crisis situations.

In recent years, growing interest has been observed in the transfer of leadership competencies from the military to the civilian sector. This results both from the processes of demobilization and professional reintegration of soldiers, as well as from the growing organizational demand for leaders capable of managing crisis and change. At the same time, the literature indicates that this process is not fully recognized, and existing studies are fragmentary in nature.

This article contributes to the literature by integrating leadership theory, transfer-of-training research, and military studies into a coherent analytical framework. The aim of the article is:

- to present the theoretical foundations of military leadership,
- to identify key leadership competencies,
- to analyze the mechanisms of their transfer to civilian organizations,
- to identify the barriers of this process.

Despite the growing body of research on military leadership and leadership development, systematic analyses that integrate leadership competencies, transfer mechanisms, and contextual barriers remain scarce.

As for the methodological approach used in this study, it adopts a conceptual research design based on a critical literature review. The review integrates contributions from leadership theory, military leadership, transfer of learning, and professional adaptation. The objective was to identify key leadership competencies developed in military environments, mechanisms supporting their transfer to civilian organizations, and barriers limiting transfer effectiveness. The analysis focused on peer-reviewed literature and foundational theoretical works commonly cited in the fields of leadership and organizational studies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Leadership in the Military – Definition and Specificity

Over the last decades, many definitions of leadership have been proposed. One of them, proposed by Bass (1990), is particularly noteworthy because it empha-

sizes the role of the leader's personality: leadership is a combination of skills and character traits that allow the leader to influence other people and induce them to act effectively in accordance with expectations. Indeed, the role of bonds and relationships between the leader and group members is crucial, because these elements reflect the leader's personality. Another common understanding of leadership is perceiving it as the ability to influence the actions of others, being a kind of "social leverage" that enables the initiation of desired and effective action. Leadership consists in creating in employees such emotions that determine their readiness to cooperate, create, and achieve common goals, tasks, and missions – regardless of the type of authority in the organization or the individual reasons of employees for participation (Yukl, 2008).

On the one hand, leadership may be defined as a process in which a person seeks to exert influence on a group in order to achieve common goals. On the other hand, it may be perceived from the perspective of the "Trait Leadership" concept. Instead of the individual traits or skills of the leader, the process approach to leadership is based on the type of activity occurring between the manager/leader and his or her subordinates (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). In this approach, managerial activities aim to coordinate and direct work in the group through establishing a hierarchy of dependencies, defining the structure of relationships, and demonstrating interest in the problems of team members. Thus, leadership includes building relationships between people based on the structure of power. However, other researchers emphasize that leadership should be understood as creating the meaning and essence of cooperation, which are key to understanding the reasons for undertaking all actions. There is also a characterological approach, according to which the leader should demonstrate specific character traits and possess skills justifying his or her position as a superior (Jago, 1982; Hughes et al., 2006, 7–9; Drath & Palus, 1994; Bass, 1990).

Leadership should be understood as a complex process including relational, situational, and behavioral aspects of cooperation between the leader and subordinates, within which personality traits and the style of action of the superior are of key importance. In this sense, it is emphasized that the leader is responsible both for the current functioning of the organization and for its long-term development, because his or her qualifications, values, and manner of influence determine the level of engagement, motivation, and pro-organizational behaviors of employees (Drewniak, 2017). Leadership in the classical sense is defined as a process of influencing others in order to achieve common goals (Burns, 1978; Yukl, 2013). However, the literature emphasizes that it is a dynamic process, encompassing both social relationships and the situational context. In Yukl's approach, leadership includes not only interpersonal influence, but also the ability to shape vision, structures, and organizational processes. Leadership is defined as the ability to

influence others in such a way that they are willing to pursue intended goals; this includes enthusiasm, integrity, cognitive abilities, as well as the capacity to communicate a vision and engage subordinates in its implementation. At the same time, the nature of leadership is determined by the organizational context: its structure, power arrangements, operating conditions, and the competencies and expectations of employees. Leadership style is likewise associated with specific expectations of subordinates – for example, a situational style fosters expectations of autonomy, whereas an autocratic style generates expectations for clear instructions, alongside a reluctance toward excessive control. As a result, leadership appears as a dynamic and contextual process requiring continuous adaptation of a leader's behavior to changing organizational circumstances and the individual needs of the team (Drewniak et al., 2020).

In the military context, this definition undergoes significant extension. Military leadership is inseparably connected with the formal command system and responsibility for mission accomplishment under conditions of high risk. According to U.S. Army doctrine, it includes three key elements: providing purpose, direction, and motivation. This means that the military leader not only organizes activities, but also gives them meaning and maintains team morale. As Huntington (1957) indicates, the military constitutes a specific type of professional organization in which the following dominate:

- strong hierarchy,
- clarity of roles,
- high level of formalization,
- subordination of the individual to the collective goal.

Leadership in military organizations constitutes one of the key determinants of the effectiveness of armed forces operations, as well as a condition for their survival and combat capability. As numerous NATO military studies and national doctrines indicate, the leadership competencies of commanders are the foundation for maintaining morale, discipline, and combat readiness. Their historical significance is confirmed by examples in which the “human factor” determined the outcome of armed conflicts, regardless of the technological or numerical advantage of the opponent (Zielichowski & Kaliciak, 2020). In accordance with NATO doctrines (including AJP-01(E)) as well as national military regulations, leadership in the military is understood as a commander's ability to influence subordinates in order to accomplish tasks and to shape their attitudes, motivation, and behaviors necessary for operating under conditions of threat and uncertainty. Leadership qualities identified across various NATO armed forces – such as courage, a strong value system, energy, creativity, discipline, team-building ability, and concern for soldiers – are essentially similar, although expressed in different terminology (NATO, 2017). Military leadership is inseparably linked with

maintaining morale as one of the principles of conducting military operations. Similarly, the Polish Land Forces Regulations classify the “human factor” – including leadership, morale, initiative, and creativity – as one of the fundamental principles of combat (Regulamin 2007: 19–20; Drumowicz, 2012, 59).

The specificity of military leadership also results from functioning in so-called extreme contexts (Hannah, Uhl-Bien & Avolio, 2009). These mean situations in which:

- decisions are made under time pressure,
- access to information is limited,
- the consequences of errors may be irreversible.

Under such conditions, leadership assumes a more direct, decisive, and situational character. At the same time, as Wong emphasizes, contemporary military leadership is evolving toward greater adaptability and decentralization of decisions, which brings it closer to leadership models used in civilian organizations. Ozlen and Zukic (2013) conceptualize military leadership as a process of interaction between the leader and subordinates, based on authority, responsibility, and the chain of command, identified as the “most important dimensions” of leadership. The aim of military leadership understood in this way is to increase productivity and effectiveness by ensuring security. This definition is practical and functional, as it emphasizes outcomes (effectiveness, motivation), but does not focus on the deeper structure of command processes (Ozlen & Zukic, 2013). Military leadership should be an activity grounded in vision, commitment, organizational culture, and innovation. In this context, the role of social and pro-innovation factors is highlighted, particularly among “talented professional soldiers” (Zielińska, 2021).

At the same time, military leadership requires the ability to gain followers, exert influence, and mobilize people to achieve objectives (Łydka, 2017). Its foundation lies in the leader’s potential – predispositions and skills continuously developed through education and practice. Łydka (2017) emphasizes the dualism of leadership: formal leadership (resulting from command) and informal leadership (resulting from personal traits). He clearly distinguishes between command and leadership, indicating that the latter is a “supporting factor for command” and arises from interpersonal relationships and trust (Łydka, 2017). Military leadership constitutes a key element in building organizational capabilities in experiential learning, and its nature stems directly from the operational character of military organizations. Leadership is defined through the active involvement of commanders, who provide direction to learning processes, establish priorities, and allocate the resources necessary to implement lessons learned (Lis, 2012).

2.2. Typical Features of Military Leadership

Mission Orientation

One of the fundamental features of military leadership is absolute orientation toward mission accomplishment. This is understood as a clearly defined, superior operational objective that gives meaning to all organizational activities. As Snider (2002) points out, in military organizations the mission serves as a key reference point around which structures, decision-making processes, and value systems are organized. In operational situations, the mission is not merely a plan of action, but rather a normative imperative that determines how responsibility, risk, and decision-making priorities are perceived. Mission orientation requires from the leader the ability to make decisions under conditions of incomplete information, time pressure, and a high level of uncertainty. Research on military leadership indicates that an effective commander must be prepared to subordinate immediate individual interests to long-term strategic objectives, often at the cost of psychological comfort or popularity among subordinates (Hannah et al., 2009). In this sense, mission orientation distinguishes military leadership from many civilian models, in which goals are often negotiated, redefined, or balanced against the interests of stakeholders. An important element of mission orientation is also the concept of mission command. It assumes delegation of responsibility and decision-making autonomy to lower levels while maintaining complete clarity regarding the commander's intent and the expected end state (U.S. Army Doctrine Publication, ADP 6-0). Such a model fosters the development of independence, initiative, and adaptability among subordinates, which is crucial in a dynamic and unpredictable operational environment. The literature emphasizes that mission command is increasingly applied beyond the military, including in project management, high-risk organizations, and teams operating under crisis conditions (Nissen, 2014). Mission orientation is also associated with a concept that assumes the delegation of responsibility while maintaining clarity of purpose. Such a model supports the development of subordinates' autonomy and initiative.

Discipline and Hierarchy

The structure of military organizations has a strongly hierarchical and formalized character, which makes it similar to the mechanistic model of organization described by Mintzberg (1983). Hierarchy performs a key coordination and decision-making function in this context, enabling:

- rapid flow of orders,
- clear assignment of responsibility,

- limitation of decision-making chaos.

In operational conditions, where delays in decision-making may have critical consequences, such a structure significantly reduces the risk of decision-making chaos. Discipline in military leadership, however, is not reduced solely to unreflective obedience. Contemporary approaches emphasize its normative and cultural function, consisting in the internalization of rules of conduct and professional standards (Soeters, Winslow & Weibull, 2003). Discipline thus serves as a mechanism that stabilizes team behavior, particularly in crisis situations, when stress and uncertainty may lead to the disorganization of activities. At the same time, the management literature indicates that excessive rigidity in hierarchical structures may limit innovation, organizational learning, and adaptability (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). This constitutes a significant challenge when attempting to transfer military models to civilian organizations, especially in knowledge- and creativity-based sectors.

In response to these tensions, modern armed forces are increasingly seeking a balance between formal hierarchy and elements of participatory and team-based leadership, bringing them closer to hybrid organizational models. Discipline fulfills a stabilizing function—particularly in crisis situations. At the same time, contemporary research indicates that excessive rigidity may limit innovation, which poses a challenge for its transfer to civilian organizations.

Psychological Resilience

One of the key competencies of military leaders is psychological resilience, understood as the ability to maintain operational effectiveness despite long-term stress, threat, and pressure of responsibility. Bartone (2006) defines psychological resilience as a construct composed of three fundamental components:

- commitment,
- sense of control, and
- the perception of challenges as opportunities for growth.

Psychological resilience is developed through exposure to difficult conditions and a training system based on simulations and experience. In the context of military command, this trait is of particular importance, as a leader often operates under conditions of constant tension and high costs of erroneous decisions. Empirical studies show that psychological resilience correlates positively with leadership effectiveness, the ability to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, and maintaining team morale (Bartone, Kelly & Matthews, 2013). A leader with high psychological resilience performs a stabilizing function for subordinates, serving as both an emotional and cognitive reference point in extreme situations.

However, this resilience is not solely an innate trait, but is largely developed through systematic training, exposure to difficult situations, and learning from experience. Military training systems employ simulations, situational exercises, and stress training to prepare future leaders to operate under conditions of psychological overload (Kolditz, 2007). Increasingly, it is emphasized that these competencies also have a high transfer value to civilian organizations, particularly in high-risk sectors such as healthcare, energy, or crisis management.

Values and the Ethos of Service

Military leadership possesses a strong axiological foundation that distinguishes it from many pragmatic concepts of civilian leadership. As emphasized by Snider and Watkins (2002), the ethos of the army is based on values such as:

- loyalty,
- honor,
- responsibility,
- public service.

These values perform a regulatory and integrative function, strengthening team cohesion and trust in the leader. These values are not merely declarative in nature, but are systematically reinforced through military education, institutional rituals, and patterns of leaders' behavior. The ethos of service performs a regulatory function by defining the boundaries of acceptable actions and constituting a point of reference in ethically ambiguous situations. The literature indicates that military leaders are evaluated not only through the prism of operational effectiveness, but also through the consistency of their actions with institutional values (Wong & Gerrass, 2015). Consistency between the leader's declared and actual behaviors strengthens trust, team identification, and the sense of meaning associated with undertaken actions.

Values and the ethos of service also perform an important integrative function, supporting the development of a strong collective identity and readiness to make sacrifices for the common good (Ciulla, 2014). Research on normative leadership indicates that organizations with a strong axiological foundation demonstrate greater internal cohesion and resilience to crises (Snider & Watkins, 2002). For this reason, the military ethos increasingly serves as an inspiration for concepts of values-based leadership in the public sector and non-profit organizations. Military leadership can be analysed as a layered construct in which values and ethos constitute the normative foundation, psychological resilience enables sustained performance under stress, discipline and hierarchy provide structural coordination, and mission orientation integrates all elements toward strategic purpose (see Figure 1).

As shown in Figure 1, military leadership is grounded in a strong axiological foundation. Psychological resilience constitutes a critical enabling layer of military leadership, allowing leaders to operate effectively under extreme striness. Disciple and hierarchy provide the formal coordination mechanisms that translate leadership intent into collective action. Mission orientation integrates all underlying layers and gives direction and purpose to military leadership. This configuration highlights why military leadership remains effective in extreme and uncertain contexts and why its direct transfer to civilian organizations requires careful contextual adaptation.

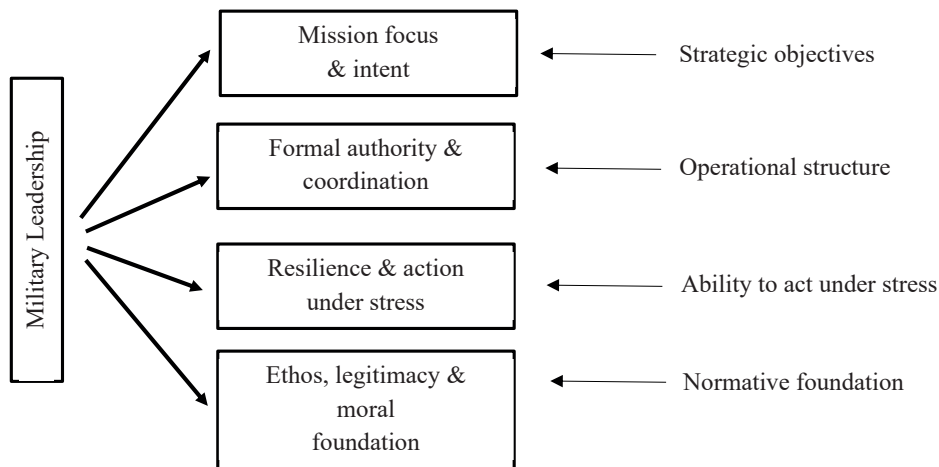


Figure 1. A layered model of military leadership

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the literature

2.3. Key Leadership Competencies in the Military

Leadership competencies are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes enabling effective operation in complex and changing conditions (Day, 2000). In contrast to approaches focused exclusively on the personality traits of the leader, the competency perspective emphasizes the possibility of developing leadership through experience, learning, and reflection on practice. In the military environment, leadership competencies have a particularly integrated character because they simultaneously include cognitive, emotional, social, and normative dimensions. The specificity of the military context means that these competencies are developed primarily through operational experience, simulation-based training, and exposure to extreme situations in which decision-making errors may lead to serious consequences (Kolditz, 2007). As a result, military leadership constitutes an example of leadership “embodied in action,” in which formal knowledge, intuition, and situational judgment are inseparably connected.

Decision-Making Competencies

One of the key leadership competencies in the military is decision-making competency, particularly important under conditions of time pressure, uncertainty, and information overload. Klein (1998) in his Recognition-Primed Decision Model (RPD), Klein describes the process of decision-making in naturalistic conditions as a process of pattern recognition rather than rational analysis of all available alternatives. In this approach, experience plays a key role because it enables rapid identification of analogies to previous situations and assessment of the potential consequences of actions.

Military leaders use accumulated operational experience to make intuitive decisions, which, however, are not impulsive in nature but are rooted in deep situational knowledge and tacit knowledge. Research indicates that under extreme conditions expert intuition may be more effective than formalized analytical models, which require time and stable decision-making conditions (Kahneman & Klein, 2009). Decision-making competencies therefore include not only the ability to choose a course of action, but also the ability to rapidly assess risk, assume responsibility for consequences, and demonstrate readiness to modify decisions in a dynamically changing environment. These competencies are crucial under conditions of uncertainty and limited time.

Crisis Management

Crisis management constitutes another key area of leadership competencies in the military. As emphasized by Boin (2005), crisis is characterized by suddenness, a high level of uncertainty, time pressure, and the necessity of making decisions with limited knowledge. Under such conditions, the role of the leader consists not only in solving operational problems, but also in giving meaning to the situation and maintaining the organization's ability to operate.

Crisis competencies include rapid diagnosis of situations, prioritization of actions, coordination of multiple actors, and effective communication under conditions of informational chaos. The military, as an organization regularly functioning under crisis conditions, develops these competencies systematically, treating crisis not as a deviation from the norm, but as an integral element of operational reality (Lagadec, 2012). For this reason, the military approach to crisis management is increasingly analyzed as a potential source of inspiration for public administration, rescue organizations, and enterprises operating in high-risk environments. Military leaders are trained to operate in sudden situations, which makes these competencies particularly valuable in the civilian sector.

Communication

Effective communication constitutes one of the pillars of military leadership because it enables synchronization of team activities under conditions of limited time and high risk. Communication in military structures is characterized by clarity, conciseness, and strong orientation toward action. The transmission of information is intended to minimize the possibility of misinterpretation and support rapid decision-making at all levels of command. Salas, Sims and Burke (2008) indicate that communication is a key element of effective teamwork, especially in teams operating under conditions of high cognitive workload (Salas, Sims & Burke, 2008). In this context, the military leader performs the role of coordinator of information exchange, interpreter of the situation, and source of clear decision-making intent. Importantly, effective communication in the military is not limited to issuing orders, but also includes active listening, providing feedback, and building shared situational awareness.

Resilience and Adaptability

Psychological resilience and adaptability belong to the most valued leadership competencies in the military because they enable functioning under conditions of permanent change and stress. Luthans (2002), within the framework of the concept of positive organizational behavior, points to the importance of psychological resources such as resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope. These resources increase the individual's ability to cope with adversity and learn from experience. In the military environment, these competencies are systematically developed through training, exercises, and gradual increases in leaders' levels of responsibility. Resilience and adaptability enable not only survival in extreme situations, but also active adjustment of strategies of action to changing operational conditions (Hannah et al., 2009). As a result, military leaders demonstrate a high capacity for learning in action, which constitutes a significant advantage in a dynamic and unpredictable environment.

3. Mechanisms of Leadership Competency Transfer

3.1. Competency Transfer – Theoretical Approach

Competency transfer refers to the process of applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired in one organizational context within another operational environment. In the literature on management and human resource development,

transfer is regarded as one of the key conditions for the actual effectiveness of education and leadership development. The mere acquisition of competencies does not guarantee their application – their active transfer and adaptation to new organizational conditions are necessary.

The classic transfer model proposed by Baldwin and Ford (1988) indicates that transfer effectiveness is a function of three groups of factors: individual characteristics (such as motivation, readiness to learn, and cognitive abilities), training design (the degree of realism and consistency of content with professional practice), and the organizational environment in which the individual functions after the completion of training. This model emphasizes that transfer is not an automatic phenomenon, but rather a dynamic process requiring support and continuous interaction between the individual and the organization.

In more recent approaches, competency transfer is perceived as a process of reinterpretation of experiences, involving the “translation” of previously acquired patterns of action to the requirements of a new context (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). Particular importance is attributed to so-called far transfer, which occurs between environments characterized by different structures, norms, and operational logics – as is the case with the transfer of competencies from the military to business organizations. Effective transfer therefore requires reflective learning, the ability to abstract the essence of competencies, and their flexible application under new conditions.

3.2. Transfer of Military Competencies to Business

Competencies developed in the military environment are characterized by a high degree of universality; however, their transfer to business organizations requires conscious adaptation. The military and business differ in terms of power structure, organizational culture, and expectations toward leaders. While the military is dominated by formal hierarchy, clarity of commands, and a high level of discipline, civilian organizations more frequently rely on employee autonomy, participatory decision-making, and negotiation of goals.

The literature emphasizes that one of the key challenges of transfer is the redefinition of leadership style. A directive style, effective in military conditions, must in the business environment be balanced with elements of participatory and transformational leadership (Hannah, Woolfolk & Lord, 2012). Similarly, command communication, based on short and directive messages, requires transformation toward dialogue, justification of decisions, and inclusion of employees' perspectives.

Hardison et al. (2013), in a RAND Corporation report, indicate that the success of transferring military experience to the civilian sector depends on the abil-

ity to narratively “translate” these experiences into language understandable in business. Experience in commanding a military unit may be perceived as equivalent to managing a project team, while decision-making competencies developed in combat situations may be viewed as valuable resources under conditions of organizational crises or strategic change.

Empirical studies indicate that many military competencies demonstrate high adaptive potential (Cappelli & Keller, 2014):

- decisiveness supports the ability to operate under conditions of strategic uncertainty,
- crisis management is crucial in unstable and turbulent business environments,
- team leadership facilitates the development of cohesive and effective task teams.

3.3. Transfer Mechanisms

Experiential Learning. The literature indicates that leadership competency transfer is enabled through several complementary mechanisms that support the adaptation of military experience to civilian organizational contexts. These mechanisms facilitate the reinterpretation, application, and contextual adjustment of competencies acquired during military service.

Reflective Learning. One of the key mechanisms supporting competency transfer is learning through experience and reflection. Kolb (1984) indicates that an effective learning process includes four stages: concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. In the context of former military leaders, it is important to create conditions for the reflective processing of experiences acquired during service and their reinterpretation within the realities of civilian organizations.

Mentoring. This process may be strengthened through mentoring, coaching, and adaptation programs, which enable safe testing of new leadership roles. Mentoring – especially when conducted by experienced civilian managers – helps identify contextual differences and reduces the risk of inappropriate application of military patterns (Ibarra, 1999).

Coaching. It represents another important mechanism facilitating leadership competency transfer. Through structured developmental conversations, former military leaders can reinterpret previously acquired competencies and adapt them to civilian organizational expectations.

Onboarding and Organizational Support. Organizational support is also of key importance. Onboarding programs dedicated to former soldiers, clearly defined role expectations, and an organizational culture supportive of learning sig-

nificantly increase the probability of effective transfer (Burke & Hutchins, 2007). In this sense, the transfer of leadership competencies should be perceived not as an individual attempt at adaptation, but as a process co-created by the individual and the organization.

4. Barriers in the Transfer of Leadership Competencies

Structural Barriers

One of the fundamental obstacles in the transfer of leadership competencies from the military to civilian organizations is constituted by structural barriers resulting from fundamental differences between these two types of organizations. These differences concern primarily formal structure, management style, decision-making mechanisms, and methods of communication. The military operates on the basis of clearly defined hierarchy, formal roles, and precisely specified procedures, which support speed of action and unambiguous responsibility, while simultaneously limiting interpretative flexibility.

Mintzberg (1983) indicates that the structure of military organizations corresponds to the classic model of a mechanistic structure, characterized by a high level of formalization, centralized decision-making, and a strict division of roles (Mintzberg, 1983). In contrast, many business organizations – especially those operating in dynamic sectors – adopt the form of organic structures based on flexibility, teamwork, and decentralized decision-making. Under such conditions, the direct transfer of military command styles may lead to organizational tensions, cultural conflicts, and reduced team effectiveness.

Structural barriers are also manifested in differing expectations regarding the role of the leader. In the military, the leader constitutes an unambiguous source of decisions and formal authority, whereas in civilian organizations the leader more often performs the function of coordinator, facilitator, and integrator of interests. Lack of consistency between structural expectations and leadership style may cause adaptation difficulties and limit the actual transfer of competencies.

Personal Barriers

Apart from structural barriers, an important role is played by barriers of a personal nature connected with the process of adaptation of the individual to a new professional context. One of the most frequently indicated barriers is strong identification with the military role, which – although constituting a source of professional identity and pride – may simultaneously hinder flexible adjustment of leadership style to civilian realities.

Stone (2010) emphasizes that the transition from the military to the civilian sector is associated with the necessity of redefining professional identity, including not only a change of organizational role, but also reconstruction of the manner of perceiving one's own effectiveness and authority (Stone, 2010). This process often becomes a source of adaptation stress, which may limit readiness to learn and openness to new leadership models. Particularly difficult is the abandonment of a directive management style in favor of more participatory and relational forms of influence.

An additional barrier is constituted by stereotypes concerning military leadership, both on the side of former soldiers themselves and within their organizational environment. Established beliefs regarding the "authoritarian" nature of military command may lead to the self-exclusion of military leaders from roles requiring cooperation and dialogue, even in situations in which they possess high social and adaptive competencies. As a result, personal barriers frequently coexist with organizational barriers, strengthening their negative influence on competency transfer.

Organizational Barriers

An important group of obstacles in the transfer of leadership competencies is constituted by organizational barriers resulting from the mismatch of human resource management systems in civilian organizations. Among the most frequently indicated are the lack of formal mechanisms for validation of military competencies, mismatched recruitment processes, and the absence of dedicated adaptation programs for former military leaders.

Harrell, Berglass and Harrell (2013) indicate that civilian organizations frequently do not possess tools enabling reliable assessment of competencies acquired during military service. As a consequence, these experiences are often depreciated or incorrectly interpreted, while personnel decisions are based on simplified stereotypes rather than on analysis of actual leadership potential. The lack of a common "language of competencies" between the military and business sectors significantly limits transfer effectiveness.

An additional problem is the absence of systemic forms of support on the side of receiving organizations. The lack of onboarding programs, mentoring, or adaptation training causes the transfer process to rest almost exclusively on the individual. The literature clearly indicates that competency transfer is a process co-created by the individual and the organization, and the absence of institutional support significantly reduces the probability of its success (Burke & Hutchins, 2007). In this sense, organizational barriers constitute one of the key factors behind the underutilization of the potential of military leaders in the civilian sector.

5. Discussion and Directions for Further Research

The conducted analysis confirms that the transfer of leadership competencies from the military context to civilian organizations is a complex, multidimensional, and strongly context-dependent phenomenon. Despite growing interest in this area, the literature remains fragmented. Research is dominated by studies focused on selected aspects, such as leadership development (Day, 2000), leaders' psychological resilience (Bartone, 2006), or processes of professional adaptation of former soldiers (Stone, 2010), while approaches integrating these perspectives into a coherent analytical model remain lacking. One of the key conclusions resulting from the analysis is the need to simultaneously consider multiple aspects of competency transfer.

Based on the conducted literature review, an integrative model of military leadership competency transfer is proposed. The model combines insights from leadership theory, transfer of learning theory, and research on professional adaptation. It assumes that successful transfer depends on the interaction of four interrelated dimensions: military leadership competencies, transfer mechanisms, contextual moderators, and transfer outcomes.

Military leadership competencies constitute the starting point of the process and include decision-making under uncertainty, crisis management, communication, resilience, and adaptability. These competencies are developed through operational experience, formal military education, and exposure to extreme conditions.

The transfer process is enabled through specific mechanisms including experiential learning, reflective learning, mentoring, coaching, and onboarding. These mechanisms facilitate the reinterpretation and adaptation of competencies acquired in the military environment to civilian organizational realities. The effectiveness of transfer is moderated by individual, organizational, and situational factors. Individual factors include motivation, openness to change, and learning orientation. Organizational factors comprise organizational culture, human resource management systems, competency validation practices, and developmental support. Situational factors relate to environmental uncertainty, task complexity, and leadership requirements. Successful transfer results in enhanced leadership effectiveness, improved organizational resilience, stronger crisis-management capability, and accelerated professional adaptation.

Existing research frequently analyzes separately the competencies of the individual, the organizational context, and the mechanisms of learning and adaptation. Meanwhile, according to the classic model proposed by Baldwin and Ford (1988), the effectiveness of competency transfer is the result of interaction between individual characteristics, the characteristics of the organizational en-

vironment, and the conditions of the learning process (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Fragmented analytical approaches hinder understanding of why similar military competencies may be effectively transferred in some organizations while remaining underutilized in others.

For this reason, the development of integrative transfer models appears justified, models which simultaneously include:

- the individual level, including motivation for adaptation, the ability for reflective learning, and the process of reconstruction of the professional identity of former military leaders (e.g., motivation, reflective ability, professional identity),
- the organizational level, connected with organizational culture, human resource management systems, competency assessment mechanisms, and the availability of mentoring and developmental support (e.g., organizational culture, HR systems),
- the situational level, referring to the nature of the work environment, the degree of uncertainty, decision-making pressure, and the dynamics of organizational change (e.g., character of the work environment, degree of uncertainty).

An important direction for further research is also the operationalization of the concept of transferability of leadership competencies. Currently, there is a lack of standardized research tools enabling systematic assessment of which military competencies demonstrate the highest adaptive potential and in which organizational configurations they are utilized most effectively. The development of such tools could be of significant importance not only for leadership theory, but also for the practice of human resource management and the shaping of public policies supporting the professional reintegration of soldiers.

Another area requiring more in-depth analysis is the role of learning through experience and reflection. According to Kolb's concept (1984), experience in itself does not yet lead to transfer – reflective reinterpretation is of key importance (Kolb, 1984). In the context of former military leaders, it appears particularly important to examine:

- the ways in which former soldiers reinterpret experiences acquired under military conditions,
- the mechanisms that support the “translation” of these experiences into the language of civilian organizations,
- the role played by mentoring, coaching, and social learning processes in leadership adaptation.

No less important, and thus far relatively rarely explored, is the cultural context of leadership competency transfer. Models of military leadership, their social perception, and relations between the military and the civilian sector may differ

depending on the country, institutional tradition, value system, or the level of civilian control over the armed forces (Huntington, 1975). Consequently, there is a clear need for comparative research that would make it possible to determine the extent to which the transfer of leadership competencies is culturally and institutionally conditioned.

An important direction for further research is the analysis of the compatibility of military leadership competencies and styles with contemporary organizational models, such as agile or project-based organizations. It is increasingly emphasized that selected elements of military leadership – such as mission orientation, clarity of communication, or the ability to operate under VUCA conditions – may constitute significant added value in modern organizations. At the same time, other aspects of military leadership may require substantial modification in order to remain consistent with expectations concerning employee participation, autonomy, and innovativeness.

6. Conclusions and limitations

The conducted theoretical analysis and literature review make it possible to formulate several key conclusions concerning the nature and determinants of the transfer of leadership competencies from the military to civilian organizations. The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the development of an integrative model explaining the transfer of military leadership competencies to civilian organizations. Unlike previous approaches that focus on isolated competencies or adaptation processes, the proposed framework combines competency development, transfer mechanisms, contextual moderators, and transfer outcomes within a coherent analytical structure. The model contributes to leadership theory by integrating fragmented research streams and provides a foundation for future empirical studies.

First, military leadership constitutes a specific and highly developed model of leadership competency formation, which develops under extreme conditions. Factors such as time pressure, uncertainty, responsibility for the lives of others, and the necessity of operating within hierarchical structures support the development of competencies of high universal value, such as decisiveness, psychological resilience, and the ability to operate in crisis situations (Klein, 1998; Bartone, 2006).

Second, these competencies possess significant transfer potential, particularly in the context of contemporary organizations operating under conditions of volatility and uncertainty (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). The ability to make decisions under conditions of limited information, effective communication, and goal orientation may constitute an important source of competitive advantage.

Third, at the same time, third, competency transfer is not automatic in nature. As indicated by Baldwin and Ford (1988), it is a process requiring the fulfillment of specific conditions, both on the side of the individual and the organization. Of key importance are:

- the adaptive and reflective capacity of the individual,
- organizational support,
- the possibility of reinterpretation of experiences.

Fourth, an important limitation is constituted by multilevel barriers, including:

- structural differences between organizations (Mintzberg, 1983),
- adaptation difficulties experienced by individuals (Stone, 2010),
- the lack of systemic solutions in civilian organizations (Hardison, et al., 2017).

These barriers may lead to insufficient utilization of the competency potential of former military leaders.

Fifth, effective transfer requires conscious management of the adaptation process, including:

- the creation of transitional programs,
- the development of competency validation systems,
- support for learning and reflection processes.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the transfer of leadership competencies from the military to the civilian sector has not only an organizational dimension, but also a social and economic one. Effective utilization of the potential of former soldiers may contribute to:

- increasing organizational effectiveness,
- reducing the social costs of professional reintegration,
- building human capital characterized by high resilience and adaptability.

In summary, the transfer of leadership competencies constitutes an area with high application potential; however, its effectiveness depends on understanding complex mechanisms and implementing systemic solutions. This requires further research and close cooperation between the academic community, public organizations, and the private sector.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations employing former military leaders should implement mentoring systems, structured onboarding processes, and competency validation mechanisms. Such initiatives may facilitate adaptation, improve leadership effectiveness, and increase the utilization of competencies acquired during military service. The conclusions presented above synthesize the key theoretical insights of the study and highlight both the opportunities and constraints associated with transferring military leadership competencies to civilian organizations.

This study has several limitations. First, it is conceptual in nature and does not provide empirical validation of the proposed framework. Second, the analysis relies predominantly on Western and NATO-related literature, which may limit the generalizability of conclusions. Third, military organizations differ substantially across countries and services, which may influence transfer processes and outcomes. Future studies should empirically test the proposed framework using qualitative and quantitative approaches and examine transfer mechanisms across different organizational and cultural settings.

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