LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION WITHIN THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES: INSTITUTIONAL PATHWAYS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Marius Emanuel Caragea[*]
University of Craiova, Craiova, Romania

Abstract

Contemporary European security dynamics demand highly agile and adaptable military leadership across institutional settings. This investigation examines how authentic leadership - operationalized through three fundamental elements: personal professional maturity, ethical accountability, and decentralized organizational authority - functions as a key mechanism for long-term institutional renewal within the Romanian defence establishment.

Drawing upon a systematic analysis of international defence policy frameworks, domestic strategic documentation, professional military curriculum materials, and empirical research spanning the post-NATO accession period (2004-2025), the research develops a coherent organizational framework that links formal defence doctrine to observable leadership practice in operational contexts.

Findings indicate that when principled leadership competencies are intentionally embedded throughout talent management systems and professional development sequences, measurable improvements emerge in institutional adaptability, operational effectiveness, and strategic synchronization with contemporary alliance requirements. The study identifies three critical issues - formalized mechanisms for professional self-assessment and development, ethically grounded educational reform, and authorization frameworks that enable subordinate-level decision discretion - while simultaneously mapping structural and resource-based obstacles inherent in military organizations characterized by centralized command traditions and constrained fiscal environments.

The recommendations outline specific strategies for institutional codification, curriculum modernization, and assessment design that embed leadership development in practice rather than referring to it only rhetorically. Contributing to defence management and military organizational scholarship, this research furnishes actionable evidence regarding the translation of leadership theory into durable institutional transformation, particularly within military contexts navigating simultaneous pressures of alliance integration and organizational path-dependency.

Keywords

[*] Corresponding author, **Marius Emanuel Caragea** - caragea.marius.emanuel@gmail.com

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

leadership development, military organizational modernization, defence education reform, NATO command interoperability, talent managament systems, capacity-building mechanisms.

JEL Classification
J53, M12, M54

Introduction
Strategic Imperatives and Institutional Context
Romania's geographical and strategic alignment within the broader Euro-Atlantic defence framework establishes distinctive national security obligations and organizational priorities. The period following formal NATO membership in 2004 and subsequent European Union integration in 2007 has witnessed comprehensive structural reorganization within the national defence establishment, marked by the transition from conscription-based service provision to a fully professionalized military workforce. Concurrently, the shifting character of contemporary security dynamics - encompassing non-conventional conflict modalities, digitally-mediated threat vectors, and diverse operational theatres spanning multiple physical, informational, and cognitive domains - necessitates fundamental reconsideration of organizational command architectures and institutional decision-making frameworks.

Traditional models of military command, centred on hierarchical authority and standardized procedures, have historically supported organizational stability and preserved chain-of-command integrity. Yet current operational demands require greater organizational responsiveness, more horizontal information flows, and faster decision-making at multiple levels of command. Several studies conducted by allied defence institutions and geographically dispersed multinational military operations increasingly affirms the operational imperative for leadership modalities capable of establishing confidence-based institutional environments, sanctioning initiative at subordinate organizational levels, and systematically incorporating normative considerations into all levels of decision-making processes.

Literature Review and Research Gaps
A review of the existing literature on military leadership development reveals several theoretical and empirical gaps that warrant further investigation. The inaugural dimension concerns the translational applicability of authentic leadership theoretical constructs - extensively investigated within organizational psychology scholarship and management studies literatures (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Gardner et al., 2011) - to specific national military organizational contexts experiencing concurrent institutional transitions. Particularly conspicuous is the shortage of empirically-anchored investigations addressing military establishments navigating simultaneous commitments to international alliances and domestic institutional traditions. Prevailing quantitative and qualitative empirical investigations examining authentic leadership phenomena within military organizational settings predominantly utilize case materials from Anglophone and Northern European defence establishments,

creating a substantial research gap regarding military institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, whose organizational trajectories and structural legacies differ markedly from those in Western contexts.

A second gap emerges from the critical examination of studies on Romanian military modernization (Nicoară and Pînzariu, 2021; Young, 2021; Bucăța and Andrei, 2024). While this corpus of research has meaningfully advanced understanding regarding organizational cultural persistence and manifest inconsistencies between declarative doctrinal statements and demonstrable operational behaviors, scholarly investigation has predominantly concentrated on problem articulation and constraint identification rather than constructing coherent, theoretically sophisticated templates for systematic institutional reorganization. The literature identifies obstacles but offers limited guidance on how to implement authentic leadership in military contexts across talent acquisition systems, professional military pedagogical systems, and personnel performance evaluation infrastructure - thereby maintaining the persistent disconnection between theoretical formulation and organizational implementation.

The tertiary dimension of investigative insufficiency pertains to the embodiment of Atlantic Alliance doctrine regarding decentralized command authority and organizational leadership adaptability (NATO, 2022; NATO, 2023). While authoritative institutional guidance regarding mission command methodology and adaptive leadership practices has achieved doctrinal maturation within alliance frameworks, scholarly literature systematically examining the organizational prerequisites, institutional barriers, and practical implementation sequences necessary for translating such prescriptive frameworks into sustained organizational transformation within individual member state contexts remains substantially restricted. Existing alliance-affiliated scholarship predominantly embraces comparative institutional analysis methodologies or prescriptive normative guidance emphasizing exemplary practices, rather than generating context-grounded implementation templates derived from meticulous examination of particular national military institutional architectures and distinctive organizational circumstances.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study starts from the assumption that translating leadership theory into enduring institutional practice requires deliberate attention to organizational context, culture, and resource constraints. The main research objective is to develop an analytically grounded and empirically informed framework that specifies the operational mechanisms through which leadership development anchored in principles encompassing reflective professional maturation, principled ethical engagement, and delegated organizational authority can achieve systematic integration into the Romanian Armed Forces' talent management architecture, professional military pedagogical continuum, and organizational culture systems in configurations that simultaneously elevate operational adaptability while maintaining strategic consonance with alliance institutional requirements.

Instead of proposing universalized organizational prescriptions, the investigative process has been structured according to the following interrelated investigative propositions and research problem formulations:

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

Research Question One (RQ1): Institutional Embedding and Mechanistic Integration

Through which specific organizational mechanisms, and to what extent, can leadership development approaches based on authentic leadership theory be systematically embedded within the Romanian Armed Forces' professional military educational delivery systems, personnel talent identification and career trajectory determination procedures, and organizational effectiveness metrics in configurations ensuring substantive institutional implementation rather than nominal policy acceptance?

The underlying presumption informing this investigative trajectory posits that organizational incorporation of leadership development imperatives demands substantially more than curricular reconfiguration or pedagogical delivery methodology innovation; rather, it requires intentional structural alignment between leadership competency development outcomes and occupational progression mechanisms, organizational incentive architectures, and institutional readiness assessment instruments that may presently reward alternative competency clusters or behavioral patterns.

Research Question Two (RQ2): Context-Specific Implementation Barriers and Organizational Particularities

Which distinct organizational, cultural, and resource-allocation constraints specifically circumscribe the practical application of authentic leadership theoretical frameworks within Romanian Armed Forces organizational parameters, and in what manner do the characteristics and intensity of these organizational impediments diverge from documented obstacles in Western military institutional contexts or from generalizable institutional change theoretical propositions?

This investigative formulation acknowledges that organizational legacies - originating in Cold War command paradigms, national-level post-transition reform chronologies, and resource-allocation environments distinctive to Central and Eastern European contexts - generate context-particular implementation challenges fundamentally resistant to resolution through direct institutional borrowing from Anglophone or Scandinavian military reorganization precedents.

Research Question Three (RQ3): Alliance Integration Imperatives and Institutional Autonomy Reconciliation

Through which concrete institutional mechanisms might leadership development architectures prioritizing lateral organizational authority distribution, psychologically-enabling command environments, and systematic ethical deliberation processes achieve operationalization in consonance with - rather than subordination to or departure from - Atlantic Alliance mission command doctrinal guidance and interoperability standardization imperatives, thereby fostering enhanced rather than compromised participation in alliance operational structures?

This investigative inquiry acknowledges the distinctive institutional challenge confronting Central and Eastern European alliance members: the concurrent necessity for preserving organizational coherence and operational readiness within collaborative alliance frameworks while addressing particularized national defence requirements and organizational institutional traditions.

Disciplinary Localization and Investigative Methodology

The present investigation is intellectually positioned at the convergence of military organizational administrative scholarship, defence sector management studies, and research on institutional transformation. Theoretically, the inquiry builds upon leadership authenticity frameworks constituted within organizational psychological scholarship, while deliberately extending such theoretical constructs through systematic engagement with military organizational operational particularities, institutional feasibility constraints, and geopolitical strategic imperatives. Methodologically, the study adopts qualitative documentary analysis of doctrinal texts, institutional communications, and peer-reviewed literature, rather than collecting primary data through surveys or interviews - an investigative strategy facilitating engagement with organizational circumstances where institutional classification protocols or sensitivities regarding organizational disclosure prohibit primary empirical collection while enabling systematic engagement with verified institutional documentation.

The analytical methodology operates from the following foundational presumptions: initially, that institutional documentation artifacts, authoritative doctrinal statements, and organizational strategic communications, despite their inevitable imperfections, authentically represent institutional priority structures and organizational decisional logics; secondly, that investigative scholarship addressing military organization in allied national contexts furnishes legitimate comparative analytical reference points notwithstanding the fundamental contextual particularities characterizing distinct national military institutional formations; and tertiary, that meticulous organizational analysis of catalogued institutional barriers, policy mechanisms, and documented modernization initiatives can furnish substantive analytical intelligence regarding implementation viability and organizational coherence even without prospective validation through empirical investigation.

Scholarly Contribution and Institutional Relevance

The present investigation advances defence sector organizational scholarship and military institutional administrative research across multiple investigative dimensions. Principally, it proposes an empirically informed and theoretically coherent framework for leadership development that explicitly addresses the gap between policy aspirations and actual practice - the documented organizational distance between policy aspirational declarations and authentic operational execution - characterizing defence sector reorganization processes in post-transition national contexts. Secondarily, it furnishes concentrated organizational examination of a specific alliance member's institutional context, thereby enlarging the comparative organizational literature concerning defence institutional metamorphosis beyond the customary prominence of Anglo-American and Scandinavian institutional exemplars within academic dissemination channels. Tertially, the investigation instantiates abstract leadership theoretical propositions through military-organizational-specific instrumental mechanisms (talent acquisition and development systems, professional military pedagogical curricula designs, institutional personnel assessment frameworks), thereby illustrating practical mechanisms through which theoretical insights might achieve organizational realization rather than persisting as aspirational institutional commitments.

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

The investigation endeavours to engage multiple stakeholder constituencies: defence sector policy formulation and senior military command authorities contemplating organizational improvement initiatives; professional military educators charged with pedagogical design and institutional reform implementation; academic investigators engaged in military organizational change and institutional dynamic examination; and alliance institutional administrative bodies responsible for organizational capacity advancement and doctrinal integration within member institutions.

1. Review of the scientific literature
1.1. Military Leadership in Contemporary Scholarship
Over the past two decades, military leadership scholarship has shifted from a predominantly hierarchical, command-driven paradigm to one that recognises the strategic value of adaptability, ethical integrity, and psychological resilience. Early 21st-century military doctrine - particularly in post-Cold War NATO contexts - tended to emphasise rigid command structures as the primary mechanism for ensuring cohesion and operational control (ADP 6-0, 2019). However, operational experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, and multinational peacekeeping missions revealed the limitations of such rigidity in fluid, high-stakes environments (Barfod and Clifton, 2025; Northouse, 2021).

The notion of authentic leadership has become increasingly relevant in addressing these shortcomings. In the formulation offered by Walumbwa et al. (2008), this approach to leadership is founded upon four interrelated dimensions: an acute awareness of one's own values and abilities, openness and honesty in dealings with others, a measured and impartial approach to evaluating information, and the consistent application of deeply held moral convictions in decision-making. This model has been adapted for military contexts by integrating operational decision-making under uncertainty with ethical obligations under the law of armed conflict (ADP 6-22, 2019; NATO, 2023). The U.S. Army's Be-Know-Do framework similarly emphasises the inseparability of competence, character, and leadership presence (FM 6-22, 2022), aligning with NATO's more recent emphasis on leadership agility as articulated in the NATO "Leadership Agility in NATO Forces: Guidelines and Best Practices" (2023).

Contemporary scholarship (2023–2025) underscore the role of authentic leadership in creating trust-based environments where subordinates feel empowered to act decisively within mission parameters. The Havok Journal (2024) notes that leaders who demonstrate vulnerability and openness are more effective at fostering psychological safety - a critical enabler of adaptive thinking and innovation. This resonates with Lindsay and Woycheshin's (2014) findings on adaptive leadership, which highlight the capacity to adjust strategies and behaviors dynamically in response to changing operational conditions.

1.2. Organizational Management Frameworks in Military Contexts
The intersection of leadership development and organizational management has been extensively explored in both academic literature and official doctrine. Modern military organisations, particularly within NATO, are increasingly adopting talent management systems that integrate recruitment, training, professional development, and retention

into a single strategic process (Trent, 2019; Montgomery, 2022). The central idea is to align individual career trajectories with organizational capability requirements, thereby ensuring both readiness and sustainability.

Several models, such as the Integrated Talent Management Framework (U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2015) and the Defence Education Enhancement Programme (Labarre and Jolicoeur, 2016), stress the importance of linking leadership education with broader cultural transformation initiatives (Mujkic et al., 2018). These frameworks prioritise decentralised decision-making, cross-cultural competence, and interagency collaboration - capabilities considered indispensable for multi-domain operations (JDP 0-01, 2022; NWCC, 2021).

The Romanian Armed Forces face a particularly complex implementation challenge due to the coexistence of modernised NATO-aligned structures and legacy systems inherited from the pre-2004 period (Nicoară and Pînzariu, 2021). Academic studies (Pepperdine University, 2025; Bucăța and Andrei, 2024) confirm that effective organizational transformation in the military requires both structural reforms and sustained cultural change, especially in environments where hierarchical norms remain deeply ingrained.

1.3. Challenges in Romanian Military Leadership Development

Leadership development in the Romanian Armed Forces has evolved under the combined influence of geopolitical circumstances, economic realities, and entrenched institutional practices. Since joining NATO, Romania's defence policy documents have repeatedly underscored the modernisation of leadership structures and competencies as a fundamental strategic priority (Government of Romania, 2021; Ministry of National Defence, 2007). Yet, persistent challenges remain, including:

Hierarchical rigidity: Decision-making processes remain centralised, limiting junior leaders' autonomy (Bucăța, 2024; Young, 2021).

Resource limitations: Budgetary constraints, exacerbated by national fiscal deficits, restrict investment in advanced training systems and simulation technologies (Eualive.net, 2025).

Gaps in ethical and cultural training: Existing curricula often prioritise technical and tactical competencies over moral reasoning, cross-cultural awareness, and adaptive leadership skills (Mazilu, 2024).

Institutional inertia: Bureaucratic structures and legacy traditions slow the integration of new leadership models, even when these are endorsed at policy level (Young, 2021).

Moreover, operational experiences - particularly in multinational missions - have revealed discrepancies between doctrinal commitments to decentralised command (mission command) and the actual delegation of decision-making authority on the ground (NATO, 2023). These challenges suggest that leadership transformation in Romania requires not only doctrinal alignment with NATO standards but also deep-seated organizational culture change.

1.4. Conceptual Framework: Authentic Leadership in the Military Context

Originating in organizational psychology and later adapted to military demands, the authentic leadership model is founded on the belief that leaders should align their conduct with firmly embedded personal values, while creating conditions that promote

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

trust, openness, and the empowerment of subordinates. According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), this approach is defined by four interconnected elements - self-awareness, transparency in relationships, impartial evaluation of information, and a moral perspective rooted in personal conviction - which together form the basis for leadership that commands credibility and upholds ethical standards.

In the military sphere, these attributes are not optional enhancements but fundamental to achieving mission success, particularly in fast-moving, high-pressure operational environments. As Lindsay and Woycheshin observe in "Adaptive Leadership in the Military Context" (2014), adaptability is closely intertwined with authenticity. They contend that leaders who possess a clear and realistic understanding of their own cognitive and emotional strengths and limitations are better placed to assess complex situations, detect emerging challenges, and adapt their strategies in response. This view reflects the findings of Walumbwa et al. (2008), who emphasise that self-awareness contributes not only to more informed decision-making but also to a leader's ability to convey reassurance during periods of uncertainty.

In practice, self-awareness within a military setting extends beyond individual reflection to include a precise appreciation of how one's conduct influences subordinates, peers, and the broader operational environment. Insights from Why Vulnerability is Essential to Authentic Leadership (The Havok Journal, 2024) highlight that leaders who are transparent about their limitations create conditions in which subordinates feel confident to show initiative and share ideas without fear of negative consequences. Such openness underpins the development of psychological safety - a concept originating in organizational behavior research and increasingly recognised within defence leadership studies.

The framework's second pillar, moral integrity, is equally critical. As argued in "Ethics as Moral Practice in Peacekeeping Missions: Insights on the Importance of Ethical Training" (Troy, 2024), military decision-making is inherently value-laden, often requiring a careful reconciliation of operational goals with ethical obligations, including unwavering adherence to the Law of Armed Conflict. Authentic leaders, by maintaining an internalised moral compass, ensure that operational expediency does not override fundamental principles, thereby reinforcing legitimacy and trust within both the unit and the civilian population.

The third pillar, empowerment, draws from the mission command philosophy prevalent in NATO doctrine and operationalised through decentralised execution. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, "Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond" (2015), supplemented by the articles "Operationalizing Talent Management" (Montgomery, 2022) and "Talent Management. A Contemporary Issue Facing the Army" (Trent, 2019), frames empowerment as an organizational necessity, emphasising that leaders must deliberately cultivate subordinate initiative to maximise adaptability in dispersed, multi-domain operations. In practice, this requires moving away from micromanagement and instead establishing clear intent, defined boundaries, and sufficient trust for subordinates to act independently within those parameters.

The integration of these three pillars into Romanian Armed Forces leadership development is both necessary and challenging. Studies such as "Considerations Regarding the Location and the Role of Organizational Culture in the Romanian

Military Environment" (Nicoară and Pînzariu, 2021) reveal that while official doctrine acknowledges the importance of decentralisation and empowerment, the persistence of hierarchical rigidity often constrains implementation. Consequently, operational scenarios continue to show gaps between the doctrinal emphasis on mission command and its actual application in the field.

The conceptual model proposed here thus positions authentic leadership not as an abstract ideal but as an operational requirement - one that directly enhances adaptability, fosters resilience, and ensures ethical conduct in complex, unpredictable environments. In the Romanian context, embedding this model necessitates not only curriculum reform but also deliberate cultural transformation to reconcile the tension between traditional command structures and contemporary operational demands.

1.5. Romanian Armed Forces Organizational Context
1.5.1 Defence Transformation and NATO Integration

The Romanian Armed Forces (RoAF) have undergone a profound transformation since the early 2000s, shaped by the dual imperatives of NATO integration and domestic military modernisation. The transition from a conscript-based force to a fully professional military in 2007 marked a pivotal institutional shift, necessitating changes in recruitment, training, and leadership development (Ministerul Apărării Naționale, Strategia de Transformare a Armatei României, 2007).

The accession to NATO in 2004 introduced stringent interoperability requirements, compelling the RoAF to align its doctrine, organizational structures, and operational procedures with allied standards. Impactul integrării în "Alianța Nord-Atlantică asupra managementului resurselor umane din Armata României" (Duțu, 2005) notes that this alignment extended beyond technical and tactical interoperability to include the adoption of NATO's mission command philosophy, which emphasises decentralised decision-making and the empowerment of subordinate leaders. However, as identified in "Particularities of Control in the Romanian Army" (Stanciu and Bichir, 2022), the practical implementation of mission command principles has been uneven, with legacy centralised control patterns persisting in many operational contexts.

Operational deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Western Balkans have tested the RoAF's leadership adaptability, highlighting both the strengths and the limitations of its current structures. These missions have facilitated exposure to multinational operational cultures, thereby increasing awareness of leadership practices that diverge from Romania's traditionally hierarchical style (Manolache, 2025).

1.5.2 Institutional Culture and Legacy Systems

The persistence of legacy institutional culture remains one of the most significant impediments to leadership transformation in the RoAF. In "Considerations Regarding the Location and the Role of Organizational Culture in the Romanian Military Environment" (Nicoară and Pînzariu, 2021), it is argued that Romanian military culture has historically prioritised procedural compliance, hierarchical discipline, and strict centralisation of authority. While these traits contribute to operational discipline and chain-of-command integrity, they can hinder adaptability, innovation, and responsiveness in complex operational environments.

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

The analysis in "How to Defend Romania: Identifying Legacy and Institutional Impediments" (Young, 2021) further highlights that entrenched cultural norms often conflict with modern leadership principles such as empowerment and participatory decision-making. The study identifies a cognitive dissonance among officers trained under the old system, who may intellectually accept NATO mission command doctrine but remain reluctant to cede decision-making autonomy to subordinates.

Moreover, bureaucratic processes in personnel management and slow adaptation of promotion criteria contribute to leadership stagnation. As Mazilu ("Methods for Modernizing the Human Resources of the Armed Forces", 2024) indicates, performance evaluations still tend to prioritise conformity and seniority over initiative and adaptive problem-solving skills.

1.5.3 Talent Management and Human Resource Modernisation

Human resource modernisation in the RoAF has been guided by both national reform agendas and the influence of allied best practices. The "Romanian defence market. Opportunities and challenges" (KPMG, 2025) acknowledges that while the formal framework for talent management exists - drawing on elements of the U.S. Army's "Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond" - its operationalisation remains inconsistent.

A key aspect of talent management involves aligning individual career paths with institutional needs, a process that requires robust assessment systems, career development programs, and targeted training interventions. However, "Study on the Threats, Vulnerabilities and Risks of the Transformation of the Romanian Army from the Perspective of Defence Resource Management" (Bordea, 2024) notes that the lack of integrated digital platforms for personnel data and career tracking limits the ability to implement data-driven talent allocation decisions.

Initiatives such as the introduction of simulation-based leadership training, inspired by allied practices, show promise. Drawing on lessons from "The Use of META (Virtual Simulations) in Canadian Junior Military Leadership Development" (Elkington et al., 2024), there is growing recognition within the RoAF that immersive training environments can accelerate the development of adaptive decision-making and teamwork skills. Nevertheless, as Bucăța (2024) warns, budgetary constraints and competing operational priorities often delay the full integration of such innovative training methods.

The Romanian Armed Forces currently stand at a juncture where inherited traditions intersect with the demands of modern transformation. On one hand, there remains a firmly embedded heritage of centralised command and hierarchical discipline; on the other, there is a pressing strategic need to cultivate leaders capable of independent, ethically responsible decision-making in dynamic and often unpredictable operational contexts. Overcoming this tension calls for more than simply aligning doctrine with NATO standards - it requires a sustained programme of institutional change encompassing cultural renewal, the refinement of talent management practices, and the modernisation of training and development systems.

2. Research methodology
2.1 Research Scope and Investigative Objectives
This investigation examines institutional mechanisms through which theoretically-grounded leadership development - anchored in validated authenticity frameworks - achieves operational integration within the Romanian Armed Forces' management architecture as a catalyst for sustained professional advancement. The inquiry encompasses leadership theory, organizational culture transformation, and talent management practices, applied to the Romanian military context between 2004 and 2025, spanning NATO integration, service professionalization, and successive modernization phases.

2.2 Methodological Design
2.2.1 Research Design
This study adopts a qualitative documentary approach combined with analysis of military institutional contexts. The methodology embraces interpretivist epistemological foundations, recognizing that organizational leadership in military contexts constitutes socially-constructed realities inadequately comprehended through purely positivist quantification. The analysis proceeds in two phases:
Phase One: Theoretical Framework Synthesis encompasses a systematic review of peer-reviewed scholarship addressing authentic and adaptive leadership propositions, institutional restructuring processes, and military talent development, drawn from defence studies journals, organizational psychology literature, and authoritative defence policy documentation.
Phase Two: Contextual Application comprises detailed analysis of Romanian defence policy instruments, professional military education curricula, and institutional reform assessments, undertaken to align theoretical insights with demonstrable organizational realities and Romanian military specificities.
2.2.2 Theoretical-Applied Analytical Delineation
This investigation deliberately distinguishes between two analytical dimensions:
Theoretical Strand examines authentic leadership frameworks as validated within organizational psychology (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Gardner et al., 2011), institutional change theory, and NATO doctrinal architectures regarding mission command and leadership agility. This dimension operates at universal theoretical propositions regarding leadership effectiveness and organizational behavioral dynamics.
Applied Strand investigates how theoretical constructs manifest, encounter resistance, and become embedded within Romanian Armed Forces organizational parameters, including documented implementation gaps between policy commitments and operational practice, and organizational constraints specific to the Romanian military context.
Integration proceeds through iterative theoretical specification (rendering general theories contextually particular) and contextual generalization (extracting transferable principles from contextual analysis).

2.3 Source Material Organization and Authentication

2.3.1 Categorical Framework

Documentary materials are organized into three classifications:

Category One: International Defence Policy Instruments comprise NATO Strategic Concept (2022), NATO Leadership Agility guidance (2023), U.S. Department of Defence publications (ADP 6-0, ADP 6-22, FM 6-22, TRADOC's Talent Management Concept, 2015), UK Joint Defence Doctrine (JDP 0-01, 2022), and NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (2021). These constitute authoritative sources regarding alliance-level leadership expectations and contemporary defence doctrine.

Category Two: Peer-Reviewed Scholarship encompasses empirical studies and theoretical contributions from defence studies, organizational psychology, and military administration journals: Walumbwa et al. (2008); Lindsay and Woycheshin (2014); Nicoară and Pînzariu (2021); Young (2021); Bucăța and Andrei (2024); Bodescu (2024); Troy (2024). These materials undergo editorial scrutiny and represent validated scholarly contributions.

Category Three: Primary Institutional Documentation includes Ministerul Apărării Naționale's Strategic Transformation documentation (2007), Government of Romania Military Strategy (2021), Ministry of Defence publications on talent management and PME, institutional reform assessments, and defence sector analyses (KPMG, 2025). These are treated as authentic organizational priority representations, triangulated against academic sources to mitigate institutional bias.

2.3.2 Verification Protocols

Authenticity Verification: Sources are confirmed through institutional repositories (NATO, DoD websites), scholarly databases, and official government repositories.

Temporal Positioning: Materials are situated within the 2004-2025 scope, reflecting NATO accession and modernization periods. Pre-2004 sources appear only for enduring theoretical frameworks or historical institutional context.

Substantive Relevance: Sources are evaluated for direct relevance to RQ1-RQ3. Materials addressing leadership development, organizational culture, talent management, military transformation, or NATO interoperability are retained; peripheral materials are excluded.

Conflict Resolution: When sources present conflicting information, hierarchical weighting applies: (1) most recent authoritative documentation supersedes earlier formulations; (2) peer-reviewed sources supersede commentary; (3) official documentation supersedes interpretations.

2.4 Analytical Procedure: Thematic Coding Framework

2.4.1 Methodology Rationale

Systematic thematic coding - designed to identify, categorise, and interpret recurrent conceptual patterns across heterogeneous documentary sources - has been selected because it enables:

Pattern Recognition: Across sources varying substantially in origin (NATO, American military, Romanian institutional, academic), institutional purpose (prescriptive doctrine, empirical analysis, organizational communication), and sophistication.

Theory-Informed Analysis: Rather than purely inductive approaches, this employs theory-informed coding wherein the framework emerges from current leadership theory

(Walumbwa et al., 2008) while remaining open to inductive theme identification from documents.

Transparency and Replicability: Documentation of coding schema, operational definitions, decision rules, and exemplary operationalizations enables methodological verification and replication.

Contextual Specificity: Distinguishes Romanian-specific themes (hierarchical rigidity, Cold War path-dependency) from universal patterns (authenticity, organizational trust, decentralization).

2.4.2 Thematic Schema and Operational Specifications

The framework comprises eleven primary thematic categories, each with explicit operational definitions, source exemplars, and framework integration (Table no. 1):

Table no. 1. Thematic Schema and Operational Specifications

Theme	Operational Definition	Exemplary Reference	RQ Integration
Theme 1: Authentic Leadership Dimensionality	Leadership approaches emphasizing personal value alignment, transparency, impartial information assessment, and ethical conviction-grounded decision-making.	Walumbwa et al. (2008): "four interrelated dimensions: acute awareness of values/abilities, openness/honesty, impartial evaluation, moral conviction application"	RQ1: Theoretical conceptualisation
Theme 2: Self-Awareness and Reflective Practice	Leadership development emphasizing introspection, reflective practice, feedback mechanisms (360-degree), and psychological insight cultivation.	Lindsay and Woycheshin (2014): "leaders engaging in reflective practice adapt to unpredictable conditions, make sound decisions under pressure"	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3: Pillar One operationalization
Theme 3: Moral Integrity and Ethical Decision Architecture	Military ethical frameworks, law of armed conflict adherence, moral decision protocols, and ethical training integration	Bodescu (2024): "Professional Military Ethics: Essential Foundation for Officer Education in Law of Armed Conflict"	RQ1: Embedding mechanisms
Theme 4: Empowerment and Decentralized Authority	Organizational structures/philosophies emphasizing subordinate decision discretion, distributed authority, mission	NATO (2023): "decentralised execution guided by clearly defined commander's intent"	RQ3: Interoperability alignment

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

	command, and lateral delegation.		
Theme 5: Hierarchical Rigidity and Centralization Legacy	Organizational resistance to decentralization, centralized command persistence, hierarchical decision-making, and cultural impediments to empowerment	Nicoară and Pînzariu (2021): "Romanian military culture prioritised procedural compliance, hierarchical discipline, strict centralisation"	RQ2: Context-specific barriers
Theme 6: Theory-Practice Implementation Gap	Discrepancies between doctrinal commitments/policy aspirations and demonstrable operational practices/daily behaviors	Preliminary findings: "policy documents articulate modernisation need; implementation remains inconsistent. Talent systems exist formally, but lack daily practice integration"	RQ1-RQ3: Core institutional challenge
Theme 7: Talent Management and Career Alignment	Organizational systems aligning professional development with career progression, merit-based advancement, competency assessment, talent retention	U.S. Army Combined Arms Center (2015) Talent Management Concept: "integrating recruitment, training, development, retention into unified strategic processes"	RQ1: Embedding mechanisms
Theme 8: PME Curriculum Integration	Leadership development integration into military education curricula, pedagogical innovation, cross-disciplinary approaches, formal training architectures	Syme-Taylor and Jalili (2018): "systematic curriculum redesign aligning learning objectives across all officer course levels"	RQ1: Educational delivery mechanisms
Theme 9: NATO Interoperability and Alliance Commitments	NATO doctrinal standards, alliance interoperability requirements, multinational	NATO (2023) Leadership Agility guidance: alliance-level leadership expectations member	RQ3: External institutional pressures

	integration demands, alliance-aligned development specifications	states must align with	
Theme 10: Resource Constraints and Fiscal Limitations	Budgetary limitations, fiscal scarcity, competing priorities, financial barriers to implementation	Bucăța (2024): "defence budget distributed across equipment modernisation, infrastructure, remuneration. Constraints limit leadership development resource availability"	RQ2: Material implementation barriers
Theme 11: Cultural Transformation and Change Management	Organizational cultural change approaches, change management methodologies, leadership role-modeling, organizational climate transformation strategies	Young (2021): "officers may intellectually accept NATO mission command doctrine yet remain reluctant ceding decision autonomy to subordinates"	RQ2: Resistance mechanisms

2.4.3 Coding Implementation Sequencing

The thematic coding process follows explicit procedural stages:

Stage One: Document Familiarization - Each source undergoes comprehensive initial review to establish substantive content familiarity, terminological conventions, institutional origins, and analytical frameworks employed, enabling subsequent thematic pattern recognition.

Stage Two: Granular Theme Identification - Documentary passages are systematically evaluated against operational definitions (Section 2.4.2). Identifiable passages receive thematic assignments; multi-theme passages receive multiple assignments with documentation.

Stage Three: Thematic Density Assessment - Beyond presence/absence determination, theme frequency, emphasis, and centrality within sources are recorded, distinguishing sources substantially foregrounding themes from passing references, permitting thematic prominence hierarchies identification.

Stage Four: Theme Correlation Integration - Identified patterns are systematically correlated with theoretical framework components (three pillars, RQ1-RQ3, implementation barriers). Thematic constellations reveal organizational dynamics and institutional patterns of analytical significance.

Stage Five: Context-Specific Variation Identification - Particular attention distinguishes Romanian-specific theme manifestations from universal patterns. For example, "hierarchical rigidity" manifests across multiple military contexts; its specific Romanian

implementation through Cold War structural legacies generates distinctive institutional dynamics.

Stage Six: Thematic Saturation Assessment - Coding continues across sources until thematic saturation - additional sources yield no substantially novel operationalizations beyond already-identified categories. Saturation typically emerges when consistent patterns repeat across independent sources without new theme categories requiring addition.

2.4.4 Coding Decision Protocols

Explicit decision rules govern thematic assignments for consistency and defensibility:

Thematic Specificity Principle: When documentary passages could reasonably assign to multiple categories, the most specific category receives priority. Exemplar: "ethical training curriculum integration" assigns to Theme 3 (Moral Integrity) rather than generic Theme 8 (PME Curriculum), with cross-referencing notes documenting secondary relevance.

Operative Language Priority: Thematic assignment privileges explicit operative language directly invoking authentic leadership, empowerment, self-awareness, cultural change, etc., over interpretive inference. Passages must explicitly reference "mission command" or "decentralized decision-making" for Theme 4 assignment; passages merely implying empowerment receive no assignment.

Source Authority Weighting: Ambiguous assignments are resolved according to epistemic authority and specificity. NATO doctrinal statements carry higher authority for interoperability themes (Theme 9) than secondary interpretations. Romanian primary institutional documents carry particular authority for Romanian context-specific themes (Theme 5, Theme 10).

Contradiction Reconciliation: When sources present contradictory organizational assertions, both operationalizations are documented with priority accorded to more recent authoritative sources and empirical evidence versus speculative commentary.

2.4.5 Thematic-Framework Integration

Thematic coding results integrate with the theoretical authentic leadership framework through:

Thematic-Theoretical Mapping: Themes 1-4 correspond to framework pillars; Themes 5-6 documents impediments; Themes 7-9 address mechanisms; Themes 10-11 address constraints.

Pattern-Driven Elaboration: Identified pattern constellations generate theoretical insights regarding causal mechanisms and institutional dynamics extending beyond single-source articulations.

Context-Grounded Specification: Universal authentic leadership propositions are specified through engagement with Romanian context-specific patterns, generating contextually-informed propositions regarding embodiment within Romanian parameters.

2.5 Methodological Constraints

2.5.1 Documentary Access Limitations

Classification protocols restrict access to classified Romanian military curricula, operational assessments, and personnel records. Analysis is limited to open-source

strategic documentation and unclassified communications. Mitigation occurs through triangulation: unclassified Romanian documents are cross-referenced with independent academic evaluations (Young, 2021; Bucăța and Andrei, 2024; Mazilu, 2024), providing external perspectives mitigating institutional bias toward overstating reform progress.

2.5.2 Linguistic-Conceptual Translation

Documentary materials span Romanian and English compositions. Linguistic translation requires attention to conceptual equivalence: Romanian military terminology, institutional frameworks, and organizational logics may not map precisely onto English equivalents. Where conceptual ambiguity exists, original Romanian terminology is retained with explicit notation (e.g., "Strategia de Transformare a Armatei României" retained alongside English translation).

2.5.3 Institutional Documentation Bias

Romanian Ministry of National Defence documentation may inherently emphasize reform progress, success achievements, and modernization while underrepresenting implementation deficits, persistent obstacles, or failures. Mitigation involves triangulation with independent academic evaluations and critical perspectives. When doctrinal aspirations contradict scholarly operational practice evaluations, both perspectives are incorporated with the discrepancy noted as revealing the theory-practice gap central to research problem formulation.

2.5.4 Temporal Documentation Lag

The 2004-2025 investigative scope encompasses materials with temporal lag between documented events and publication. 2024 scholarly evaluations may address 2022-2023 institutional developments. Temporal lag is acknowledged; source dating is explicitly recorded permitting readers to calibrate analytical weight according to recency.

2.5.5 Absence of Primary Empirical Data

This investigation deliberately foregoes primary empirical collection (survey instrumentation, interview protocols, organizational observation). While such investigation might yield detailed organizational insights, feasibility barriers exist within military contexts (classification restrictions, organizational disclosure sensitivities, sampling representation difficulties). Documentary analysis enables authentic institutional documentation engagement and rigorous analysis while acknowledging that independent prospective validation would strengthen confidence in identified patterns and recommendations. This methodological choice is transparently articulated; research conclusions are therefore limited by the scope of the available documentary evidence.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Empirical Assessment of Organizational Requirements: Authentic Leadership Integration

3.1.1 Documented Institutional Substrate and Prerequisites for Sustainable Development

A systematic review of key doctrinal and policy documents issued by NATO (2022; 2023), the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center (2015), the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (JDP 0-01, 2022), and the Romanian Ministry of National Defence (2007;

2021) indicates that sustainable professional development requires embedding leadership development in strategic guidance, personnel systems, and organizational culture, rather than relying on isolated training interventions (U.S. Army CAC, 2015; Government of Romania, 2021; NATO, 2022). Thematic coding analysis identified consistent emphasis across independent sources that authentic leadership operationalization requires integration within talent management, professional military education, performance assessment, and institutional incentive systems.

In the specific case of the Romanian Armed Forces, documentary evidence from strategic transformation papers, human resource modernization studies, and leadership culture analyses suggests that existing talent management frameworks formally acknowledge the importance of leadership development, yet significant discrepancies persist between doctrinal intent and day-to-day organizational practices, as highlighted by empirical assessments conducted by Young (2021), Mazilu (2024), and KPMG (2025).

3.1.2 Three-Pillar Integration Framework: Foundation and Organizational Manifestation

The three-pillar framework proposed in this section synthesizes insights from organizational psychology, military leadership research, and defence policy analysis (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Lindsay and Woycheshin, 2014; NATO, 2023; Morgado and Czarnogursky, 2024), and is further refined through the thematic coding of Romanian and allied institutional documents described in the Methodology section. Documentary analysis substantiates that authentic leadership operationalizes through three consolidated institutional pillars:

Pillar One: Reflective Professional Development

Empirical Organizational Foundation: Documented sources addressing military leadership development (Lindsay and Woycheshin, 2014; NATO, 2023; Morgado and Czarnogursky, 2024) establish that organizational contexts enabling leader self-assessment, multi-source feedback, and structured mentorship demonstrate enhanced adaptive decision-making and interpersonal effectiveness. Organizational psychology research substantiates that leaders engaging in systematic reflective practice exhibit greater capacity to recognize cognitive limitations, adapt strategies, and communicate effectively during operational uncertainty.

Integration Mechanisms:

Formalized Self-Assessment Architecture - Institutionalized at career progression intervals, incorporating trained facilitator-mediated feedback and confidential reflection protocols.

Multi-Source Feedback Integration - Documented in NATO allied military literature, wherein performance evaluation incorporates perspectives from superiors, peers, and subordinates.

Structured Mentorship Systems - Analyzed sources document that mentorship relationships positioned outside immediate hierarchical chains facilitate knowledge transfer and developmental receptivity.

Expected Organizational Outcomes: Enhanced emotional intelligence, increased feedback receptivity, strengthened interpersonal trust between hierarchical levels.

Pillar Two: Principled Ethical Engagement

Empirical Basis: Documentary sources addressing military ethics and professional military ethics education (Solis, 2010; Bodescu, 2024; Troy, 2024) establish that military decision-making constitutes value-laden organizational phenomena requiring reconciliation of operational imperatives with ethical legal obligations. Empirical military operations research reveals that leader ethical clarity measurably enhances organizational legitimacy, unit cohesion, and subordinate confidence.

Integration Mechanisms:

Ethics-Centered Professional Military Education – Education in moral reasoning is found at all hierarchical training levels.

Scenario-Based Ethical Deliberation - Immersive simulations presenting morally ambiguous scenarios accelerate ethical reasoning development.

Performance Evaluation System Integration - Advancement decisions privilege ethical decision-making and law of armed conflict adherence.

Expected Organizational Outcomes: Enhanced decision-making legitimacy in multinational contexts, measurable reduction in ethical violations, strengthened civilian-military trust relationships.

Pillar Three: Lateral Authority Distribution and Empowerment

Empirical Basis: NATO doctrinal architecture and allied military operational studies substantiate that organizational command structures emphasizing subordinate-level decision discretion demonstrate enhanced adaptability in dispersed, multi-domain environments. Documented military operational experience reveals that organizations enabling subordinate initiative within commander-defined intent parameters execute adaptive tactics with greater strategic effectiveness. Operational case studies from multinational deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Western Balkans demonstrate that formations which internalize mission command and devolve decision-making authority to junior leaders achieve higher adaptability and responsiveness under complex conditions (NATO, 2023; Sjogren and Nilsson, 2025).

Integration Mechanisms:

Expanded Subordinate Decision Authority - Revised standard operating procedures explicitly authorizing unit-level decision discretion within strategic parameters.

Psychologically Safe Command Environment - Command climates characterized by leader vulnerability and non-punitive treatment of honest error generate psychological safety enabling subordinate initiative.

Institutional Recognition Systems - Structured programs rewarding creative problem-solving and effective subordinate empowerment.

Expected Organizational Outcomes: Enhanced multi-domain operational adaptability, strengthened unit cohesion grounded in reciprocal trust, measurable increases in subordinate initiative.

3.2 Institutional Embedding Architecture: Integration Framework

Building on these empirically derived patterns, the following sub-sections advance a set of normative propositions regarding how authentic leadership can be systematically embedded within the core organizational systems of the Romanian Armed Forces.

3.2.1 Talent Management System Integration

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

Normative Requirement: Leadership development institutional sustainability necessitates systematic linkage between demonstrated leadership competency and organizational career progression. Analyzed Romanian institutional documentation reveals substantial gap between doctrine and practice in current talent management architecture. Comparable integration logics have been adopted, with varying degrees of success, in the U.S. Army's Integrated Talent Management framework and in selected NATO member states, where leadership competencies constitute explicit criteria for promotion and assignment decisions (U.S. Army CAC, 2015; Trent, 2019; Montgomery, 2022;).

Implementation Framework: Organizational embedding requires leadership competency development documentation within personnel advancement files, promotion evaluation processes incorporating authentic leadership behavioral evidence, and career trajectory prioritization of candidates demonstrating reflective self-awareness and empowerment capacity.

3.2.2 Professional Military Education System Integration

Normative Requirement: NATO professional military education scholarship establishes that isolated leadership training initiatives generate minimal institutional impact.

Effective integration requires the application of authentic leadership principles at all levels of education.

Implementation Framework: Organizational embedding requires cross-disciplinary curriculum integration of military strategy and ethical frameworks, case-based pedagogical methodologies utilizing documented organizational scenarios, and systematic connection between classroom instruction and operational exercise participation. Such an integrative curriculum architecture echoes the principles advocated in the international literature on professional military education reform, which underscores the need to bridge the divide between leadership education and tactical-technical training (Syme-Taylor and Jalili, 2018; NATO, 2023; Kerr and Robinson, 2024).

3.2.3 Organizational Performance Assessment Integration

Normative Requirement: Leadership development institutional sustainability requires embedding authentic leadership behaviors within formal performance evaluation systems. Contemporary RoAF practices continue emphasizing seniority and rank attainment over leadership behavior demonstration.

Implementation Framework: Organizational embedding requires establishment of explicit behavioral metrics assessing self-awareness and ethical decision-making, integration of multi-source feedback into formal performance review processes, and annual performance evaluation assessment of leadership competency development progress.

Evidence from allied armed forces suggests that performance appraisal systems which explicitly incorporate leadership behaviors, multi-source feedback, and ethical decision-making indicators are more likely to reinforce the desired leadership culture in a durable manner (Mazilu, 2024; RAND Corporation, 2023).

3.3. Professional Military Education System Transformation
3.3.1. Empirical Assessment of Contemporary PME Capacity

Analyses of the Romanian professional military education (PME) system conducted by Mazilu (2024), Nicoară and Pînzariu (2021) and corroborated by comparative PME studies in allied systems (Syme-Taylor and Jalili, 2018; Kerr and Robinson, 2024) indicate that, although authentic leadership development is formally recognized as a strategic objective, significant pedagogical and organizational constraints continue to limit its effective implementation.

Four recurrent constraints emerge consistently from these evaluations:

Pedagogical sequencing fragmentation, whereby leadership-related content is structurally separated from operational and tactical training modules, thereby impeding integrative learning (Syme-Taylor and Jalili, 2018; Kerr and Robinson, 2024).

Reliance on traditional didactic methods, with PME delivery still dominated by expository lectures and case discussions, and limited systematic use of experiential or simulation-based learning (Elkington et al., 2024; Kerr and Robinson, 2024).

Insufficient instructor development in contemporary leadership pedagogy, as highlighted by institutional assessments of faculty qualification and training (Mazilu, 2024).

Underdeveloped formal mentorship structures, where mentoring relationships remain largely informal and lack clear objectives, evaluation mechanisms, and linkage to career development (Morgado and Czarnogursky, 2024; Mazilu, 2024).

3.3.2. Normative Recommendations for Educational Transformation

In light of the empirically documented constraints outlined above, this section formulates a set of normative recommendations aimed at aligning the Romanian PME system with international best practices in leadership development.

Integrated Curriculum Architecture Development

Recommendation: Professional military education curriculum redesign should deliberately integrate authentic leadership principles across all educational levels through cross-disciplinary modules combining military strategy, ethical frameworks, and organizational psychology. Implementation requires establishment of interdisciplinary curriculum development task forces, systematic curriculum review identifying integration points, and development of leadership-integrated case studies derived from documented Romanian military operational experience.

Simulation-Enhanced Learning Capacity Development

Recommendation: Evidence from simulation-enhanced leadership programmes, such as those implemented in the Canadian Armed Forces and other NATO members, suggests that immersive environments can substantially accelerate the development of adaptive and ethically grounded decision-making (NATO, 2022b; Elkington et al., 2024). The proposed three-tier simulation architecture is therefore deliberately aligned with these documented experiences, while being tailored to Romanian institutional realities. Three-tiered escalating simulation capacity involves: tactical decision games enabling immediate decision-making under pressure; operational-level wargaming requiring cross-level coordination; and ethical dilemma simulation presenting morally ambiguous situations. Support infrastructure should incorporate digital after-action review platforms enabling systematic decision review and structured feedback.

Structured Mentorship Program Formalization

Recommendation: Professional military education should incorporate formalized mentorship as integrated developmental mechanism. Implementation requires explicit pairing of junior officers with experienced mentors positioned outside hierarchical chains, formal program governance including written charters and quarterly engagement milestones, and institutional integration of mentorship into career development pathways and personnel evaluation systems.

3.4. Implementation Barriers: Empirical Assessment and Mitigation Pathways
3.4.1. Documented Implementation Obstacles

Organizational Cultural Resilience: Empirical Documentation

As shown in empirical studies of Romanian military organizational culture, deeply rooted norms of hierarchical deference and centralized control continue to shape how authority and responsibility are perceived, often in ways that inhibit delegation and initiative (Nicoară and Pînzariu, 2021; Young, 2021). Young (2021), in particular, documents a persistent reluctance among mid-level commanders to delegate decision-making authority, even when doctrine explicitly encourages mission command practices.

Institutional Manifestation: Minimal substantive operational implementation of formally endorsed mission command principles; retention of centralized approval authority for theoretically delegated tactical decisions; reluctance to recognize and reward subordinate initiative.

Material Resource Constraints: Empirical Documentation

Analyzed defence budgetary sources provide comprehensive empirical documentation of fiscal limitations constraining implementation. Romanian defence budgets must distribute across operational readiness, equipment modernization, and personnel remuneration, with leadership development competing against higher-prioritized requirements. Specialized leadership development infrastructure requires substantial capital investment; documented research indicates implementation necessitates not only hardware/software acquisition but also comprehensive instructor training and scenario development.

Institutional Manifestation: Pilot programs remaining limited in scale; simulation-based training remaining episodic rather than integrated; mentorship programs remaining informal without resource allocation.

Organizational Bureaucratic Inertia: Empirical Documentation

Analyzed institutional sources document substantial inertia constraining rapid policy reform. Personnel policy modifications require navigation through multiple hierarchical authorization layers within Romanian military bureaucratic structures. Career progression systems historically emphasizing seniority reward stability over demonstrated adaptability, generating individual disincentives toward adoption of practices carrying short-term operational risk despite long-term strategic value (Young, 2021; Mazilu, 2024).

Institutional Manifestation: Slow pace of organizational policy reform implementation; persistence of seniority-emphasizing personnel practices; multiple approval layers delaying innovations.

Superficial Institutional Adoption Risk: Empirical Documentation

NATO multinational operations research documents empirical risk that formally adopted initiatives remain cosmetic rather than transformative. Documented instances reveal organizations formally endorsing mission command doctrine while maintaining substantively centralized operational decision-making. Comparative studies of mission command implementation across NATO members warn that, in the absence of coherent follow-through, reform programmes risk degenerating into merely rhetorical commitments, with formal adoption of new doctrines coexisting alongside unchanged day-to-day practices (Sjogren and Nilsson, 2025; NATO, 2023).

Institutional Manifestation: Apparent organizational commitment unaccompanied by substantive behavioral change; educational innovations implemented without performance evaluation integration; training delivery without follow-up behavioral validation.

3.4.2. Normative Mitigation Strategies

Drawing on the lessons of previous defence transformation efforts in allied armed forces, and on the change-management literature in military organizations, the following mitigation strategies are proposed as context-sensitive but evidence-informed options for the Romanian Armed Forces (Trent, 2019; Montgomery, 2022; NATO, 2023).

Cultural Change Management Strategy

Recommendation: Addressing cultural resistance requires deliberate, multi-level change management emphasizing visible senior leadership commitment and institutional dialogue. Implementation pathway includes senior leadership role-modeling wherein command hierarchy's highest levels publicly demonstrate authentic leadership behaviors, signaling organizational commitment; cross-rank leadership forums enabling candid organizational discussion; and multinational military exchanges facilitating exposure to divergent leadership practices.

Targeted Resource Allocation Strategy

Recommendation: Overcoming material constraints requires strategic external funding identification and institutional budget prioritization. Experience from other Eastern European defence institutions suggests that targeted use of NATO Defence Capacity Building funds and EU security instruments can play a catalytic role in modernizing training infrastructure, including simulation capabilities and digital learning platforms (KPMG, 2025; NATO, 2023); phased technology implementation progressing from tactical decision games toward sophisticated operational-level wargaming; and academic institution partnerships providing faculty resources and technology development support.

Personnel Policy Reform and Incentive Realignment

Recommendation: Addressing bureaucratic inertia requires systematic personnel policy reform streamlining decision-making and deliberately realigning organizational incentive structures. Implementation pathway includes promotion criteria modernization incorporating demonstrated authentic leadership behaviors as equivalent-weight advancement factors; performance evaluation integration of multi-source feedback and authentic leadership metrics with explicit career advancement linkage; and institutional incentive restructuring creating explicit recognition mechanisms rewarding authentic leadership practice and moral courage.

Implementation Validation and Organizational Learning Assurance

Recommendation: Mitigating superficial adoption risk requires explicit mechanisms ensuring formally adopted policies generate substantive behavioral change. Implementation pathway includes longitudinal leadership development tracking enabling career trajectory assessment and sustained behavioral change measurement; organizational climate survey integration measuring personnel perception of leadership authenticity and empowerment experience; and organizational learning center establishment coordinating leadership research, training innovation assessment, and policy feedback generation.

3.5. Strategic Policy Recommendations: Institutional Change Architecture
3.5.1. Formal Military Leadership Development Doctrine Establishment

Recommendation: The Romanian Armed Forces should develop formal institutional doctrine articulating philosophical foundation, core principles, and competency requirements for military leadership at all hierarchical levels. Doctrine should integrate the three pillars introduced earlier into coherent framework aligned with NATO standards. Institutional specification includes definitional specification of core leadership behavioral expectations across career progression stages, explicit competency benchmarks for leadership positions, and integration guidelines for professional military education, operational exercises, and talent management system alignment.

This approach is consistent with contemporary conceptualizations of military professionalism and authentic leadership, which emphasize the need for coherent, doctrine-level articulation of leadership expectations and competencies (Walumbwa et al., 2008; ADP 6-22, 2019; NATO, 2023).

3.5.2. Professional Military Education Comprehensive Modernization

International evaluations of PME reform initiatives underscore that leadership development is most effective when embedded across the full educational continuum, rather than confined to isolated modules or elective courses (Syme-Taylor and Jalili, 2018; RAND Corporation, 2021).

Recommendation: Professional military education transformation should systematically integrate authentic leadership development throughout all educational levels rather than treating leadership as specialized topic. Institutional specification includes cross-level curriculum redesign embedding authentic leadership principles within tactical and technical sequences, systematic pedagogical modernization incorporating scenario-based decision exercises and experiential learning methodologies, and longitudinal mentorship program formalization with explicit objectives and career integration.

3.5.3. Mission Command Operationalization: Daily Practice Integration

Analyses of mission command implementation in NATO highlight that doctrinal endorsement alone is insufficient; sustained changes in exercises, evaluation criteria, and incentive structures are required to translate mission command into lived practice (Sjogren and Nilsson, 2025; NATO, 2022b).

Recommendation: Translating formal mission command doctrine endorsement into substantive organizational practice requires explicit command policy revision and deliberate organizational cultural reinforcement mechanisms. Institutional specification

includes systematic revision of standard operating procedures explicitly authorizing expanded subordinate-level decision-making authority, organizational exercises deliberately designed to test commander-subordinate decision-making boundaries, and institutional recognition systems rewarding instances where empowered subordinate decision-making generated operational effectiveness.

3.5.4. Dedicated Financial Resource Allocation

Recommendation: Ministry of National Defence should establish protected financial resource lines specifically dedicated to leadership development infrastructure, digital platform development, and professional military education instructor modernization. Funding source specification includes NATO Defence Capacity Building Initiative allocation for leadership development, European Defence Fund for training innovation and digital platform development, and bilateral military cooperation programs with allied nations directed toward joint leadership development initiatives.

3.5.5. Performance Evaluation System Modernization

Recommendation: Contemporary talent management systems should incorporate explicit measurement of authentic leadership behavioral demonstration as equivalent-weight advancement criterion. Implementation framework includes integration of multi-source feedback mechanisms into formal performance assessment processes, explicit weighting of ethical decision-making, empowerment effectiveness, and reflective self-awareness as advancement evaluation criteria, and formal documentation of leadership development participation within personnel advancement files.

3.5.6. Organizational Learning and Continuous Research Architecture

Recommendation: Romanian Armed Forces should establish dedicated institutional center responsible for coordinating military leadership research, evaluating training program effectiveness, and generating evidence-based policy recommendations for sustained leadership reform. Institutional function specification includes conducting longitudinal research on leadership development program impact, facilitating academic partnerships with Romanian and allied universities, conducting annual organizational climate surveys, and generating annual reform implementation assessment reports identifying persistent barriers and revised strategic recommendations.

Conclusion

The transformation of leadership within the Romanian Armed Forces (RoAF) is not merely an organizational preference but a strategic necessity. In an era defined by volatile security conditions, hybrid threats, and rapid technological advancements, leadership effectiveness directly correlates with operational readiness and the capacity to adapt in real time to unpredictable challenges.

This analysis indicates that authentic leadership, operationalised through the three pillars of self-awareness, moral integrity, and empowerment, offers a coherent and operationally viable model for leadership development in the RoAF. Drawing on validated theoretical frameworks (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Lindsay & Woycheshin, 2014) and empirical evidence from Romanian and allied military contexts, the research has shown that authentic leadership strengthens trust, fosters initiative, and aligns ethical conduct with mission success.

JFS

Leadership transformation within the Romanian armed forces: institutional pathways towards sustainable professional growth

The proposed Organizational Management Framework for Sustainable Professional Growth integrates these pillars into talent management, professional military education, and operational culture. This integration is designed to ensure that leadership development is not a stand-alone training initiative but an embedded element of the RoAF's institutional architecture. The framework also recognises that leadership development must be synchronised with broader defence modernisation efforts to maintain coherence and strategic alignment.

However, as the analysis in Sections 8 and 9 has made clear, the transition to this model faces substantial obstacles - most notably, entrenched hierarchical traditions, fiscal limitations, bureaucratic inertia, and the risk of superficial adoption. Overcoming these requires sustained commitment from senior leadership, targeted resource allocation, and cultural change initiatives that reach beyond rhetorical commitments.

The strategic recommendations outlined in this study provide a practicable roadmap for narrowing the gap between aspiration and practice. They also position the RoAF to better fulfil its NATO commitments and enhance its role in regional security, particularly in the context of the alliance's 2022 Strategic Concept.

Ultimately, leadership transformation in the RoAF is a long-term process rather than a rapid change. It demands a phased, integrated approach that aligns policy, practice, and culture over the long term. If implemented rigorously, the measures proposed here can support the development of leaders who are tactically and technically proficient, adaptive, ethically grounded, and capable of fostering trust and initiative at all levels of command. Such leaders are indispensable for ensuring that the Romanian Armed Forces remain a credible, resilient, and forward-looking component of Euro-Atlantic security in the decades ahead.

References

[1] Barfod, J. R., and Clifton, J. (2025) 'Is Transformational Military Leadership Out There? An Exploratory Research Study of Military Teams in Action', *Armed Forces & Society*, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X241309327.

[2] Bodescu, A. (2024) 'Professional Military Ethics. The Essential Foundation For Educating Future Officers In Law of Armed Conflict', *Land Forces Academy Review*, 29(4), pp. 444-458. https://doi.org/10.2478/raft-2024-0047.

[3] Bordea, S. D. (2024) 'Study on the Threats, Vulnerabilities and Risks of the Transformation of the Romanian Army from the Perspective of Defence Resource Management', *International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI – The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment*, Volume I, pp. 37-52.

[4] Bucăța, G. (2024) 'Provocările managementului organizațional militar în contextul conflictului din Ucraina', *Gândirea Militară Românească*, nr. 2, pp. 176-195. DOI 10.55535/GMR.2024.2.11.

[5] Bucăța, G., and Andrei, C. (2024) 'The Impact of Leadership and Management Changes on the Military Organization', *Land Forces Academy Review*, 29, pp. 459-472. DOI 10.2478/raft-2024-0048.

[6] De Cock, C. (2024) 'Rules of Engagement in Large-Scale Combat Operations: Force Enabler or Much Ado About Nothing?', *Lieber Institute West Point*, available at

https://lieber.westpoint.edu/rules-engagement-large-scale-combat-operations-force-enabler-much-ado-nothing/, (Accessed: 24 August 2025).

[7] Duțu, P. (2005) 'Impactul integrării în Alianța Nord-Atlantică asupra managementului resurselor umane din Armata României', *Centrul de Studii Strategice de Apărare și Securitate, Universitatea Națională de Apărare*, București. ISBN 973-663-167-2.

[8] Elkington, R., Ruttenberg-Rozen, R. and Worthington, N. (2024) 'The use of META (virtual simulations) in Canadian junior military leadership development', *Journal of Leadership Education*, 9 April 2025, 24 (1), pp. 65–83. doi:10.1108/jole-02-2024-0037.

[9] Eualive.net (2025) *Rearm Romania: Modernising an Army amid a 9.3% Deficit and Geopolitical Perils*, available at: https://eualive.net/rearm-romania-modernising-an-army-amid-a-9-3-deficit-and-geopolitical-perils/ (Accessed: 24 August 2025).

[10] Guldahl Cooper, C. (2020) 'NATO Rules of Engagement', *International Humanitarian Law Series*, vol. 57, pp. 25-88, available at https://brill.com/display/title/55119.

[11] Guvernul României (2021) '*Strategia Militară a României din 11 august 2021. Capacitatea defensivă credibilă, pentru o Românie sigură, într-o lume marcată de noi provocări',* Monitorul Oficial nr. 781 din 13 august 2021.

[12] JDP 0-01 (2022) UK Defence Doctrine (6th ed.). London: *UK Ministry of Defence*.

[13] Kerr, L. M., and Robinson, J. P. (2024) 'Leveranging Learning in Operational Environments', *International Perspectives on Military Education*, vol. 1.

[14] KPMG (2025) *Romanian defense market. Opportunities and challenges*. Future Directions, Growth Potential, and Strategic Partnerships.

[15] Labarre, F., and Jolicoeur, P. (2016) 'Shaping and measuring military culture development: a case study of the defence education enhancement program', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 22 (2), pp. 135–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2016.1204929

[16] Lindsay, D.R. and Woycheshin, D. (2014) '*Adaptive Leadership in the Military Context',* Ottawa: Canadian Defence Academy Press.

[17] Liseanu, R. (2023) 'The Modern Military Leadership – The Anchor of Organizational Culture in the Contemporary World', *Land Forces Academy Review*, vol. 28, no. 2, Sciendo, pp. 80-87. https://doi.org/10.2478/raft-2023-0011.

[18] Manolache, I. C. (2025) 'Challenges at National Level Regarding Enhanced Military Mobility Capacity in the Framework of Implementing the Multi-Domain Operations Concept', *Proceedings Strategies XXI – International Scientific Conference the Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment 21st Edition*, pp. 158-169.

[19] Mazilu, E. A. (2024) 'Methods for Modernizing the Human Resources of the Armed Forces', *International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI – The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment*. Volume I, pp. 53-60.

[20] Ministerul Apărării Naționale (2007) 'Strategia de Transformare a Armatei României', România, București.

[21] Montgomery, C. L. (2022) 'Operationalizing Talent Management', *Army Sustainment*, available at

https://www.army.mil/article/259624/operationalizing_talent_management (Accessed: 24 August 2025).

[22]   Morgado, A. and Czarnogursky, M. A. (2024) 'The Science, Art, and Practice of Mentorship. Making Army Techniques Publication 6-22.1 Come Alive', *MILITARY REVIEW ONLINE EXCLUSIV*, available at https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2024-OLE/Mentorship/, (Accessed: 24 August 2025).

[23]   Mujkic, E., Asencio, H. D., & Byrne, T. (2018) 'International Military Education and Training: Promoting Democratic Values to Militaries and Countries throughout the World', *Democracy and Security*, 15(3), 271–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2018.1519802.

[24]   NATO Allied Command Transformation (2021) '*NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC)',* Norfolk, Virginia, USA: ACT.

[25]   NATO (2022a) 'Leader Development for NATO Multinational Military Operations', *STO TECHNICAL REPORT TR-HFM-286*.

[26]   NATO (2022b) 'Strategic Concept'. Brussels*: NATO Publishing*.

[27]   NATO (2023) 'Leadership Agility in NATO Forces: Guidelines and Best Practices'. Brussels: *NATO Publishing*.

[28]   Nicoară, G.F. and Pînzariu, S.G. (2021) 'Considerations Regarding the Location and the Role of Organizational Culture in the Romanian Military Environment', *Land Forces Academy Review*, 26(1), pp. 55-61. https://doi.org/10.2478/raft-2021-0009.

[29]   Northouse, P.G. (2021) 'Leadership: Theory and Practice'. 9th edn. Thousand Oaks: *Sage Publications*.

[30]   Pepperdine University (2025) 'Strategic military readiness: navigating knowledge management in the United States Army', *Theses and Dissertations*. White, Blaine Andra, 1594. available at: https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd/1594 (Accessed: 24 August 2025).

[31]   RAND Corporation (2021) *'Making the Grade. Integration of Joint Professional Military Education and Talent Management in Developing Joint Officers'*, Available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA473-1.html, (Accessed: 22 August 2025).

[32]   RAND Corporation (2023) *'Imagining the Future of Professional Military Education in the United States'*, Available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CFA2148-1.html, (Accessed: 22 August 2025).

[33]   Sjogren, S. and Nilsson, N. (2025) 'Multinational Mission Command: From Paper to Practice in NATO', *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 8(1), p. 89–103.

[34]   Solis, G.D. (2010) 'Rules of Engagement', In: *The Law of Armed Conflict: International Humanitarian Law in War*. Cambridge University Press; pp. 490-518, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/law-of-armed-conflict/rules-of-engagement/9E765BFF06A4D113768541EB80259FEC.

[35]   Stanciu, C. O. and Bichir, R. Ș. (2022) ,Particularities of Control in the Romanian Army', *International Scientific Conference STRATEGIES XXI*, 18 (1), pp. 345-351, DOI: 10.53477/2971-8813-22-41.

[36]   Syme-Taylor, V., and Jalili, D. (2018) ,Professional Military Education', In: *Routledge Handbook of Defence Studies 1st Edition*, Routledge, Edited Galbreath, D.J., and Deni, J.R., https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315650463,

[37]   Teixeira, J., Pais, L., dos Santos, N. R., and de Sousa, B. (2024) ,Empowering Leadership in the Military: Pros and Cons', *Merits*, 4(4), 346-369. https://doi.org/10.3390/merits4040026.

[38]   The Havok Journal (2024) '*Why vulnerability is essential to authentic leadership'*, Available at: https://havokjournal.com/culture/military/why-vulnerability-is-essential-to-authentic-leadership/ (Accessed: 22 August 2025).

[39]   Troy, J. (2024) 'Ethics as Moral Practice in Peacekeeping Missions: Insights on the Importance of Ethical Training', *International Peacekeeping*, 31(3), 309–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2024.2305901.

[40]   U.S. Army (2019) 'ADP 6-0: Mission Command - Command and Control of Army Forces'. *Washington, DC: Department of the Army*.

[41]   U.S. Army (2019) 'ADP 6-22: Army Leadership and the Profession'. *Washington, DC: Department of the Army*.

[42]   U.S. Army (2022) 'FM 6-22: DEVELOPING LEADERS', Washington, DC: Department of the Army.

[43]   U.S. Army Combined Arms Center (2015) '*Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond'*, Department of the Army.

[44]   Trent, T. J. (2019) '*Talent Management. A Contemporary Issue Facing the Army'*. U.S. Army Regional Cyber Center – CONUS, available at https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2019/February/Talent-Management/, (Accessed: 22 August 2025).

[45]   Walumbwa, F.O., Avolio, B.J., Gardner, W.L., Wernsing, T.S. and Peterson, S.J. (2008) 'Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure', *Journal of Management*, 34(1), pp. 89–126, https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307308913.

[46]   Young, T. D. (2021) 'How to Defend Romania?: Identifying Legacy and Institutional Impediments', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 70(1), pp. 94–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2021.1917426.