

CONCEPTUALISING AUTHENTIC MILITARY LEADERSHIP FOR ADAPTIVE DECISION-MAKING IN VOLATILE, UNCERTAIN, COMPLEX, AND AMBIGUOUS ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

Contemporary military operations in contested, multi-domain environments demand leadership frameworks that integrate ethical discipline with operational agility. This study synthesises authentic leadership theory with adaptive decision-making doctrinal frameworks to address a significant theoretical gap: the absence of a unified model linking relational and moral authenticity to accelerated decision cycles within volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) contexts.

Through systematic integration of peer-reviewed scholarship (2010–2025), NATO doctrinal guidance, and empirical research on leadership resilience and simulation-enabled training, the researcher develops the Integrated Authentic–Adaptive Leadership Model (IAALM). The analysis reveals that core authentic behaviours - principled transparency, balanced information processing, and relational clarity - serve as catalysts for decentralised initiative and rapid learning cycles characteristic of mission command. Three mediating mechanisms - psychological safety, interpersonal trust, and shared operational understanding - constitute the pathway through which moral anchoring translates into tactical tempo without eroding legal-ethical compliance.

The IAALM demonstrates that units cultivating psychological safety and trust relationships achieve faster situational understanding and disciplined risk calibration under uncertainty. Institutionalisation mechanisms include doctrine-aligned training methodologies, mentorship frameworks, structured reflection cycles, and extended-reality (XR) simulations. The model provides scalable policy guidance for NATO and national militaries seeking to prepare leaders who sustain both ethical resilience and decision velocity in contemporary operational contexts.

Keywords

Authentic leadership; Mission command; Adaptive decision-making; VUCA; NATO doctrine; Psychological safety; XR training; Resilience.

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