

Mapping Military Leadership Competencies: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: Leadership is a complex, dynamic phenomenon, shaped by the characteristics of the different actors involved and the relationships between them, making it a controversial and polysemic concept in the literature. In the military context, it has very specific characteristics that distinguish it and make it more demanding. For the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA), several reforms are underway, fundamentally in the field of staff training, in order to improve their performance in the exercise of their functions. The present study was driven by the following guiding question: “what military leadership competencies are described in the selected literature to be taken as a reference to the education and training of Angolan sub-officers?” For this, a systematic literature review on leadership competencies in the military context was conducted based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) method, divided into three phases: identification, screening, and inclusion. Studies were consulted on Scopus, Science Direct, SciELO and in the Open Access Scientific Repository of Portugal (RCAAP), published between January 2018 and April 2023, according to the selected inclusion and exclusion criteria. The evidences of this study highlights that military leadership competencies mobilise, integrate and transfer a range of knowledge, resources, skills and values that systematically operate to solving the problems of the military professional context, and points to three different approaches to military leadership competencies, that configure three models.

Keywords: Leadership, Military leadership, Military leadership competencies, Approaches to military leadership competencies, Systematic literature review, PRISMA

1. Introduction

Leadership is a social need, generally viewed as directly related to the leader's influence on his followers, with a view to achieve a shared vision through a communication process (Toumbeva *et al.*, 2021). Thus, leadership presupposes an ethical and responsible posture of the leader for the achievement of results (Gonçalves, 2021). In the literature, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of the phenomenon of leadership, since there are many definitions, as well as many authors who study it and give it different approaches (Bass and Stogdill, 1990). Meanwhile, many studies have been published on the phenomenon, criticizing the traditional and conservative focus of the ‘myth of the great man’, focusing on the individual and proposing new categories of analysis (Calvosa and Ferreira, 2023; Henderikx and Stoffers, 2022).

According to Souza and Wood Jr (2022);

the notion of the leader's identity seems incapable of dealing with the growing complexity inside and outside organizations, leading theorists and professionals to seek alternative lenses [...] that consider the relational aspects of leadership, which depend less on the figure of the leader and more on the context and relationships between individuals, as a process co-created in social relationships.

These same authors argue that leadership studies are conducted according to three theoretical lenses, namely: focus on the leader (me), focus on the followers (them) and focus on the collective (us) and they organize leadership theories on this basis (Souza and Wood Jr, 2022). From this perspective, it is possible to analyse leadership from a micro level (such as individual characteristics) to a macro level focused on the collective processes and results of leadership.

In the military context, in addition to the afore-mentioned characteristics, leadership takes on new elements, specific to the context, such as: high complexity, the high level of stress, constant changing environment, with emphasis on crisis contexts (Metwally and Ruiz-Palomino, 2022), extreme violence and constant risk of life, with serious consequences on the psycho-emotional and physical health of the military (Trachik *et al.*, 2020), putting the commander and subordinates in interaction, through a communication process (Tchivela, 2020), for the fulfilment of the mission (Mandele, 2019). Thus, the characteristics of the leaders and the followers, as well as the context make leadership assume different styles (Sakato, 2021).

The FAA is conducting internal reforms, mainly in the field of infrastructure, equipment and staff training. The latter is our focus of interest, in order to improve their performance in the exercise of their functions. Thus, the present study was driven by the following guiding question: “what military leadership competencies do Officers of the FAA need in order to achieve high levels of performance in the exercise of their functions?” This question is fragmented into the following objectives:

- To define leadership competencies in the military context, based on the selected literature,
- To characterize different approaches to leadership competencies in the military context and,
- To identify military leadership competencies in the selected literature.

A search for systematic literature reviews in the international prospective register of systematic reviews (PROSPERO) and COCHRANE databases reveal the absence of records within the scope of the present review. The search through the RCAAP, SciELO, Science Direct and Scopus databases also revealed the scarcity of systematic reviews that answer the starting question of this review. Accordingly, we found this work original and necessary due to its relevance, the period of time covered, and also for contributing to the construction of the theoretical body to support the ongoing doctoral research, allowing an overview of the problem that would not be possible through individual studies, as well as enabling the identification of the need for future research (Page *et al.*, 2021). This way, it seems is essential to enable political and military decision-makers to take the results of this review into consideration within the framework of defence and security policies.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

In order to achieve the objectives formulated and thus answer the starting question we made a systematic literature review, of qualitative analysis, based on the PRISMA method, divided into three phases: identification, screening and inclusion of studies (Page *et al.*, 2021; Vilelas, 2020; Shamseer *et al.*, 2015). Thus, documents published between January 2018 and April 2023 were consulted in the databases Repository of Open Access Science of Portugal (RCAAP – Acronym in Portuguese), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Science Direct and Scopus. The research and analysis was carried out between March and October 2023.

2.2 Selection Criteria

To guide and limit the search, we defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, as in Table 1.

Table 1: Selection criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Type of documents: Articles, theses, dissertations, book chapters and communications at conferences with blind peer review. Time of publications: published between January 2018 and April 2023. Languages: Portuguese, Spanish, English and French. Subjects: Social Sciences, Psychology, Decision Sciences, Neurosciences, Business, Management and Accounting and Arts and Humanities.	Protocols, duplicate documents, Studies with unavailable full texts or in languages other than those selected for inclusion, or with a different focus.

Source: Research data

2.3 Search Strategy

We applied different search strategies by database, accordingly with their characteristics, as in Table 2.

Table 2: Search strategies by database

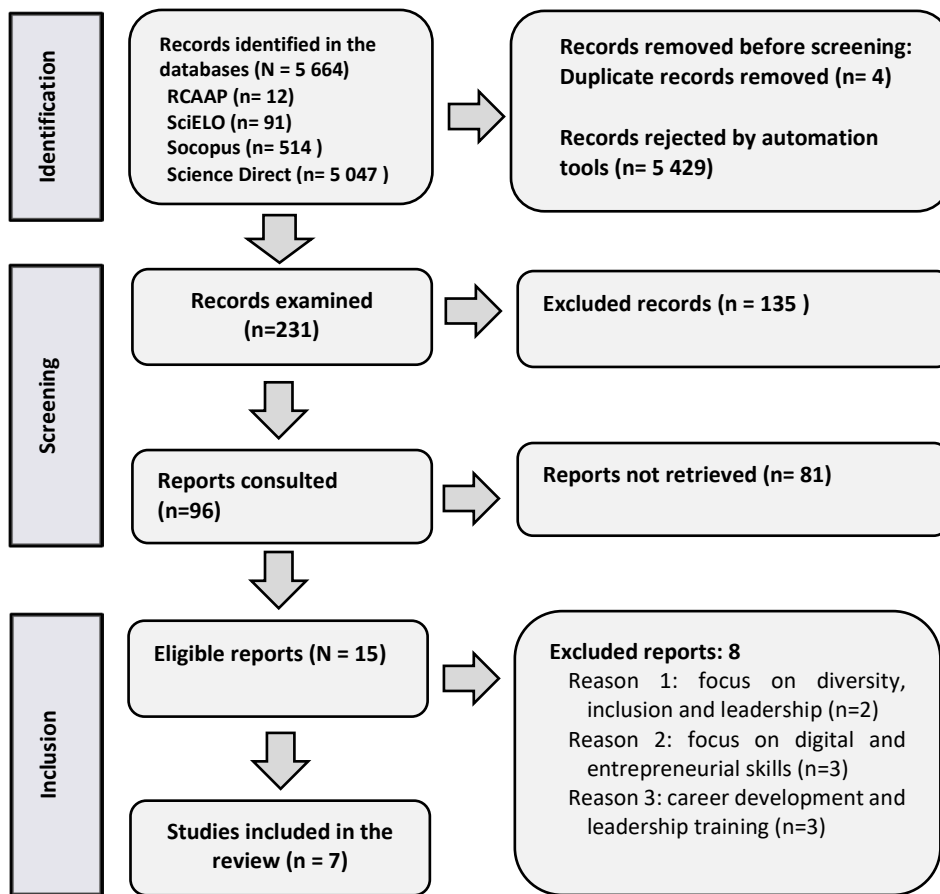
Nº	Databases	Search strategy
1	RCAAP	“Military leadership competencies” AND “2018-2023” AND “books” AND “conference papers” AND “PhD Theses” AND “articles” AND “Master’s Dissertations” AND “Portuguese” AND “English” AND “Spanish” AND “French”.
2	SciELO	“Military leadership competencies” AND “January 2018 to April 2023” AND “Portuguese” AND “French”.
3	Science Direct	“Military leadership competencies” OR “military leadership skills” AND “2018-2023” AND “articles” (review and research) AND “book chapters” AND “Social Sciences” AND “Business, Management and Accounting” AND “Decision Sciences” AND “Psychology” AND “Open access and archive”.

4	Scopus	“Military leadership competencies” OR “military leadership skills” AND “2018-2023” AND “Social Sciences” AND “Business, Management and Accounting” AND “Arts and Humanities” AND “Psychology” AND “Decision Sciences” AND “Neurosciences” AND “articles” AND “book chapters” AND “conference or review articles” AND “final stage of publication” AND “Portuguese” AND “English”.
5	PROSPERO	“Military leadership competencies” AND “Revision” AND “2018-2023”.
6	OSF	“Military leadership competencies” AND “Revision” AND “2018-2023”

Source: Research data

3. Results

The process of identification, screening and inclusion of studies can be best observed in the PRISMA flow chart below (Figure 1). And, the studies included for the review are presented below in Table 3.



Source: Research data.

Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart regarding the selection of studies

The search in RCAAP and then in SciELO brought up the term military leadership skills, in addition to military leadership competencies, as previously defined, which led us to adopt this descriptor in the searches in the following databases (Science Direct and Scopus). Research data point to the scarcity of literature review studies on the guiding question of this research, and particularly in the context of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA).

The review produced evidence that highlights interesting studies published in the context of the Armed Forces of Portugal, Mozambique, Brazil, Norway, Finland and the USA, in addition to Sweden, Indonesia, South Africa, Canada and the United Kingdom whose studies were excluded for the reasons already mentioned.

The research illustrates the broad interest and production in this area of study by Psychological Sciences (Boe and Torgersen, 2018), Management Sciences (Häyrynen and Läms, 2021; Neves, 2022), Military Sciences (Montez, 2021; Neves, 2022), Political Sciences (Arnold, Chatagnier and Hollibaugh, 2020), Social Sciences (Reis

and Zucco, 2020) and Education Sciences (Muirequetule and Machado, 2018) emphasizing different aspects from leadership competencies in the military context.

Table 3: Studies included for qualitative analysis

Nº	Author (Date)	Country	Sample	Study design	Main results and conclusions	Disciplinary area
1	(Muirequetule and Machado, 2018)	Mozambique	10 military leaders, 18 AMMSM graduates	Transversal. Qualitative (focus group) and document analysis.	Need for greater articulation between the initial training plan and the professional exercise plan, since the finalists of the Marechal Samora Machel Military Academy (AMMSM) have difficulty in developing command and leadership skills. They only develop them in the performance of their duties.	Education Sciences
2	(Boe and Torgersen, 2018)	Norway	4 high level leaders and 10 low level leaders	Cross-sectional. Qualitative. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis.	Lack of a general understanding of strategic leadership competencies (SLC); Need to improve SLC in order to develop consequent actions for its development.	Psychology
3	(Arnold, Chatagnier and Hollibaugh, 2020)	USA	Not observed	Biographical study (100 commanders) and doc. analysis of 250 battles of the American Civil War	Focusing on the relationship between military appointments and battlefield outcomes allows direct examination of the relationship between appointee characteristics and organisational performance (...) with implications for the study of conflict and bureaucratic politics.	Political Science
4	(Reis and Zucco, 2020)	Brazil	3 Female Officers, Directors of Military Org.	Biographical study	The interviewees' leadership highlighted their characteristics, developed throughout their lives and enhanced (or acquired) in the exercise of command.	Social Sciences
5	(Montez, 2021)	Portugal	265 participants: 117 Cadets and 148 Lieutenants	Longitudinal. Quantitative methods. Competencies survey	The more academic and professional skills, the more the cadets reveal greater self-confidence in performing their tasks on the path to excellence, which is fundamental in performing their duties as future commanders.	Military Sciences
6	(Häyrynen and Läms, 2021)	Finland	15 Female Officers	Longitudinal. Qualitative, through interviews with participants in a training programme, carried out at 3 moments.	The current leadership model for effective leadership in the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF) would benefit especially from the addition of an intrapersonal leadership competence dimension, to better take women's needs into consideration. By making the female point of view visible and acknowledging women's views, new resources can be created for military organizations.	Human Resource Management
7	(Neves, 2022)	Portugal	370 military personnel	Cross-sectional. Quantitative	The importance of orientation towards the development of harmonious and collaborative relationships, towards the process inherent in the leader him/herself, with emphasis on the ability to make decisions in a fair, ethical manner and correspond to the commitments made.	Business Sciences

Source: Own elaboration of the research data.

The data also points to the authors' emphasis on qualitative methodologies for the study of leadership competencies, with a strong preference for documentary analysis, focus groups and biographical studies.

Among the results, the tendency for cadets not to develop the expected leadership competencies is emphasised, if not in the performance of their functions, once they have been assigned to a post (Muirequitule and Machado, 2018).

Of the studies on leadership in the military context, two perspectives stand out: the one that associates military leadership with military command (Muirequetule and Machado, 2018) and the one that associates it with management, understanding the military leader as a manager of himself, his collaborators and the task (Neves, 2022).

Although the evidence from our study shows a tendency for studies to consider military leadership as a hierarchical, unidirectional process, centred on the figure of the commander-leader who exercises vertical authority over subordinates (Command, Control and Communication), contrary to the current trend of collective leadership (Souza and Wood Jr, 2023), the analysis of the military leadership competencies models point to a tendency to adopt more participatory leadership practices committed to involving all the players in the decision-making process (Montez, 2021; Häyrynen and Läms, 2021; Neves, 2022).

Of the seven studies included for the review, only three presented more rigorous data to answer the starting question, even presenting models of military leadership competencies that can be adapted to different professional contexts, with the necessary precautions. The same models seem to emphasise what were considered, at least from the researchers' perspective, to be needs for change in their military professional contexts. Moreover, the differences in the prevalence of answers to the items denotes the degree of importance that participants assigned to them in their answers (See Tables 4, 5 and 6).

Table 4: Military leadership competencies for the Portuguese Army

TYPOLOGY OF COMPETENCES			
Personal/Cognitive	Social	Functional	Organisational
DOMAIN OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES			
Of oneself	Of relationships with others	Of work, activities and tasks	Of management
Courage	Participative leadership	Decision-making	Vision
Self-confidence	Interpersonal relationships	Ability to solve problems	Conflict management
Self-control	Leadership by delegation	Technical and professional aptitude	Task orientation
Flexibility and adaptability	Influence by example		
Determination and perseverance	Openness to multiculturalism		
Optimism and enthusiasm	Empathy		
Consideration	Recognition, positive feedback and appreciation		
Transparency	Communication		
Proactivity	Assertiveness		
	Team work		
	Developing others		
	Orientation towards human relations		

Source: Montez (2021).

Häyrynen and Läms (2021), proposed the model of military leadership competencies and corresponding sub-competencies (Table 5) that address the specificity of the military profession, in the Finnish Armed Forces.

Table 5: Military leadership competencies for the Finnish Armed Forces.

Core competency category	Sub-competencies
Intrapersonal competence	Self-esteem
	Self-confidence
	Own leadership style
Emotional intelligence competence	Taking others into account
	Self-expression
	Patience
	Self-awareness
Social competence	Relationship skills
	Coping with and learning from diversity
	Motivating others
	Organizational skills
	Sense of proportion
Pedagogical competence	General training and teaching skill
	Presentation skills
	Directing others
Technical competence	Professional skills

Source: Häyrynen and Läms (2021).

More recently, another model of military leadership competencies was proposed for the Portuguese Armed Forces (Table 6).

Table 6: Military leadership competencies for the Portuguese Armed Forces

Leading Organization (LORG)	Leading Others (LOTH)	Leading Yourself (LYOUR)
Sound judgement	Forging synergy	Credibility
Influencing leadership	Inspiring commitment	Resiliency
Getting information, Making sense of it; Problem identification	Leading employees	Coping with pressure and adversity; Integrity
Results orientation	Employee development	Composure
Change management	Building collaborative relationships	Self-awareness
Strategic planning	Respect for differences	Balancing personal life & work
Administrative/Organizational ability	Engaged management	Leadership stature
Being a quick learner	Confronting problem employees	Adaptability
Risk-taking, Innovation	Managing conflict; Negotiation	Seeks opportunities to learn
Human resources	Developing & empowering	Learning through others
Strategic perspective	Compassion & sensitivity	Taking initiative
Acting systemically	Participative management	Energy, Drive, Ambition

Source: Neves (2022).

4. Discussion

4.1 Definition of Leadership Competencies in the Military Context

The literature suggests that leadership is a psychosocial phenomenon, which develops in different ways according to the sociocultural contexts (Kawano, 2019). In this way, as a co-creation phenomenon, leaders and followers imprint their own characteristics on this phenomenon, in their process of socio-professional interaction, causing it to acquire its own characteristics and style (Sakato, 2021).

It is noted that while leadership in a business context aims at profit maximization, in a military context leadership aims at successful mission accomplishment, which has implications for social and political stability (Rehardiningtyas, Firdaus and Sulistyanto, 2022). According to (Arnold, Chatagnier and Hollibaugh, 2020), in military operations successful mission accomplishment mainly implies victory and as few casualties as possible. In fact "historians and military strategists have long recognized the critical role of leadership in determining battlefield outcomes" (Arnold, Chatagnier and Hollibaugh, 2020, p.194).

According to the data, military leadership consists of the ability to influence and guide followers (collaborators) to perform tasks in order to accomplish the assigned mission. However, military leadership fulfils several functions. Among them we highlight: influence, direct guide, command and enforce military dictates (Muirequetule and Machado, 2018). In military leadership, the element of influence stands out due to the professional culture of loyalty, discipline and hierarchy (Rehardiningtyas, Firdaus and Sulistyanto, 2022).

Being the expression of legal authority, military leadership is exercised in accordance with authority and power delegated by law to a commander to influence, coordinate and control the forces and means at his disposal (Muirequetule and Machado, 2018). Military leadership, according to this author, citing Rouco (2012) is only one part of military command, since "military command at all levels is the art of making decisions, leading, motivating, directing and controlling military forces in the accomplishment of missions". Thus, in a military context, the action of leading and the action of commanding seem deeply interconnected and interdependent.

The evidence seems to indicate a diversity of interpretations about authors conceptions of how military leadership manifests itself. For some of them it is manifested through skills or ability (Reis and Zucco, 2020; Häyrynen and Läms, 2021), giving rise to the keywords "military leadership skills". For other authors, leadership is expressed through competencies (Muirequetule and Machado, 2018; Montez, 2021; Neves, 2022) giving rise to the term "military leadership competencies". There are still some who had seen it as proficiency, from where the term military leadership proficiency comes from (Boe, 2015).

Based on the notion of skill, some authors argue that military leadership is expressed through certain skills. In this sense, they understand military leadership skills, as the ability to exercise power to influence, guide and motivate their followers, according to a task (Reis and Zucco, 2020; Gonçalves, 2021; Häyrynen and Läms, 2021).

Others authors understand military leadership from the concept of competency. Thus, according to Neves, (2022) competence translates the operationalization of knowledge, skills and values mobilized to solve problems. According to the same author, the understanding of this concept has evolved since its introduction in the business environment by), as an aptitude to accomplish tasks (McClelland, 1973). In view of globalization, the growth of competitiveness among organizations and the need for qualified labour, assumed as human resources gives rise to the model of human resource management based on competencies (Neves, 2022). Accordingly, the author agrees with Özçelik and Ferman (2006), that these soon were combined to the results obtained by the professionals, giving rise to the performance management model based on the definition of competencies. Thus, competencies are defined to raise the professionals' performance levels.

Competencies are the expression of the modes of professional performance, in a given context. Thus, it assumes three perspectives of analysis: competencies of the person (micro level), competencies of the collective (meso level) and competencies of the organisation (macro level), as pointed by Cunha and Rego (2012).

Based on this notion of professional contexts, military leadership starts from the personal competencies developed and complemented with those worked on during military training and professional experience in the performance of functions (Reis and Zucco, 2020; Häyrynen and Läms, 2021).

Rehardiningtyas, Firdaus and Sulistyanto (2022) understand competence as an individual's ability to solve a problem, through a combination of knowledge, skills and abilities. Accordingly, these competencies are widely used and integrated in all management functions such as planning, policy making, implementation and monitoring. From this point of view, they argue that military leadership should follow the same model. However, in the military context, there is still much dispersion in the perception of military leadership competencies, as argued by Boe and Torgersen (2018).

The perspective of Neves (2020) agrees with Fleury and Fleury (2001, p.187) who define competence as,

set of social and communicational learning processes nurtured upstream by learning and training and downstream by the assessment system. [...] it is knowing how to act responsibly and that is recognised by others. It involves knowing how to mobilise, integrate and transfer knowledge, resources and skills in a specific professional context. They are always contextualised

Military Leadership competencies mobilise, integrate and transfer a range of knowledge, resources, skills and values that systematically operate to solving the problems of the military professional context (Neves, 2022; Montez, 2021).

Others see military leadership from the concept of proficiency. Thus, they argue that leadership proficiency derives from personal proficiency, social proficiency and subject matter proficiency, understood as the military subject matter and which results in the Officer's competency (Boe, 2015). However, it seems that proficiency has more to do with the degree of excellence with which a task is performed than with the ability or competence to carry it out.

In our point of view, the term competency seems more appropriate to describe military leadership since it can easily be operationalised to meet the needs of military education in the academic, ethical, physical and military training dimensions. As Muirequetule and Machado (2018) argue, military leadership competencies do not appear, they are not formed automatically. They are developed through hard work of education and training.

4.2 Approaches to leadership Competencies in the Military Context

Unlike other professional contexts where leadership is more flexible, in military contexts it tends towards ascension and specialisation, within the framework of the development of specific careers and functions (Rehardiningtyas, Firdaus and Sulistyanto, 2022), from a tactical to strategic levels.

The consideration of the meaning of the term leadership competencies in the military context is of paramount importance if we aim to contribute to the Armed Forces Officers achieving high levels of professional performance. It is imperative that the study of leadership competencies in the military context be deepened by considering the models for managing leadership competencies in the military context, starting with the identification of each model item and its meanings and performance criteria. The models raised in the present literature review (Montez, 2021; Häyrynen and Läms, 2021; Neves, 2022), allow us to broaden the understanding of the subject and to analyse its definition and main characteristics of the same competencies.

The evidence from our study points to three different approaches to leadership competencies in a military context, that configure three models, namely:

- Montez's (2021) approach to military leadership competencies, whose elements of analysis are: personal or cognitive competencies, social competencies, functional competencies and organisational competencies, based on the management model of military leadership competencies proposed by (Rouco, 2012) – Table 4;
- The approach to core military leadership competencies and their sub-competencies, proposed by Häyrynen and Läms (2021) – Table 5;
- The approach to military leadership competencies, proposed by (Neves, 2022), according to the model of the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL), in three domains: Leading Organisation, Leading Others and Leading Yourself – Table 6.

The approach to military leadership skills in these three studies is shaped by the authors' training perspective. For example, Montez (2021) in Portugal, from the perspective of the military sciences, emphasises that the more academic and professional skills cadets have, the better they will perform their command duties as sub-officers. Thus, military leadership competencies serve military command. On the other hand, Häyrynen and Läms (2021), from the perspective of Human Resources Management, emphasise the need to take the female staff officers in the Finnish Armed Forces perceptions and add an intrapersonal leadership competence dimension, to better take women's needs into account when designing military leadership models for the same forces. Its emphasis is on personnel management and, more specifically, military career development. Finally, Neves (2022), from the perspective of economic and management sciences, emphasises the need to train cadets to be able to develop harmonious and collaborative relationships in order to lead themselves, others and the organisation. It thus emphasises the figure of the military leader as a manager. However, Neves (2022) seems to ignore the institutional nature of the Armed Forces and that although some management concepts cannot be applied to it, as military leadership has very specific characteristics to the military context, as we have already pointed out, and which distinguish it from leadership in an organisational (business) context.

4.3 Military Leadership Competencies in the Angolan Armed Forces

As the research data indicates, while on the one hand much has been produced and published on military leadership and military leadership competencies at a worldwide level, at a local level, in the Angolan Armed Forces, there are few studies on the phenomenon. However, the evidence suggests that, in a certain sense,

leadership competencies in a military context are defined as the expression of the expectations of the military institution on its personnel, in the confrontation with the training needs identified in each context, giving rise to new designs of military leadership competencies, according to each historical moment, from a more participative perspective between theoreticians and professionals. For example, technological progress, with an emphasis on artificial intelligence and its application in military operations, has raised challenges for the analysis and design of military leadership competencies (Boe and Torgersen, 2018).

While the civilian context looks at professionals as human resources, as human capital, at the service of the capitalisation of the organisations' profits, in the military context, troops are seen as personnel and as a primary and indispensable element for the success of the Armed Forces (Neves, 2022; Ferreira and Nunes, 2021).

The evidence allows us to assert that for the development of competencies, it becomes essential to describe, from the course curriculum, the competencies that are expected to be developed, as the expression of what the trainees will be able to do at the end of that training (Costa, 2023). In this way, the curricular design itself, at the level of the professional's performance model, should describe the competencies that the finalist should show, as a system of knowledge, articulated with the skills and values that they should mobilise to solve the problems of their profession, in the performance of their functions (Costa, 2022).

5. Conclusion

Leadership competencies in a military context consist of the mobilisation of accumulated knowledge, skills, experience and values for the resolution of problems in the military profession. They aim to raise professional performance so that it is successful in any scenario. In this sense, their definition and characterisation, based on a model that integrates the intentions of the Armed Forces' staff and personnel bodies, is of paramount importance to guide their development, in a conscious manner, either through self-directed or institutionally coordinated actions.

In future studies it would be interesting to move on to empirical work, in order to deepen the understanding of the original question. It would also be extremely valuable to study how leadership competencies are developed in a military context, as well as to define the levels of performance that respond to military leadership competences.

Knowledge of leadership competencies in a military context can be used by students to guide their training at the Military Academies. They can also be used by political and military decision-makers to develop the Armed Forces' personnel management processes and to guide the curricular design and the development of military courses.

This study has limitations regarding the time in which the review took place, the lack of access to some studies that would enrich the review but were not in open access, while others were in other languages, as well as the bases selected.

As this is a qualitative study, it is advisable to take the evidence into account with due caution. On the other hand, the difficulty in retrieving some studies ended up affecting the results, which could be more robust. Added to this are the limitations of the review process, which was conducted manually.

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