Team Readiness as a Leadership Capability: A Study of Military Students

Jaromír Pitaš, Petr Čech and Miroslav Mašlej
Faculty of Military Leadership, University of Defence, Brno, Czech Republic

jaromir.pitas@unob.cz
petr.cech@unob.cz
miroslav.maslej@unob.cz

Abstract: Team readiness represents an important concept in contemporary research on management and leadership, particularly within organizations operating in complex, dynamic, and high-risk environments. Increasing demands for adaptability, flexibility, and effective decision-making under conditions of uncertainty underscore the importance of team-oriented competencies. Although leadership development has been extensively studied, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the empirical assessment of team readiness as a multidimensional managerial competence, especially within the context of military education. This paper addresses this gap by examining team readiness through Belbin's Team Role Theory among first-year students at the University of Defence in the Czech Republic. Team readiness is conceptualized as a multidimensional leadership-related competence encompassing the ability to understand team roles, effectively perform them, adapt to changing situational conditions, and actively contribute to collective performance within a structured organizational environment. The analysis further identifies gender differences in the distribution of team roles. After applying the Benjamini–Hochberg correction for multiple comparisons, statistically significant differences remained for the Resource Investigator role (BH-FDR $p = 0.045$) and the Monitor Evaluator role (BH-FDR $p < 0.001$). These roles exhibit a complementary character and may contribute to enhanced team effectiveness and improved decision-making quality. The study contributes to the discussion on leadership development and team competencies by providing empirical evidence regarding the composition of team roles within the military education environment. At the same time, it extends the application of Belbin's model in the fields of leadership and governance and offers practical implications for the systematic preparation of future leaders in organizations operating under demanding and uncertain conditions. The research is based on a quantitative research design and utilizes data collected through the standardized Belbin Team Role Inventory. The research sample consists of more than one hundred students, with each respondent assessed across eight Belbin team roles (excluding the Specialist role). This approach enables an analysis of how individual behavioural predispositions influence team functioning. The most frequently identified dominant role was Shaper, followed by Implementer, while Teamworker also achieved relatively high scores. The highest mean scores were recorded for the Shaper role ($M = 11.34$) and the Implementer role ($M = 10.46$), whereas the lowest mean score was observed for the Plant role ($M = 7.21$). These findings suggest that students are oriented toward structured task management, responsibility, and the maintenance of team cohesion. Conversely, the lower representation of the Plant role points to a limited emphasis on creativity, which may reflect an institutional environment that prioritizes discipline, standardization, and collective performance.

Keywords: Team readiness, Leadership development, Belbin team roles, Military leadership, Managerial competencies

1. Introduction

Leadership research has gradually shifted over recent decades from individually oriented approaches toward team-based and distributed forms of leadership that better reflect the conditions of complex, dynamic, and uncertain organizational environments (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007; Northouse, 2022; Yukl, 2019). In such contexts, organizational performance increasingly results from collective processes, coordination, and shared responsibility rather than from the isolated decision-making of individuals. Teams have thus become the fundamental unit of performance, while leadership effectiveness depends primarily on the quality of interactions among team members (McChrystal et al., 2015; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

In this context, increasing attention has been devoted to the role of the individual within team functioning. One concept that effectively captures this shift is team readiness. Team readiness can be understood as an individual leadership competence that reflects the extent to which a person is capable of effectively engaging in team processes and actively contributing to their successful execution (Cannon-Bowers & Salas, 2001; Salas, Sims & Burke, 2005). Unlike approaches that focus primarily on team outcomes, this concept emphasizes the individual level and the underlying capabilities that enable effective team processes.

Despite the growing interest in teamwork and collaboration, team readiness remains relatively underexplored as a distinct analytical construct in empirical research. It is often implicitly embedded within other variables, such as leadership styles or personality characteristics, while its direct conceptualization and measurement have received comparatively limited attention (Mathieu et al., 2008). This gap is particularly evident in the field

of military education, where the ability to function effectively within a team is essential, yet systematic evidence regarding students' individual readiness remains fragmented.

Despite the growing interest in teamwork, recent research demonstrates that shared leadership significantly contributes to team effectiveness and collaborative performance (Klasmeier and Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2025).

Military organizations, in particular, represent environments in which the demands of teamwork are especially pronounced. They are characterized by high levels of structure, risk, and coordination requirements, while simultaneously emphasizing flexibility and the capacity to respond effectively to changing situations (Hannah et al., 2008; Kolditz, 2007; Sweeney et al., 2011). Military education therefore provides a unique opportunity to examine the development of these capabilities at an early stage of professional formation. Furthermore, previous research suggests that students enter this environment with specific value orientations that influence their motivation and subsequent professional development (Binková & Štěpánková, 2023).

To operationalize and empirically examine team readiness, this study employs Belbin's Team Role Model. The model links the abstract concept of individual competence with observable behavioural manifestations, thereby providing a bridge between theoretical conceptualization and empirical analysis (Belbin, 2010; Aritzeta, Swailes, & Senior, 2007; Fisher, Hunter, & Macrosson, 1997).

Despite the extensive body of research on leadership, teamwork, and team effectiveness, limited attention has been devoted to team readiness as an individual leadership competence. Existing studies have focused predominantly on team outcomes, while comparatively less attention has been paid to the behavioural predispositions that facilitate effective participation in collective processes, particularly within the context of military education. This study addresses this gap by operationalizing team readiness through Belbin team roles and examining their distribution among military university students.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the team readiness of military university students, identify dominant role profiles, and assess their implications for leadership development and the cultivation of team-related competencies. The primary contribution of the study lies in its empirical operationalization of a concept that has thus far remained largely theoretical, as well as in its application to the specific context of military education. The analysis also considers gender differences in the distribution of team roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Bear & Woolley, 2011). Unlike studies primarily concerned with team performance, this research focuses on the individual prerequisites that support effective teamwork.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, the theoretical foundations of team readiness and Belbin's Team Role Model are presented. Next, the methodology and characteristics of the research sample are described. The results of the empirical analysis are then presented and discussed. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the main contributions of the study and outlines directions for future research as well as practical implications.

The study contributes to the fields of leadership and governance by conceptualizing team readiness as an individual leadership competence that enables effective participation in collective decision-making, coordination, and team processes within organizations operating under conditions of high uncertainty. By operationalizing team readiness through behavioural role configurations, the study extends existing leadership research beyond individual characteristics toward the distributed and interactional dimensions of leadership.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Team Readiness

Contemporary research on leadership and teamwork suggests that effective functioning in complex organizational environments cannot be explained solely by team structure or established processes. Increasing attention is being devoted to the extent to which individual members are prepared to actively engage in these processes (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2008). Although empirical research frequently focuses on overall team performance, comparatively less attention has been paid to the individual competencies that make such performance possible (Mathieu et al., 2008).

Building on the preceding conceptualization, team readiness can be understood as an individual competence that enables effective participation in team functioning and active contribution to its quality. It is not an outcome of teamwork itself but rather a set of underlying capabilities that allow collective collaboration to operate effectively. These capabilities include, for example, the ability to understand team objectives, adapt

behaviour to specific situational demands, and actively contribute to decision-making and problem-solving processes.

In military organizations, readiness extends beyond personnel and equipment to include behavioural preparedness, adaptability, and the capability to operate effectively within teams. Contemporary leadership literature therefore increasingly considers team readiness as an individual contribution to organizational readiness through collaboration, coordination, and shared decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. Whereas military readiness is traditionally conceptualized in terms of personnel, training, and equipment, the present study focuses specifically on the behavioural dimension of individual team readiness.

Research on teamwork consistently demonstrates that effective team functioning relies on competencies such as communication, coordination, adaptability, and shared understanding (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). The development of these competencies is not automatic; rather, it depends on individuals' active engagement in collective cognitive and behavioural processes. Meta-analytic studies further indicate that these individual characteristics significantly influence the effectiveness of coordinated activities over time (Mathieu et al., 2008).

From a cognitive perspective, team readiness encompasses shared mental models, situational awareness, and the ability to anticipate the actions of other team members (Cannon-Bowers & Salas, 2001). From a behavioural perspective, it is reflected in patterns of interaction, the assumption of responsibility, and responses to situational demands. These behavioural manifestations make the concept amenable to empirical examination (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001).

One analytical approach to capturing such behavioural manifestations is the concept of team roles. Team roles can be understood as relatively stable patterns of behaviour through which individuals contribute to team functioning. Research suggests that effective teams are characterized by role complementarity that addresses both task-related and relationship-oriented requirements (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Team roles therefore represent a concrete manifestation of how individual readiness translates into team functioning. Importantly, team roles should not be reduced to formal organizational positions. Rather, they represent informal behavioural tendencies that shape interactions among team members. The adoption of a particular role thus reflects not only competence but also a willingness to engage in a specific form of teamwork. This perspective is consistent with process-oriented approaches to leadership, which conceptualize leadership as a dynamic phenomenon emerging through interactions among individuals (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

2.2 Belbin's Team Role Model and the Military Education Context

To analyse team roles, this study employs Belbin's Team Role Model as an analytical framework for capturing the behavioural manifestations of team readiness. Belbin (2010) argues that effective team processes require a balanced representation of action-oriented, thinking-oriented, and relationship-oriented roles, with each role contributing in a distinctive way to team functioning (Belbin, 2010; Aritzeta, Swailes, & Senior, 2007). The model emphasizes role complementarity and rejects the notion of a single optimal leadership style. Empirical studies indicate that Belbin's roles constitute meaningful descriptors of behavioural patterns associated with coordination and interaction within teams (Fisher, Hunter, & Macrosson, 1997; Aritzeta, Swailes, & Senior, 2007). Nevertheless, some scholars have highlighted methodological limitations of the model, particularly concerning the self-assessment nature of the instrument (Broucek & Randell, 1996).

The importance of team readiness is particularly evident within military organizations, which operate under conditions of high uncertainty, risk, and coordination demands (Hannah et al., 2008; Sweeney et al., 2011). Military education therefore represents a distinctive environment in which team readiness can be examined at an early stage of professional development. Military university students are in a formative period during which attitudes toward leadership, responsibility, and teamwork are being shaped (Binková & Štěpánková, 2025). An analysis of their preferred team roles therefore provides insight into the initial configuration of behavioural patterns that contribute to their capacity to function effectively within teams. Previous research suggests that collective values, commitment to service, and a sense of responsibility constitute important foundations for the development of these competencies (Binková & Štěpánková, 2023).

Based on these theoretical premises, the present study conceptualizes team readiness as an individual competence manifested through behavioural patterns captured by team roles. This approach also enables the integration of the individual level of analysis with the dynamics of team functioning. Belbin's Team Role Model therefore serves as a coherent analytical framework for examining how individuals are prepared to contribute to the effective functioning of team processes.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design aimed at analysing the team readiness of military university students through Belbin's Team Role Model. It is based on the assumption that individual behavioural predispositions, operationalized as team roles, constitute a relevant indicator of an individual's capacity to function effectively within a team.

The research sample consisted of 126 first-year students enrolled at a military university in the Czech Republic, including 98 men (77.8%) and 28 women (22.2%). Respondents were selected using convenience sampling, which corresponds to the exploratory nature of the study while also reflecting the practical constraints associated with data collection in the military education environment.

Data were collected using the standardized Belbin Team Role Self-Perception Inventory (Belbin, 2010), which is designed to identify preferred behavioural patterns in a team context. The version employed in this study included eight team roles: Plant, Resource Investigator, Coordinator, Shaper, Monitor Evaluator, Teamworker, Implementer, and Completer Finisher. The Specialist role was excluded because it represents a narrowly defined area of expertise rather than a general pattern of team behaviour. The Benjamini–Hochberg procedure was applied because eight simultaneous hypothesis tests were conducted, thereby reducing the probability of false positive findings.

Respondents allocated a fixed total of 70 points across the individual roles, resulting in an ipsative data structure. Consequently, the scores reflect the relative distribution of role preferences rather than their absolute levels. The primary unit of analysis consisted of the scores assigned to individual team roles. For analytical purposes, a dominant role was defined as the role receiving the highest score for a given respondent. In cases where multiple roles shared the highest score, no dominant role was assigned.

The ipsative nature of the data constitutes a methodological limitation because the variables are not statistically independent. An increase in the score of one role is necessarily associated with a relative decrease in the scores of other roles. This characteristic must be taken into account, particularly when interpreting correlation and cluster analyses.

The data analysis was conducted in several sequential steps:

- Descriptive Analysis: First, basic descriptive statistics were calculated for each team role (mean and standard deviation). The objective was to identify the overall distribution of roles within the sample and determine the dominant role profiles.
- Group Difference Analysis (H1): Differences between male and female respondents were assessed using the Mann–Whitney U test, which is appropriate for comparing two independent groups when the assumption of normality is violated. To account for multiple comparisons, the Benjamini–Hochberg correction was applied to control the false discovery rate (FDR).
- Correlation Analysis (H4): Relationships among individual team roles were examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient, which enables the assessment of monotonic associations without assuming a normal distribution of the data.
- Cluster Analysis (H3): To identify typological groups of respondents, the k-means clustering method was employed. Prior to the analysis, the data were standardized using z-scores. Distances were calculated using the Euclidean metric. The optimal number of clusters was determined based on a combination of result interpretability and silhouette coefficient values.

Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **H1:** There are statistically significant differences between male and female respondents in selected team role scores.
- **H2:** The military education environment is associated with a stronger preference for action-oriented and implementation-oriented roles.
- **H3:** Distinct groups of respondents can be identified based on the structure of their team role profiles.
- **H4:** Statistically significant relationships exist among individual team roles.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, hypotheses H3 and H4 should be regarded as complementary and exploratory rather than confirmatory.

4. Results

The first step of the analysis involved examining the basic statistical characteristics of the individual team roles. The descriptive analysis (Table 1) revealed that the highest mean scores were recorded for the Shaper role (M = 11.34, SD = 3.96) and the Implementer role (M = 10.46, SD = 3.30).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Team Role Scores

Role	M	SD
Shaper	11.34	3.96
Implementer	10.46	3.30
Teamworker	8.87	4.22
Completer Finisher	8.13	3.71
Monitor Evaluator	8.06	3.86
Coordinator	8.02	3.31
Resource Investigator	7.91	3.01
Plant	7.21	3.70

Relatively high scores were also observed for the Teamworker role (M = 8.87, SD = 4.22), whereas the lowest mean score was found for the Plant role (M = 7.21, SD = 3.70). The remaining roles exhibited mean values of approximately eight points. From the perspective of Belbin's functional classification of team roles, these findings suggest a stronger representation of action-oriented and implementation-oriented roles, whereas roles associated with idea generation and innovation appear less prominent. This pattern is further supported by the analysis of dominant roles. The most frequently identified dominant role was Shaper (n = 39), followed by Implementer (n = 18). The remaining roles occurred less frequently, indicating an uneven distribution of role profiles within the sample. These findings suggest that roles oriented toward task accomplishment and implementation are more strongly represented than roles focused on interpersonal relations and the generation of new ideas. This pattern is consistent with the characteristics of the military education environment, which emphasizes discipline, task execution, and operational effectiveness. Consequently, the findings are consistent with Hypothesis H2, suggesting that the military education environment may be associated with a stronger preference for action-oriented and implementation-oriented roles.

The Mann–Whitney U test (Table 2) revealed statistically significant differences between men and women in the Resource Investigator role ($p = 0.045$, rrb = −0.31) and the Monitor Evaluator role ($p < 0.001$, rrb = 0.54). Women achieved higher scores in the Resource Investigator role, whereas men scored higher in the Monitor Evaluator role.

Table 2: Gender Differences in Team Role Scores

Role	Men	Women	Raw p-value	Adjusted p-value (Benjamini–Hochberg FDR)	Rank-biserial (positive values indicate higher scores among men)
Plant	6.97	8.07	0.4417	0.5889	-0.0955
Resource Investigator	7.55	9.18	0.0113	0.0454	-0.3130
Coordinator	7.81	8.75	0.3782	0.5889	-0.1093
Shaper	11.35	11.32	0.9226	0.9788	0.0124
Monitor Evaluator	8.79	5.54	0.0000	0.0001	0.5394
Teamworker	8.70	9.43	0.2946	0.5889	-0.1301
Implementer	10.73	9.50	0.0737	0.1964	0.2212
Completer Finisher	8.10	8.21	0.9788	0.9788	-0.0036

Following the Benjamini–Hochberg correction, no statistically significant differences were identified for the remaining team roles. Nevertheless, descriptive trends suggest that women tended to achieve higher scores in

some relationship-oriented roles, whereas men tended to score higher in certain performance-oriented and analytical roles. However, these tendencies were not consistently supported by statistically significant differences across all team roles and should therefore be interpreted with caution. These findings suggest that gender differences are present but are not consistently observed across all team roles. Therefore, Hypothesis H1 is partially supported.

Table 3: Spearman Correlation Matrix of Team Roles

Role	Plant	Resource Investigator	Coordinator	Shaper	Monitor Evaluator	Teamworker	Implementer	Completer Finisher
Plant	1.00	0.07	-0.07	-0.28	-0.07	0.02	-0.37	-0.25
Resource Investigator	0.07	1.00	0.01	-0.16	-0.31	0.04	-0.18	-0.27
Coordinator	-0.07	0.01	1.00	-0.02	-0.20	0.12	-0.26	-0.30
Shaper	-0.28	-0.16	-0.02	1.00	-0.09	-0.45	0.11	-0.01
Monitor Evaluator	-0.07	-0.31	-0.20	-0.09	1.00	-0.32	0.06	0.00
Teamworker	0.02	0.04	0.12	-0.45	-0.32	1.00	-0.30	-0.22
Implementer	-0.37	-0.18	-0.26	0.11	0.06	-0.30	1.00	0.00
Completer Finisher	-0.25	-0.27	-0.30	-0.01	0.00	-0.22	0.00	1.00

Relationships among the individual team roles were examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (Table 3).

The analysis identified several statistically significant associations, most of which were of weak to moderate magnitude. The strongest negative correlation was observed between the Shaper and Teamworker roles ($\rho = -0.45$), followed by a negative correlation between the Resource Investigator and Monitor Evaluator roles ($\rho = -0.31$). These relationships suggest a degree of complementarity between task-oriented and relationship-oriented roles and may reflect differing approaches to decision-making and the management of team processes.

The interpretation of these findings should be approached with caution due to the ipsative nature of the data, whereby an increase in preference for one role is necessarily associated with a relative decrease in the preference for other roles. Consequently, the observed correlations do not represent independent relationships among variables but rather the relative interconnectedness of role preferences within the overall allocation of points. Therefore, Hypothesis H4 receives only partial support.

To identify typological respondent profiles, k-means cluster analysis was conducted using standardized data. The analysis revealed several relatively distinct role configurations; however, the silhouette coefficient values indicated only limited separation between the clusters. Consequently, the results should be interpreted as an exploratory typology of role profiles rather than a stable classification of respondents. The analysis identified three relatively homogeneous groups of students (Figure 1), which differed in the structure of their preferred team roles. The first cluster can be characterized as an action-oriented profile, distinguished by higher scores in the Shaper and Implementer roles. The second cluster represents a team-oriented profile, in which the Teamworker and Coordinator roles are predominant. The third cluster exhibits a balanced profile, characterized by a more even distribution of team roles and slightly higher scores in analytically oriented roles.

These findings suggest the existence of distinct role configurations among students, supporting the assumption of variability in team readiness. The results therefore provide support for Hypothesis H3. However, given the relatively weak separation between clusters, this support should be regarded as partial, and the identified profiles should be interpreted with caution.

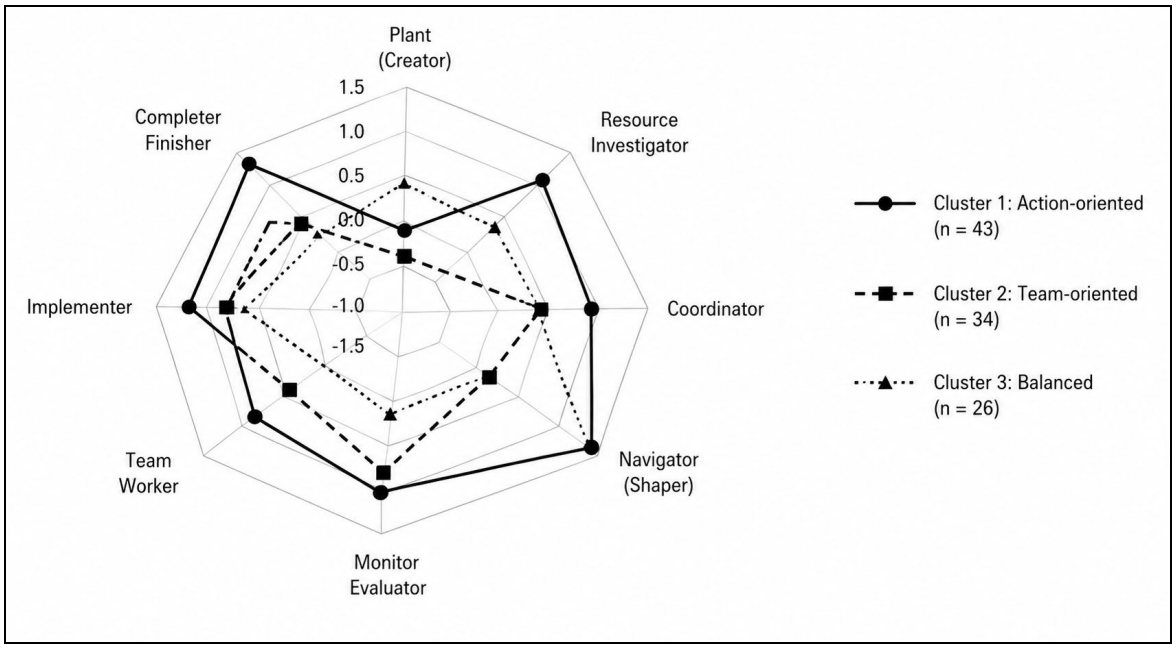


Figure 1: Profiles of Team Roles Across Identified Clusters

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the empirical analysis indicate that the team readiness of military university students is characterized by a specific structure of behavioural predispositions manifested through preferred team roles. The predominance of action-oriented and implementation-oriented roles supports the assumption that the institutional environment of military education shapes individual predispositions toward effective task accomplishment, coordination, and activity management. This finding is consistent with theoretical approaches emphasizing the importance of structure, discipline, and operational decision-making in organizations operating under conditions of uncertainty and high performance demands.

At the same time, the relatively lower representation of roles associated with idea generation suggests a certain imbalance within the observed role configurations. From the perspective of team readiness, this implies that students' individual predispositions are more strongly oriented toward implementation-related than innovation-related aspects of team functioning. Such a profile may be beneficial in terms of stability and efficiency of team processes; however, in dynamic and complex situations, it may limit adaptability and the ability to respond effectively to novel challenges. The findings therefore indirectly highlight the importance of maintaining a balance among different role types as a prerequisite for effective team functioning.

The analysis of gender differences revealed statistically significant distinctions only in the Resource Investigator and Monitor Evaluator roles, while no significant differences were observed for the remaining team roles after correction for multiple testing. These findings suggest that team readiness constitutes a relatively homogeneous characteristic within the examined sample and is not fundamentally differentiated by gender. The identified differences may reflect variations in behavioural preferences that have been discussed in previous leadership and teamwork research. At the same time, the results indicate that the military education environment may contribute to the convergence of behavioural tendencies and to the development of a broadly comparable profile of team-oriented competencies among students.

Important insights into the structure of team readiness are also provided by the analysis of relationships among team roles and the identification of typological groups of respondents. The observed associations confirm that individual roles do not operate in isolation but rather form an interconnected system of relative preferences. Given the ipsative nature of the data, however, these relationships should be interpreted as indicators of the internal structure of role configurations rather than as independent associations between variables. The identified clusters further demonstrate that team readiness is a differentiated construct that may be manifested through various combinations of behavioural predispositions. These configurations support the assumption that effective team functioning is primarily based on role complementarity and the mutual reinforcement of diverse behavioural contributions.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to leadership research by linking the concept of team readiness with specific behavioural manifestations captured through team roles. This approach enables team readiness to be understood as an individual leadership competence that is expressed through interactions among team members and contributes to the formation of collective processes. In doing so, the study shifts the focus from a static view of individual characteristics toward a dynamic and interactional understanding of leadership.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that the development of team readiness should focus not only on strengthening dominant roles but also on deliberately cultivating less represented behavioural predispositions, particularly those related to creativity, innovation, and adaptability. Furthermore, the identification of role profiles may be utilized in team composition to ensure internal balance and complementarity. Such an approach may contribute to enhancing both team effectiveness and the quality of decision-making processes in environments characterized by high demands for coordination and collaboration.

The interpretation of the findings should nevertheless take into account several methodological limitations. The ipsative nature of the data restricts the interpretation of statistical relationships among individual roles, while the use of a self-report instrument may introduce a degree of response bias. In addition, the specific context of military education limits the generalizability of the findings to other organizational settings.

In conclusion, the team readiness of military university students can be characterized as a structured yet differentiated set of behavioural predispositions reflected in various role configurations. The dominance of action-oriented roles reflects the characteristics of the examined environment, whereas the identified variability in role profiles highlights the importance of diversity and complementarity for effective team functioning. Future research should focus on a deeper examination of the relationship between role configurations and actual team performance, as well as on the longitudinal development of these predispositions over time. The interpretation of the findings should nevertheless take into account several methodological limitations the number of female respondents was relatively small, separate cluster analyses by gender were not considered statistically robust and were therefore not performed.

Ethics Declaration: This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Defence. Participation in the study was fully voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The data were collected anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was recorded. In accordance with institutional policies, the study did not require formal ethical clearance.

AI Declaration: The authors take full responsibility for the content of this manuscript. Artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited capacity to support language editing and text refinement. All analytical procedures, interpretations, and conclusions were developed independently by the authors.

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