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STRATEGIC COMPETENCE AS A KEY COMPONENT OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Strategic competence has become an important element of effective leadership in complex professional and military environments. Modern leaders are expected not only to possess professional knowledge and technical skills but also to understand complex situations, identify long-term consequences, evaluate alternative solutions, and make informed decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Strategic competence can therefore be understood as an integrated capability that combines strategic thinking, critical analysis, systems thinking, decision-making, communication, adaptability, professional knowledge, and ethical responsibility. This article examines the concept of strategic competence and analyzes its major components, its importance for military leadership, and approaches to its development through professional education and practical training. The research is based on a qualitative review of academic literature and professional publications related to competence, strategic thinking, leadership development, and military education. It requires continuous education, practical exercises, problem-based learning, case analysis, reflection, collaborative work, and exposure to complex decision-making situations. The article concludes that systematic development of strategic competence can strengthen leaders' ability to understand complex environments, formulate appropriate strategies, adapt to changing circumstances, and connect professional decisions with long-term organizational objectives.
Keywords: strategic competence, strategic thinking, military leadership, professional education, critical thinking, decision-making, systems thinking, adaptability, leadership development, strategic planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary professional environment is characterized by rapid technological development, uncertainty, interconnected systems, information overload, and constantly changing organizational requirements. These conditions create new demands on leaders and professionals. Possessing specialized knowledge is no longer sufficient for individuals who are expected to make decisions in complex environments. Leaders must also understand relationships between different factors, anticipate possible consequences, evaluate risks, and adapt their decisions when circumstances change.

These requirements are particularly significant in the military profession. Military leaders operate in environments where political, social, technological, economic, organizational, and security factors may interact with one another. A decision that appears appropriate from a narrow operational perspective may produce unexpected consequences when considered from a broader

perspective. Consequently, military leaders need the ability to connect immediate professional tasks with wider objectives and long-term consequences.

This ability can be described through the concept of strategic competence.

Strategic competence is a multidimensional concept. It is related to strategic thinking, professional knowledge, leadership, decision-making, organizational learning, and adaptability. Research on competence-based management demonstrates that competencies can provide organizations with different forms of flexibility and create strategic options for responding to changing environments. Sanchez (2004), for example, emphasizes the relationship between competence and organizational flexibility.

Strategic thinking is another central dimension of this concept. It involves the ability to examine complex and sometimes poorly defined problems, understand relationships between different factors, and develop approaches that connect available resources with desired objectives. Research on strategic thinking in military education has emphasized the importance of broad education, experience, systems theory, history, culture, and the ability to understand complex strategic problems.

Professional military education also plays an important role in the development of strategic competence. Recent research on professional military education emphasizes that leaders need opportunities not only to study theoretical concepts but also to apply them to realistic problems through planning exercises, simulations, and problem-based learning.

The importance of this issue is also relevant to Uzbekistan. Research concerning military education at the Academy of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan describes the modern commander as requiring professional competence, discipline, initiative, creativity, and social, moral, and organizational abilities. The same source notes that officer education can extend from tactical to strategic levels.

The purpose of this article is to examine strategic competence as an important component of military leadership and professional development.

The main objectives of the study are: to clarify the concept of strategic competence; to identify its major components; to examine the relationship between strategic competence and military leadership; to analyze educational approaches that contribute to its development; to identify challenges associated with the development of strategic competence.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative literature-review methodology. Academic research and professional publications concerning strategic competence, strategic thinking, competence-based management, military leadership, and professional education were reviewed and analyzed.

The literature was selected according to several conceptual areas. The first area concerned general theories of competence and competence-based management. The second focused on strategic thinking and strategic decision-making. The third addressed military leadership and professional education. The fourth concerned educational approaches for developing analytical and strategic abilities.

A thematic analysis approach was used to identify common characteristics of strategic competence. The analysis focused on the following dimensions:

a) professional and strategic knowledge;

b) critical thinking;
c) analytical ability;
d) systems thinking;
e) decision-making;
f) strategic planning;
g) communication;
h) adaptability;
i) collaboration;
j) ethical and professional judgment.

The study also examined publications discussing problem-based learning and practical exercises in professional military education. Recent research suggests that strategy should be treated not only as an academic subject but also as a professional practice requiring repeated application, assessment, and reflection.

The research is conceptual rather than empirical. It does not attempt to measure the strategic competence of a particular group of officers or cadets. Instead, it synthesizes existing literature in order to develop a clearer conceptual understanding of strategic competence and its potential application to military professional development.

The methodological process can be represented as: Literature review → Identification of key concepts → Thematic analysis → Identification of competence components → Application to military education and leadership.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Understanding Strategic Competence

The analysis indicates that strategic competence should not be considered a single professional skill. Rather, it represents a combination of several interconnected abilities.

For the purposes of this study, strategic competence can be defined as: the ability to understand complex environments, identify long-term objectives, analyze alternative courses of action, make informed decisions under uncertainty, coordinate available resources, communicate strategic ideas, and adapt actions in response to changing conditions.

This definition highlights the integrated nature of strategic competence.

A strategically competent professional should be capable of moving from simple observation to deeper analysis. Instead of asking only “What is happening?”, the individual should also ask:

1) Why is it happening?
2) What factors influence the situation?
3) What assumptions are being made?
4) What could happen in the future?
5) What alternative solutions are available?
6) What risks are associated with each option?
7) What are the possible short-term and long-term consequences?
8) How might other actors respond?
9) What resources are required?
10) How should the plan change if circumstances change?

These questions demonstrate the connection between strategic thinking and strategic competence.

Research examining competency models for strategic thinking has found that organizations may treat strategic thinking as an independent competency or incorporate it into broader competency areas. Such models may also establish different expectations for strategic thinking according to professional position and level of responsibility.

Therefore, strategic competence can develop progressively as an individual's responsibilities increase.

3.2. Professional and Strategic Knowledge

Knowledge is the foundation of strategic competence. A leader cannot analyze a complex situation effectively without an adequate understanding of the relevant professional environment.

For military leaders, strategic knowledge may include military history, leadership, organizational management, security studies, technology, logistics, international relations, geography, economics, communication, and national security.

However, strategic knowledge should not be understood simply as memorizing information. Its value depends on the ability to connect different areas of knowledge.

For example, a technological innovation may influence training requirements, logistics, organizational structures, financial planning, personnel management, and operational capabilities. A strategically competent leader therefore needs to understand relationships between these areas.

Broad education is particularly important for strategic thinking because complex strategic problems rarely belong to one academic discipline. Research on strategic thinking has similarly emphasized the importance of subjects such as history, strategic theory, systems theory, international relations, economics, and culture.

3.3. Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is one of the most important components of strategic competence.

Strategic decisions are often made with incomplete, uncertain, or contradictory information. Leaders must therefore evaluate the reliability of information and identify assumptions behind different interpretations.

Critical thinking involves:

a) questioning assumptions;
b) examining evidence;
c) comparing alternative explanations;
d) identifying contradictions;
e) recognizing limitations;
f) distinguishing facts from opinions;
g) evaluating the consequences of proposed actions.

For example, when analyzing a security problem, a leader should not immediately accept the first explanation that appears convincing. Instead, the leader should examine whether other explanations exist and whether additional information is required.

Professional education can support this ability by creating learning environments in which students are encouraged to discuss different interpretations rather than simply reproduce predetermined answers.

Research on military education has emphasized the value of participatory and problem-based approaches for developing cognitive abilities beyond simple black-and-white thinking.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review indicate a strong conceptual relationship between strategic competence and military leadership.

Military leadership involves different levels of responsibility. At lower levels, leaders may focus primarily on immediate tasks, personnel, procedures, and operational requirements. As responsibility increases, leaders increasingly need to understand broader organizational and strategic relationships.

This does not mean that strategic competence replaces tactical or technical competence. Instead, strategic competence builds upon professional foundations.

An effective military professional should therefore be able to move between different levels of analysis.

For example:

Tactical level:

"How can this task be accomplished?"

Operational level:

"How can several activities be coordinated to achieve the broader objective?"

Strategic level:

"How does this objective contribute to long-term goals, and what wider consequences may result from the chosen approach?"

The ability to connect these levels is an important characteristic of strategic competence.

Research on military professional education has similarly argued that military leaders require education in areas such as thinking, decision-making, planning, and leadership, with educational requirements adjusted to different levels of responsibility.

5. CONCLUSION

Strategic competence represents an integrated set of knowledge, cognitive abilities, professional skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enables individuals to understand complex environments and make informed decisions in conditions of uncertainty.

The analysis conducted in this article demonstrates that strategic competence includes several interconnected dimensions: professional knowledge, critical thinking, systems thinking, strategic decision-making, adaptability, communication, collaboration, and ethical judgment.

For military leaders, these competencies are particularly relevant because military organizations operate within complex environments where professional decisions may have consequences beyond immediate tasks.

The development of strategic competence should therefore become a continuous component of professional education and leadership development. Traditional theoretical instruction can provide essential knowledge, but it should be complemented by practical activities that require students to apply that knowledge.

Problem-based learning, strategic simulations, case studies, scenario exercises, historical analysis, group discussion, reflective writing, and practical planning activities can provide valuable opportunities for developing strategic competence.

An important finding of this study is that strategic competence should be developed progressively. Professional knowledge provides the foundation, while critical thinking and analytical skills allow individuals to understand complex situations. Practical decision-making then enables them to apply this knowledge, while adaptability and reflection support continuous development.

Strategic competence is also closely connected with organizational learning. When individuals are encouraged to examine experience, analyze decisions, identify lessons, and revise their approaches, both individual and organizational capabilities can develop.

In conclusion, strategic competence should be understood not as a single ability but as a continuously developing professional capacity. Its development requires a combination of education, practice, experience, reflection, and exposure to complex problems. For military professional development, this approach can provide an important foundation for preparing leaders capable of analyzing uncertainty, understanding interconnected challenges, developing alternative strategies, and making responsible long-term decisions.

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