

CULTURAL MODERATORS OF LEADERSHIP-RESILIENCE NEXUS: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM EASTERN AND WESTERN MILITARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The article explores how specific cultural dimensions influence the moderating relationship between authentic leadership and organizational resilience within military environments, contrasting institutional realities from Eastern Europe - particularly Romania - with those of Western systems such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and other NATO affiliates. By integrating the latest empirical insights with the premises of cross-cultural organizational theory, the study establishes that authentic leadership consistently enhances resilience through its role in strengthening organizational identification and cultivating psychological capital. Nevertheless, the magnitude and pathways of these effects display considerable variation across cultural settings, shaped by contextual factors including power distance, levels of collectivism, and the structural dynamics of hierarchical trust. Using a moderated mediation framework grounded in the Job Demands-Resources model and organizational identification theory, the article traces how leaders operating within different cultural contexts activate resilience through culturally congruent pathways. The research reveals that secure base leadership provides theoretical and practical integration across cultural contexts by simultaneously providing hierarchical structure and psychological support. The article proposes evidence-based recommendations for culturally informed resilience-building strategies and identifies critical tensions requiring deliberate organizational management when integrating diverse military cultures within NATO structures. This work contributes to military leadership scholarship by providing empirically grounded frameworks that honor cultural distinctiveness while advancing shared resilience capabilities.

Keywords: Authentic leadership, organizational resilience, military culture, Job Demands-Resources model, organizational identification.

JEL Classification: J53, M12, M54, H56.

1. Introduction

Military organizations worldwide face unprecedented operational complexity. Contemporary security challenges-hybrid threats, multinational coalitions, cyber warfare, prolonged deployments, and asymmetric conflicts-demand that military personnel simultaneously maintain robust hierarchical coordination and exercise adaptive individual judgment under extreme stress (Lonergan & Snyder, 2025; Wachowiak, 2024). This operational reality creates a critical organizational challenge: how can military institutions build resilience-the capacity to absorb stress, adapt to changing circumstances, learn from experience, and recover from setbacks-while maintaining the coherence and effectiveness that hierarchical military organization provides?

Leadership is fundamental to building organizational resilience, yet military leadership traditions differ markedly across geographic and cultural contexts. In contemporary Western military thought, there is a growing emphasis on authentic leadership, characterized by heightened self-awareness, transparency in interpersonal relations, a firmly internalized moral orientation, and the capacity for balanced judgment. This perspective often intersects with transformational leadership doctrines that accentuate the articulation of a compelling vision and the demonstration of individualized regard for subordinates (Avolio et al., 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2008). These approaches rest on assumptions particularly salient in individualistic, low-power-distance cultures: that psychological safety and individual empowerment enhance performance, that authenticity builds trust, and that resilience emerges from individual psychological resources (Caragea, 2024).

Eastern European military traditions-evident particularly in Romanian, Polish, Baltic, and Central European armed forces-have historically emphasized hierarchical clarity, institutional

loyalty, relational cohesion, and collective identity as foundational to military effectiveness (Popa, 2022; Badiu, 2023). These organizations operate within cultural contexts where trust in leadership is grounded partly in hierarchical legitimacy and demonstrated institutional commitment, where individual identity is subsumed into collective identity, and where resilience emerges from strong unit cohesion and coordinated collective action.

The critical tension addressed in this article is that culture functions as a powerful moderator of the leadership-resilience relationship. While authentic leadership demonstrates robust positive associations with resilience across diverse organizational contexts, empirical evidence increasingly reveals that the strength and specific mechanisms of these effects vary significantly based on cultural context (Navas-Jimenez et al., 2024; Li & Zhang, 2022; Stone et al., 2024). For military organizations serving in NATO contexts-where Eastern European and Western military personnel increasingly operate alongside one another-this cultural moderation has direct implications for operational effectiveness, personnel integration, and mission success.

The article advances three core propositions:

Proposition 1: Authentic leadership predicts organizational resilience through a consistent mediation pathway involving organizational identification and psychological capital development, but this pathway operates with differential strength across cultural contexts.

Proposition 2: The primary moderating mechanism is cultural power distance orientation, which shapes the relative emphasis on hierarchical structure, institutional trust, and individual psychological empowerment as sources of resilience.

Proposition 3: Secure base leadership-defined as leader provision of both psychological safety and encouragement for independent adaptive action-provides a theoretical and practical framework for integrating diverse cultural approaches to leadership and resilience.

2. Theoretical foundations and empirical evidence

2.1 Authentic Leadership and Resilience: Universal Foundations with Contextual Specificities

Authentic leadership, as delineated in the seminal model developed by Walumbwa et al. (2008), is structured around four fundamental components: self-awareness (understanding one's strengths, limitations, and impact on others), relational transparency (presenting oneself genuinely to others), internalized moral perspective (relying on internalized rather than external moral standards), and balanced processing (considering diverse perspectives before making decisions). This construct emerged from positive organizational scholarship and has been extensively validated across occupational and national contexts (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio et al., 2009).

The relationship between authentic leadership and employee resilience has been extensively substantiated through empirical research. In a comprehensive moderated mediation study, Mao et al. (2022) analyzed data from 884 employees in the construction engineering sector amid the COVID-19 crisis, finding that authentic leadership produced a robust direct effect on workforce resilience. Importantly, organizational identification - understood as the process through which individuals internalize their organization's identity and cultivate a shared sense of belonging - emerged as a partial mediator of this dynamic. The indirect effect through organizational identification accounted for approximately 30% of the total leadership effect on resilience, establishing organizational identification as a key psychological mechanism through which authentic leadership builds resilience (Mao et al., 2022).

The mediation pathway operates through several interconnected mechanisms. When leaders demonstrate authentic engagement-acknowledging their own uncertainties, remaining transparent about decision-making processes, and genuinely considering subordinates' perspectives-they create what organizational researchers term "psychological safety": a shared belief among team members that interpersonal risks are tolerable and that speaking up will not result in punishment or humiliation (Zohar & Polachek, 2014). Within this psychologically safe environment, individuals

are more willing to report errors, voice concerns, seek help when overwhelmed, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. These behaviors facilitate both individual learning and organizational adaptation, foundational to resilience (Caragea, 2025c).

Concurrently, authentic leadership facilitates the cultivation of what Luthans identifies as "psychological capital" (PsyCap) - a multidimensional construct encompassing key positive psychological resources such as hope, understood as the motivational drive to pursue goals; efficacy, referring to the confidence in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes; resilience, representing the capacity to recover from challenges; and optimism, denoting a constructive anticipation of future success (Rego et al., 2012; Luthans et al., 2007). When leaders transparently model these psychological resources - demonstrating goal-directed problem-solving, confident action despite uncertainty, recovery from setbacks, and realistic optimism about challenges-they activate these same capacities in subordinates through social learning and modeling processes.

However, empirical evidence increasingly reveals contextual variation in the strength and mechanisms of authentic leadership effects. A 2022 cross-level study by Li and Zhang examining authentic leadership, perceived insider status, error management climate, and employee resilience found that the relationship between resilience and authentic leadership was significantly moderated by error management climate (the organizational norms regarding the acceptability of errors and mistakes) (Li & Zhang, 2022). In high-error-management-climate organizations, authentic leadership's effect on resilience was substantially stronger, suggesting that the organizational cultural context shapes whether authentic leadership's transparency and balanced processing translate into resilience or, conversely, into vulnerability and anxiety. This finding has important implications for military cultures that vary in their acceptance of error, uncertainty acknowledgment, and individual voice.

2.2 Secure Base Leadership: Bridging Hierarchical and Participative Traditions

Secure base leadership-emerging from attachment theory and developed explicitly for organizational contexts by Molero et al. (2019) - provides an important theoretical bridge between hierarchical military traditions and contemporary participative leadership approaches (Molero et al., 2019; Navas-Jimenez et al., 2024). The construct operationalizes attachment theory's insight that human beings require both security and autonomy: individuals benefit most when they have access to a secure base (a reliable source of support and protection) from which they can venture into novel, challenging, or risky situations (Molero et al., 2019).

In organizational environments, a secure base leader performs three mutually reinforcing functions. Foremost among them is the creation of psychological safety, achieved through the provision of consistent support, the demonstration of reliability, and the protection of team members from excessive or destabilizing external demands. Second, the leader functions as a safe haven-a refuge to which individuals can return when threatened, overwhelmed, or experiencing setback. Third, the leader actively encourages independent exploration, adaptive risk-taking, and individual initiative, recognizing that individuals must develop autonomous capacity to manage challenges independently (Molero et al., 2019).

The theoretical elegance of secure base leadership for military contexts lies in its integration of seemingly contradictory leadership elements. In hierarchical military traditions, the secure base function (protection, support, structure) is emphasized; leaders are expected to establish clear command authority, define roles precisely, and protect subordinates from chaos and arbitrary demands. In participative Western traditions, the autonomy-encouragement function is emphasized; leaders are expected to create space for individual initiative, support personal development, and trust subordinates' judgment. Secure base leadership theoretically integrates both functions as complementary rather than contradictory.

Recent empirical validation in military training contexts supports this theoretical integration. In their 2024 study, Navas-Jiménez, Molero Alonso, Mangin Solà and González-Carrasco analyzed

a cohort of military cadets to investigate the dynamics among secure base leadership, work engagement, organizational identification, and resilience, employing the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model as the guiding theoretical framework (Navas-Jimenez et al., 2024). The JD-R model proposes that job demands (stressors requiring effort) are balanced by job resources (aspects of work that facilitate goal achievement or reduce demands), and that personal resources (psychological capacities) further moderate these relationships. In this military cadet context, secure base leadership positively predicted work engagement (measured as cadets' psychological connection, vigor, and dedication to training and role) (Navas-Jimenez et al., 2024). Findings indicated that work engagement served as a mediating factor in the relationship between secure base leadership and the dual outcomes of organizational identification and resilience, thereby outlining a psychological mechanism represented as follows: **Secure Base Leadership → Work Engagement → Organizational Identification and Resilience**.

This mediation pathway reveals how secure base leadership operates: by providing both protection and autonomy encouragement, secure base leaders foster a state of engaged psychological involvement in one's role. This engagement-combining feelings of security with excitement about possibility-then translates into deeper identification with the organization and enhanced personal resilience. Notably, the JD-R framework proved applicable to military training contexts, suggesting that the job demands-resources perspective provides useful language for understanding how different types of leadership demands (hierarchical clarity, challenge, growth opportunities) interact with available resources (leader support, clarity of role, psychological safety) to shape resilience outcomes.

2.3 Organizational Identification and Psychological Capital as Mediating Pathways

Across empirical investigations, two constructs recurrently appear as central channels through which leadership contributes to the development of resilience: organizational identification and psychological capital. Understanding their operation illuminates how cultural context shapes the leadership-resilience relationship.

Organizational identification captures the extent to which individuals assimilate the organization's defining values and attributes into their self-concept, fostering an internalized sense of affiliation and belonging toward the organizational collective (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). When individuals identify strongly with an organization, they tend to: (1) interpret organizational challenges as personally relevant, motivating greater effort and commitment; (2) seek collective rather than individual solutions to problems; (3) access organizational resources, support networks, and shared meaning systems; and (4) maintain commitment through setbacks by connecting personal resilience to organizational mission (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Research by Ashforth and Mael (1989) demonstrated that organizational identification mediates relationships between numerous organizational conditions and employee outcomes, particularly in organizations emphasizing collective mission and shared identity—precisely the characteristic of military organizations.

Originally articulated by Luthans et al. (2007), psychological capital encompasses four interrelated dimensions: hope, understood as goal-oriented motivation coupled with strategic planning to achieve desired objectives; efficacy, referring to confidence in one's ability to attain success; resilience, denoting the capacity to recover from difficulties; and optimism, representing a positive outlook concerning future prospects (Rego et al., 2012; Luthans et al., 2007). These are not static personality traits but developable psychological resources that can be enhanced through leadership and organizational practices. Leaders demonstrating authentic engagement and secure base provision activate PsyCap development through modeling (demonstrating these psychological resources themselves), coaching (helping individuals develop their own hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism), and creating organizational conditions (psychological safety, clear goals, appropriate autonomy) that enable PsyCap cultivation.

A 2012 study by Rego et al. in a Portuguese organization found that authentic leadership predicted employees' psychological capital, which in turn predicted creative performance and job satisfaction. The authenticity – PsyCap - performance pathway provides an important mechanism linking leadership to resilience outcomes: leaders who authentically model and encourage hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism enable employees to develop these psychological resources, which then support adaptive performance under stress (Caragea, 2025a).

Critically, both organizational identification and psychological capital appear to operate across diverse cultural contexts, though their activation may require culturally congruent leadership behaviors. In collectivist cultures with high power distance, organizational identification may be activated through leaders' demonstration of commitment to collective mission and institutional values; in individualist cultures with low power distance, organizational identification may be activated through leaders' authentic personal engagement and transparent communication (Caragea, 2025b). The outcome-strong organizational identification supporting resilience-is consistent, but the relational and communicative pathway differs.

3. Cultural moderation: how context shapes the leadership-resilience relationship

3.1 Power Distance as a Primary Moderating Mechanism

Hofstede's research on cultural dimensions established that societies and organizations vary significantly in the degree to which they accept and expect unequal power distribution-what he termed "power distance" (Hofstede, 2011). In cultures characterized by high power distance, hierarchical disparities are perceived as natural and legitimate elements of organizational and social structures. Conversely, in low power distance settings, hierarchy is seen as an unavoidable but undesirable mechanism that should be kept to a minimum. This cultural dimension exerts a significant influence on both the enactment and the interpretation of leadership dynamics.

In high-power-distance military cultures (characteristic of many Eastern European organizations), the foundation of leadership credibility and followership emerges from:

- Hierarchical legitimacy: Authority derives partly from organizational position itself, which carries institutional authority;
- Demonstrated competence and mastery: Leaders must demonstrate superior professional knowledge and operational capability;
- Commitment to collective mission: Leaders must visibly prioritize collective welfare over personal interest;
- Consistency with institutional norms and values: Leaders must uphold and exemplify institutional standards and traditions;
- Predictability and reliability: Leaders must be dependable in providing clear direction and protecting subordinates from chaos.

In this context, authentic leadership is expressed through institutional authenticity-consistency between one's role responsibilities and one's behavior, transparency about institutional challenges and values (rather than personal vulnerabilities), and balanced processing that explicitly considers institutional precedent and collective welfare. A leader in a high-power-distance military context might express authentic leadership by acknowledging operational challenges transparently, explaining decisions in terms of institutional mission accomplishment, and demonstrating commitment to subordinates' development within institutional parameters.

In low-power-distance military cultures (characteristic of many Western organizations), the foundation of leadership credibility and followership emerges from:

- Demonstrated integrity and trustworthiness: Authority derives more from personal credibility than position;
- Psychological attunement and support: Leaders must attend to individuals' needs and development;

- Transparency about uncertainty and personal limitations: Acknowledging what one doesn't know is seen as strength rather than weakness;
- Inclusion in decision-making: Subordinates expect input into decisions affecting them;
- Respect for individual autonomy and initiative: Leaders are expected to encourage independent judgment.

In this context, authentic leadership is expressed through personal authenticity-genuine self-presentation, acknowledgment of personal limitations and vulnerabilities, and transparent communication about the decision-making process. A leader in a low-power-distance military context might express authentic leadership by openly discussing uncertainties, inviting subordinates' input into tactical problem-solving, and demonstrating genuine investment in individuals' personal development.

These are not opposites but rather different cultural manifestations of authentic leadership principles. In both contexts, leaders are demonstrating relational transparency, self-awareness, balanced processing and internalized moral perspective - but the relational and communicative channels differ based on cultural power distance orientation.

Empirical evidence supports this cultural moderation hypothesis. In a comparative study of NATO multinational headquarters (examining SHAPE strategic headquarters, German-Dutch corps, and EU mission headquarters), researchers found that national military cultures remained distinctive in leadership style preferences even within the same multinational command structure (Ethik und Militar, 2015). Importantly, when operationally oriented (closer to combat operations), all national groups shifted preferences toward more hierarchical, directive leadership styles, suggesting that operational task demands and proximity to threat interact with cultural preference to shape effective leadership. This implies that the cultural moderation of leadership effects is not static but is conditioned by operational context as well as cultural background.

3.2 Hierarchical Trust and Relational Mechanisms in High-Power-Distance Contexts

In high-power-distance military cultures, trust operates through distinct mechanisms compared to low-power-distance contexts. Rather than trust emerging primarily from personal relationship quality and emotional connection, hierarchical trust emerges from:

1. Role clarity and institutional predictability: When hierarchical responsibilities are clear and role expectations are explicit, subordinates can reliably predict leader behavior and organizational response, creating psychological safety through predictability;
2. Fair and consistent application of institutional norms: When leaders apply organizational standards consistently and equitably, subordinates experience trust through justice and fairness rather than personal favoritism;
3. Demonstrated institutional commitment: When leaders visibly prioritize institutional mission and subordinate personal interests, this signals that the hierarchy exists for collective purpose rather than individual benefit;
4. Professional mastery and operational capability: When leaders demonstrate superior competence in their role, subordinates trust their professional judgment and leadership capability.

In high-power-distance contexts, therefore, organizational resilience emerges through a different pathway than low-power-distance contexts. Rather than:

Authentic (Personal) Leadership → Psychological Safety → Organizational Identification → Individual Resilience.

The pathway operates more as:

Institutional Authentic Leadership (Consistency) → Hierarchical Trust → Organizational Identification (through collective mission) → Collective Resilience.

This distinction is critical: in high-power-distance contexts, resilience emerges not primarily as individual psychological resource development but as deep organizational integration and collective problem-solving capacity. When individuals trust the institution and institutional

leadership, they access collective resources, collective meaning systems, and coordinated collective action, all supporting resilience through collective rather than individual channels (Caragea, 2024).

A 2021 study by Gaddy and Gonzalez examining authentic leadership as an individual and social factor of resilience in military personnel found that authentic leadership predicted resilience both through individual pathways (individual confidence, self-efficacy) and through social pathways (trust in unit, sense of belonging to unit). Importantly, the social pathway (operating through organizational identification and unit cohesion) accounted for substantial variance in resilience outcomes, particularly in military contexts where unit cohesion is institutionally emphasized. This provides empirical support for the proposition that authentic leadership activates resilience through both individual psychological resources and collective/organizational mechanisms, with the relative emphasis varying by organizational context (Gaddy & Gonzalez, 2021).

3.3 Collectivism, Individual Autonomy, and Resilience Pathways

Beyond power distance, collectivism-individualism orientation influences how authentic leadership translates into resilience. In collectivist military cultures (more prominent in Eastern European contexts), resilience emerges partly through:

- Strong unit cohesion and mutual support: Individuals draw resilience from unit relationships and collective identity;
- Clear role integration within unit structure: Clarity about how one's efforts contribute to collective mission provides meaning and resilience;
- Access to collective resources and collective problem-solving: When facing challenges, collectivist-oriented individuals draw on unit support and collective solutions;
- Institutional continuity and tradition: Connection to institutional history and tradition provides psychological grounding and resilience.

In individualist military cultures (more prominent in Western contexts), resilience emerges partly through:

- Individual autonomy and self-reliance: Individuals develop confidence in their own judgment and capacity to manage challenges;
- Personal achievement and competence: Resilience builds from personal mastery experiences and recognition of individual capability;
- Individual psychological resource development: Hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism are cultivated as personal psychological strengths;
- Innovation and adaptive risk-taking: Individuals are supported in experimenting with novel approaches and learning from experience.

These represent different-not superior/inferior-resilience pathways. A collectivist-oriented unit with strong cohesion and clear role integration may demonstrate substantial resilience through collective mechanisms, while an individualist-oriented unit with autonomous, self-reliant personnel may demonstrate resilience through individual psychological resource development. Contemporary military effectiveness, however, appears to require elements of both-units must maintain strong cohesion and coordination while also developing distributed adaptive capacity in individual personnel (Caragea, 2025a).

The tension between hierarchical collectivism and individual adaptive autonomy represents a central challenge for contemporary military organizations, particularly as NATO expands and hybrid threats demand more distributed, decentralized operations. Military leaders and organizational designers must navigate this tension by deliberately cultivating both collective identity and individual autonomous capacity, recognizing that these support resilience through different but complementary mechanisms.

4. Military-specific evidence: deployment, stress, and resilience trajectories

4.1 Resilience Under Operational Stress: Combat Deployment Literature

Understanding how leadership and culture shape resilience gains particular urgency in military contexts characterized by extreme stress, high-stakes decision-making, and sustained operational demands. Research on military deployments provides important contextual evidence about how resilience operates when faced with combat-related trauma, separated families, extended isolation, and moral injury.

Hoge et al. (2004) landmark study of combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan found that military personnel returning from combat deployments reported elevated rates of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress, yet many barriers prevented help-seeking, including stigma, practical concerns about career impact, and belief that problems would resolve without intervention. Critically, the research revealed that individual differences in resilience—the capacity to manage these stressors and maintain functioning—varied significantly based on unit-level factors including leadership quality and unit cohesion.

Bartone's research on resilience under military operational stress posed the critical question: "Can leaders enhance soldier well-being?" (Bartone, 2012). His research demonstrated that leaders directly influenced soldier resilience through multiple mechanisms: creating organizational conditions supporting psychological safety, modeling resilience through their own response to stress, ensuring clear communication about mission purpose and unit roles, and maintaining unit cohesion during challenging operations. Bartone's research established that resilience was not solely an individual trait but a capacity that could be developed and supported through effective leadership and organizational practices.

More recent longitudinal research by Adler et al. (2023) examined resilience across a complete combat deployment cycle (pre-deployment, during deployment, post-deployment) using growth curve modeling. This research revealed that resilience trajectories were not stable but changed dynamically across deployment phases, with some personnel showing sustained resilience throughout, others showing decline during deployment, and others showing post-deployment adjustment challenges. Critically, trajectories were partially predicted by leadership quality and unit cohesion measures assessed pre-deployment, suggesting that leaders' actions before deployment shaped how personnel would manage stress during and after deployment.

A 2023 study by Adler et al. examining longitudinal measurement invariance and growth curve modeling of resilience across a combat deployment cycle found that leadership authenticity—assessed through objective behavioral observations and subordinate ratings—predicted more favorable resilience trajectories across the deployment cycle. Personnel with authentic leaders maintained or improved resilience through deployment, while personnel with lower authenticity leadership showed greater resilience decline across the cycle. This provides direct empirical evidence that authentic leadership specifically (not just generic "good" leadership) supports resilience maintenance under extreme operational stress (Adler et al., 2023).

4.2 Eastern European Military Context: The Lithuanian Armed Forces Example

The Lithuanian Armed Forces illustrate an Eastern European military organization engaged in balancing the demands of NATO integration with the preservation of its institutional and cultural distinctiveness. A 2024 study conducted by Prakapiene, Simanskiene and Bakker explored the specific obstacles encountered in designing and delivering resilience training for members of the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

The research revealed that Lithuanian military personnel responded positively to resilience training incorporating both traditional institutional values (collective mission focus, hierarchical structure respect) and modern psychological approaches (individual resource development, psychological safety). The training was most effective when instructors explicitly connected

resilience development to institutional military mission rather than framing it as individual psychological enhancement (Prakapiene et al., 2024).

This Lithuanian case illustrates an important practical insight: Eastern European military organizations can successfully integrate contemporary leadership and resilience approaches when these are presented as enhancements to institutional effectiveness rather than replacements for traditional military culture. The research further revealed that resilience training incorporating secure base leadership principles (providing both structure/support and autonomy encouragement) was particularly effective in Lithuanian military contexts, suggesting that this theoretical framework may indeed provide practical integration across cultural contexts.

4.3 Post-Deployment Readjustment and Sustained Resilience

An often-overlooked aspect of military resilience concerns the challenge of post-deployment readjustment. Cabrera and Adler (2021) examined the substantial challenge military personnel face in readjusting to civilian-oriented military life after combat deployments, noting that resilience must extend beyond deployment into the reintegration phase. Their research found that leadership continuity, maintained unit cohesion, and transparent communication during transition periods supported sustained resilience through post-deployment readjustment. Personnel who experienced leadership transitions or unit dissolution during readjustment periods showed greater difficulty in sustained resilience compared to those maintaining leadership and unit continuity. This suggests that organizational resilience requires sustained attention to leadership quality and unit cohesion across multiple operational phases, not just during deployment (Cabrera & Adler, 2021).

5. Mechanisms of cultural moderation: integrated framework

5.1 High-Power-Distance Military Pathway: Institutional Authentic Leadership → Hierarchical Trust → Collective Resilience

Building on the evidence reviewed above, we can specify the pathway through which authentic leadership promotes resilience in high-power-distance military contexts:

Step 1: Institutional Authentic Leadership Expression

Leaders demonstrate authentic engagement within hierarchical role, expressing authenticity through consistency between institutional values and actual behavior, transparent communication about organizational challenges (framed in institutional context), and balanced processing that explicitly considers collective mission and institutional precedent.

Step 2: Hierarchical Trust Development

When military personnel observe leaders consistently upholding institutional values, prioritizing collective welfare, applying organizational standards fairly, and demonstrating professional mastery, they develop trust in leadership authority. This trust is grounded in institutional legitimacy and demonstrated institutional commitment rather than personal relationship quality.

Step 3: Organizational Identification (Collective Focus)

From hierarchical trust emerges strong organizational identification, but expressed through collective rather than individual emphasis: individuals identify with the institution, the mission, the unit—their sense of self becomes intertwined with collective identity rather than individual achievement.

Step 4: Collective Resilience Through Institutional Resources

From collective organizational identification, individuals access institutional resources for managing stress: collective problem-solving, unit support networks, institutional meaning systems that frame individual challenges within larger institutional mission, and coordinated collective action to address challenges. Resilience emerges as individuals draw on collective rather than primarily individual psychological resources.

This pathway remains consistent with authentic leadership theory (leaders are still expressing self-awareness, transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing) but operates through institutionally grounded mechanisms rather than individually grounded mechanisms.

5.2 Low-Power-Distance Military Pathway: Personal Authentic Leadership → Psychological Safety → Individual Resilience

In contrast, the pathway in low-power-distance military contexts operates as:

Step 1: Personal Authentic Leadership Expression

Leaders demonstrate authentic personal engagement, expressing authenticity through genuine self-presentation, transparent acknowledgment of personal uncertainties and limitations, visible investment in individuals' personal development, and genuine relationship building.

Step 2: Psychological Safety Development

When military personnel observe leaders openly acknowledging limitations, inviting input, admitting mistakes, and demonstrating genuine concern for their welfare, they develop psychological safety: confidence that interpersonal risks are acceptable and that speaking up will not result in punishment.

Step 3: Organizational Identification (Individual-Collective Blend)

From psychological safety emerges organizational identification expressed through personal trust in leadership combined with connection to institutional mission. Individuals maintain distinct individual identities while also identifying with the organization.

Step 4: Individual Resilience Through Personal Psychological Capital

From this identification emerges resilience grounded partly in organizational support but substantially in developed individual psychological capital: personal confidence in one's judgment, developed hope (goal-directed motivation), efficacy (confidence in success), and optimism about managing challenges. Resilience emerges as individuals develop autonomous psychological resources while remaining supported by organizational relationships.

This pathway also remains consistent with authentic leadership theory but operates through individually grounded psychological mechanisms supported by organizational relationships.

5.3 Integrated Model: Secure Base Leadership Across Cultural Contexts

The critical insight is that both pathways represent legitimate, effective expressions of authentic leadership, achieving resilience through culturally congruent mechanisms. The theoretical and practical advance offered by secure base leadership is that it provides a framework for integrating seemingly contradictory elements:

A secure base leader in a high-power-distance context provides:

- Clear hierarchical structure and role definition (secure base function);
- Protection from arbitrary demands and chaos (safe haven function);
- Fair, consistent application of organizational standards (hierarchical trust);
- Visible commitment to collective mission (institutional authenticity);
- Encouragement for adaptive initiative within role structure (autonomy function).

A secure base leader in a low-power-distance context provides:

- Transparent communication including admission of uncertainty (authenticity);
- Psychological safety and support for personal development (secure base/safe haven);
- Inclusion in problem-solving and decision-making (autonomy encouragement);
- Personal investment in individual growth (safe haven/support function);
- Clear expectations and guidance alongside autonomy (hierarchical structure).

In both contexts, the leader provides both security/support and autonomy/challenge, but the specific relational and communicative expression differs based on cultural context. The outcome-developed organizational identification and resilience-remains consistent despite different mechanisms.

5.4 Operational Context as a Secondary Moderator

Importantly, operational context appears to interact with cultural context as a moderator of leadership effects. Research on NATO multinational headquarters revealed that personnel closer to combat operations showed stronger preferences for directive, hierarchical leadership regardless of national culture (Ethik und Militar, 2015). This suggests that operational demands (ambiguity, high consequences, extreme stress, rapid decision requirements) activate universal preferences for structure and clear authority that partially override cultural preferences.

This has important implications for military organizations: in garrison contexts, leadership might successfully emphasize psychological safety, individual empowerment, and personal authenticity; in combat contexts, even personnel from low-power-distance cultures appear to appreciate and require directive, clear hierarchical structure. Effective military leaders must therefore develop flexibility to adapt their leadership expression based not only on cultural context but also on operational context and task demands.

6. Practical implications: culturally informed leadership development

6.1 Diagnostic Assessment of Military Cultural Context

Military organizations seeking to enhance resilience through leadership development should begin with explicit, systematic assessment of their cultural context. Rather than adopting generic leadership development models, organizations should diagnose their own cultural characteristics, including:

Power Distance Assessment:

- To what extent do personnel expect and accept hierarchical authority?
- How is leadership authority legitimated-through position, competence, personal relationship, institutional mission?
- What behaviors do personnel perceive as appropriate exercises of authority versus inappropriate overreach?

Organizational Identification Patterns:

- Do personnel primarily identify with their individual role, unit, branch, military institution, or nation?
- In times of stress, do personnel seek individual or collective solutions?
- What provides meaning and motivation in military service-personal achievement, collective mission, institutional tradition?

Trust Foundations:

- What behaviors build subordinate trust in leaders-hierarchical role clarity, personal relationship, demonstrated competence, institutional commitment?
- Is trust in leadership grounded in personal relationship quality or institutional legitimacy?
- What behaviors undermine trust-inconsistency, perceived self-interest, uncertainty, deviation from institutional norms?

Deployment and Stress Response Patterns:

- How do personnel respond to operational stress-do they maintain role clarity seeking, increase reliance on unit cohesion, seek more leader guidance?
- What factors support resilience across deployment cycles?
- Which personnel struggle most with post-deployment readjustment and what predicts sustained resilience?

This diagnostic phase should involve mixed methods: quantitative assessment of cultural dimensions (adapted versions of Hofstede's cultural dimensions indices), qualitative interviews with military leaders and personnel across ranks, and analysis of organizational documents (doctrine, regulations, training curricula) revealing implicit assumptions about leadership and organizational functioning.

6.2 Secure Base Leadership Development Programs

Given the empirical support for secure base leadership and its theoretical applicability across cultural contexts, military organizations should consider developing structured training programs in secure base leadership (Caragea, 2025b). Based on attachment theory and organizational research, such programs should:

Educational Component: Understanding Secure Base Leadership

- Teach attachment theory adapted to military context: humans require both security and autonomy for optimal functioning;
- Explain how military leaders can provide security through hierarchical clarity, protection, reliable support;
- Explain how military leaders can encourage autonomy through delegated authority, trust in subordinate judgment, support for individual initiative;
- Illustrate both functions through military examples from different national military traditions.

Competency Development Component: Specific Leadership Skills

- Creating hierarchical clarity while maintaining psychological safety: Leaders learn to establish clear authority, role definition, and expectations while remaining accessible, supportive, and responsive to subordinate concerns;
- Providing support while encouraging adaptive risk-taking: Leaders develop capability to support personnel through challenges while encouraging experimentation, appropriate initiative, and independent problem-solving;
- Building unit cohesion while developing individual capability: Leaders learn practices that strengthen collective identity and mutual support while also developing individual personnel's autonomous capacity
- Maintaining consistency while; demonstrating authentic engagement: Leaders practice consistency with institutional values and standards while also expressing personal investment in individual personnel development.

Application Component: Military-Specific Context

- Military leaders practice secure base leadership in progressively realistic military scenarios: garrison operations, field training exercises, simulated deployment conditions;
- Leaders receive feedback on how effectively they balance structure/support with autonomy/challenge across different operational contexts;
- Organizations assess outcomes: Does secure base leadership training increase measured leader authenticity? Does it improve unit resilience? Does it enhance post-deployment readjustment?

6.3 Cultural Congruence in Leadership Implementation

A critical practical principle emerges from the research: effective authentic leadership must be culturally congruent to be credible and effective. A leader in a high-power-distance military context who attempts to express leadership through low-power-distance mechanisms (extensive personal disclosure, frequent admission of uncertainty, soliciting input on all decisions) may appear inauthentic or weak to personnel socialized in hierarchical traditions. Conversely, a leader in a low-power-distance military context who maintains rigorous emotional distance or rarely admits uncertainty may appear inauthentic to personnel socialized in more egalitarian traditions.

The practical solution involves:

1. Understanding one's own cultural context: Leaders should explicitly understand the cultural norms and expectations of their military organization and personnel,
2. Identifying culturally congruent authenticity expressions: Leaders need to determine which authentic leadership behaviors are most consistent with the cultural expectations of their specific

context. Within high power distance environments, such behaviors may include open and transparent discussions of organizational issues framed through institutional perspectives, the demonstration of strong institutional loyalty, and the fair as well as uniform application of organizational rules and standards. In low-power-distance contexts, this might include personal transparency, relationship investment, inclusion in decision-making,

3. Maintaining authentic leadership principles while adapting expression: Leaders preserve the essential tenets of authentic leadership - self-awareness, openness and transparency, an internalized moral orientation, and balanced judgment - while adjusting the outward manifestation of these behaviors to correspond with the cultural parameters of their environment.

6.4 Managing Cultural Integration in NATO Contexts

NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and ongoing multinational operations create specific challenges and opportunities for culturally informed leadership development. Military personnel from Eastern European and Western traditions increasingly work together in NATO structures. Recommendations for managing this integration include:

Explicit Cross-Cultural Leadership Training:

- NATO leadership development programs should explicitly address comparative military cultures;

- Leaders should understand that diverse leadership style preferences among NATO personnel reflect legitimate cultural differences, not individual deficiency;

- Training should emphasize that NATO operations require integration of diverse approaches, not adoption of single approach.

NATO Doctrine Development with Cultural Flexibility:

- NATO doctrine and training standards should maintain universal commitments to psychological safety, inclusion, and adaptive capacity;

- Doctrine should explicitly permit diverse implementation mechanisms, recognizing that psychological safety can be created through different relational channels in different cultural contexts;

- NATO assessment of leadership effectiveness should evaluate outcomes (resilience, unit cohesion, adaptive capacity) rather than prescribing specific behaviors.

Deliberate Culture Bridging:

- Identify and empower "culture entrepreneurs"-military leaders who understand both their home military culture and NATO norms, and who can bridge between seemingly incompatible perspectives;

- Create opportunities for cross-cultural military exchange, particularly at senior levels where cultural integration decisions are made;

- Use comparative case studies and shared problem-solving to demonstrate that multiple legitimate approaches to military leadership and resilience exist.

Long-term NATO Organizational Culture Development:

- NATO is itself developing an organizational culture that includes elements from member militaries but cannot be simply the sum of national military cultures;

- NATO leadership development should help emerging NATO organizational culture evolve toward explicit integration: maintaining commitment to collective NATO mission while respecting member military distinctiveness, incorporating secure base leadership principles applicable across cultural contexts, and developing shared language for discussing military leadership and resilience that transcends specific national traditions.

7. Limitations and future research directions

This article has advanced an integrated theoretical framework grounding authentic leadership's effects on organizational resilience within cultural moderation theory. However, several limitations merit acknowledgment:

Limited Direct Empirical Evidence on Cultural Moderation:

While theoretical arguments for cultural moderation are compelling and indirect empirical evidence supports cultural differentiation in leadership preferences, direct empirical evidence explicitly examining how cultural dimensions moderate the authentic leadership-resilience relationship in military contexts remains limited. Future research should employ multilevel mediation analyses (using frameworks developed by Preacher et al., 2010) to directly test cultural moderation hypotheses across diverse military populations.

Generalization Across Military Contexts:

This article has treated Eastern European military cultures somewhat homogeneously, yet substantial differences exist between Baltic militaries (NATO members since 2004), Central European militaries (NATO members since 1999), and Southeastern European militaries (more recent NATO members or non-members). Future research should examine how specific military histories, NATO membership duration, and national strategic contexts shape cultural characteristics and leadership preferences.

Operational Context Specification:

While this article has noted that operational context interacts with cultural context, future research should systematically specify how different operational contexts (garrison, field training, combat operations, peacekeeping, multinational operations) shape leadership effectiveness across cultural contexts. This would benefit military organizations seeking to develop leaders who can maintain effectiveness across diverse operational demands.

Longitudinal Evidence on Sustained Resilience:

Most empirical studies employ cross-sectional designs or short-term follow-ups. Future research should track personnel and units across extended periods (multiple deployment cycles, career progressions) to examine whether leadership effects and organizational resilience are sustained over time and how cultural context influences sustainability.

Measurement Standardization Across Cultures:

Authentic leadership, organizational identification, psychological capital, and resilience are operationalized through measurement instruments developed and validated primarily in Western (particularly American) contexts. Future research should develop and validate culturally adapted measurement instruments, examining whether these constructs manifest similarly across diverse military cultures or whether culture-specific measurement adaptations are needed (Giurca et al., 2021; Caragea, 2023).

8. Conclusions

Military organizations worldwide face an imperative to build organizational resilience while navigating unprecedented cultural integration and operational complexity. This article has advanced the proposition that authentic leadership promotes organizational resilience through culturally moderated pathways: while authentic leadership demonstrates robust positive associations with resilience across diverse military contexts, the strength and specific mechanisms of these effects vary significantly based on cultural dimensions including power distance, collectivism orientation, and hierarchical trust foundations.

The research reviewed establishes that authentic leadership builds resilience through consistent mechanisms (organizational identification and psychological capital development) but expresses these mechanisms through culturally congruent channels. Within high power distance military settings, resilience develops through processes that emphasize institutional authenticity,

confidence in hierarchical structures, and a strong sense of collective organizational identification, thereby enabling individuals to leverage the organization’s shared institutional resources. In low-power-distance military contexts, resilience emerges through pathways emphasizing personal authenticity, psychological safety, and individual psychological capital development, enabling individuals to develop autonomous adaptive capacity supported by organizational relationships.

The concept of secure base leadership provides both theoretical integration and practical application across cultural contexts. By simultaneously providing both hierarchical structure and psychological support (security) alongside autonomous initiative and personal development encouragement (autonomy), secure base leaders bridge seemingly contradictory cultural approaches and cultivate resilience through both collective and individual mechanisms.

For military organizations, particularly those serving in NATO contexts where Eastern European and Western traditions increasingly intersect, the key practical insight is that effective leadership development requires cultural understanding, not cultural elimination. Rather than attempting to impose uniform leadership models across diverse military contexts, military organizations should:

1. Diagnose their cultural context systematically, understanding power distance orientation, organizational identification patterns, trust foundations, and resilience pathways;
2. Develop secure base leadership capability as a culturally flexible framework supporting resilience through both hierarchical and participative mechanisms;
3. Express authentic leadership through culturally congruent channels while maintaining authentic leadership principles;
4. Create deliberate cultural integration mechanisms in NATO and multinational contexts, helping diverse military traditions learn from one another and collaborate effectively.

Military excellence in contemporary security environments requires neither wholesale adoption of Western participative leadership models nor defensive preservation of traditional hierarchical approaches. Instead, military organizations that thoughtfully integrate culturally authentic leadership approaches, deliberately navigate cultural tensions through understanding and respect, and develop leaders capable of flexible cultural adaptation will build the genuine organizational resilience that contemporary military challenges demand.

The path forward requires embracing cultural complexity rather than seeking to eliminate it, recognizing that military organizations are strengthened when they develop leaders grounded in their own cultural traditions while also capable of learning from, respecting, and integrating diverse approaches to military leadership and organizational resilience.

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