Competence Management of the German Armed Forces – Situations of uncertainty as an Opportunity for Officers to Develop their Competencies

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Competencies of Officers

Delivering high performance in a variety of work situations and adapting quickly to the environment
Research Questions

• How do challenging, unsettling situations and career advancement contribute to the development of officers' skills?

• What role does labilization play in the acquisition of competencies by officers?
Methodology – Conducting Interviews

**Explorative, qualitative Study**

- Conducting semi-structured interviews in a personal or by telephone
- Duration: ~ 45-60 minutes
- Selection of interviewees according to the expected information quality (Yin, 2013)
  - Experts for competence-oriented training:
    - 1 Professor, 1 Colonel, 1 Lieutenant Colonel, 1 civilian employee at the Ministry of Defence
  - Officers as target group for competence-oriented training:
    - 1 Colonel, 1 Lieutenant Colonel, 1 Commander
    - 1 Major, 1 Captain
- Evaluation of data: inductive content analysis (Mayring, 2010)
## Interview Design – What did we ask?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Experts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding of competencies</td>
<td>• Competence Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reception of the Competency model of the German Armed Forces</td>
<td>• Competency model of the German Armed Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Situations of competence development: in general, in deployment, recent experiences</td>
<td>• Competence profile of Officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Competence Management of the German Armed Forces</td>
<td>• Development of officer’s competencies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Significance of challenging situations for the competence development of officers</td>
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</table>
What Does Competence Mean?

Competencies according to Heyse and Erpenbeck (2009)

- Competency ≠ Knowledge (based on information)
- Competency = Information (enriched with values, rules and norms) linked to emotion and motivation
- Competencies enable action under uncertainty → they help to compensate a lack of information in new situations
- Meta-Competency → individuals are able to develop their own competencies in a self-organized manner
  - Ability to learn (adaptability)
  - Assessment of one’s own competence level (self-awareness)
### International Competency Models

- Development of national competency models for special military areas
- China: Competency model for the leadership of Chinese cadets *(Tian et al., 2009)*
- USA:
  - Readiness Estimate and Deployability Index for nurses to ensure their operational readiness *(Rivers et al., 2006)*
  - Performance model for soldiers at the start of their military career *(Campbell et al., 1990)*
- Great Britain: Competence framework for military surgical teams *(Ramasamy et al., 2010)*

### Operations-oriented Competence Development

- Focus on intercultural competence
  - Development of corresponding trainings *(e.g., Brenneman et al., 2016)*
  - Design of suitable assessments *(e.g., Moenning et al., 2016)*
- Measurement of military-cultural competence *(e.g., Meyer et al., 2015; Stewart, 2012)*
- Development and evaluation of resilience *(e.g., Reivich et al., 2011; Griffith und West, 2013)*
What Do Officers Understand by Competence?

“An individual possesses the various skills necessary for the performance of his or her special task.” (Major)

„The ability that allows me to mentally grasp and evaluate facts that are connected with a task and the willingness to put these findings autonomously into practice“ (Commander)

„Competencies are a mixture of character and social skills, talents and expertise.“ (Colonel)

„Solving tasks independently in complex situations, even if unforeseen problems arise“ (Captain)

Having the skills (personal, social and professional) and motivation to cope independently with complex tasks and unforeseen problems.
Development of Skills According to Heyse & Erpenbeck

- Personnel development measures for knowledge transfer
- Examples: courses and trainings

- Trying out what has been learned and integrating it into everyday life
- Example: Job Rotation

- Mastering new, challenging situations
- Frequently associated with stress, anxiety and palpitations
Labilization – Psychological Stress Dimensions in Modern Military Operations

- Isolation
- Ambiguity
- Alienation
- High Workload
- Powerlessness
- Dangers

(Bartone 2006)
Background Information and Aim of Model

- 5 basic competences, which are operationalized in partial competencies
- Competency to Act as focus of training; it is determined by an individual’s sum of competencies
- Goals pursued:
  - Covering the personnel requirements better and exploiting optimally the potentials of all employees
  - Involving all stakeholders in a dialogue
  - Supporting executives, personnel managers and managers of training
Which Competencies Are Particularly Important for Officers?

- Ability to motivate
- Strategic Thinking
- Decisiveness

- Specific professional competencies

- Analyzing and problem solving
- Ability to Organize
- Pedagogic skills

- Educate yourself
- Integrity
- Strength of character

- Humanity
- Decency
- Flexibility

- Empathy
- Caring for others
- Respect for others
- Comradry
- Team Spirit
- Communication Ability

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# How Do Officers Develop Their Competencies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Perceived Competence Development</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>• Mastering complexity&lt;br&gt;• Quickly analyze, systematize and prioritize issues</td>
<td>Analytical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>• Interesting content&lt;br&gt;• Good professional basis&lt;br&gt;• Valuable exchange with participants</td>
<td>Professional Knowledge, Peer Coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>• Multifaceted learning field for social competence, leadership, self-management, analytical thinking, project management and competency to act</td>
<td>Project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-the-job</td>
<td>• Early, gradual introduction to increasingly demanding management asks&lt;br&gt;• Development through real challenges in the areas of social, leadership and personal competency</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment</td>
<td>• Development of professional and leadership competencies in stressful situations at an extreme pace</td>
<td>Professional competencies and leadership in extremis</td>
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</table>
How Do Officers Describe their Competency Profile?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Self-Competency (as meta-competency)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(generally of decreasing importance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods Expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Competency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading and Management Competency</td>
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Time

Advancement in the Hierarchy
"I would see a priority here. I would take social competence and self-competence as character competence. To put it bluntly, if they're both really good, I can handle the rest by training."
## Does Deployment Have an Effect?

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<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Experiencing Deployment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Novel situations, many new impressions</td>
<td>• Personality development and development of self competency (motivating oneself)</td>
<td>• Positive stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pressure, external constraints, no possibility of “evasion”</td>
<td>• Development of professional competency (routines)</td>
<td>• Large scope of action (you can make a difference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Persisting stress (long working phases, no relaxation phases)</td>
<td>• Development of leadership skills in extremis (motivating in stressful situations)</td>
<td>• Experience of personal growth: affirmation and reinforcement in the leading role</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**BUT:**

- Deployment = objective of training and not as the last station of training
- A high degree of competencies (decency, character) must already exist beforehand
"Nowhere else is so much demanded of you as in deployment – psychically, stress, everything related to it. It's like a bricklayer. If you only train a bricklayer theoretically, but he never has to pull up a wall, he is missing something."
What are the effects of new leadership situations?

**Characteristics**

- Typical stress factors:
  - Greater leadership range / area of responsibility
  - Older and more experienced subordinates
  - Challenging management tasks (e.g. assessment interviews)
  - New leadership situations are generally strenuous, as not all the necessary skills can be taught beforehand

**Effect**

- Development of
  - Leadership competency
  - Self-competency and
  - Social competency
  - Development of „real“, outlasting and universally applicable competencies
  - Broadening one’s horizon

**Success Factor**

- Existing professional competence
- On-site support (e.g. by experienced subordinates)
"Take my career as an officer in the general staff, every two to three years you change to the next position. You always make the leaps at the respective position. You have to swim free."
How are Officers Accompanied in their Competence Development?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Forms</th>
<th>Specification</th>
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</table>
| Feedback| • Spontaneous intervention and situational feedback given by superiors or experienced subordinates in problem situations  
          • Supervisors or experienced subordinates as sparring partners and development assistants |
| Reflection| • Hints for self-reflection  
              • Suggestion for reflection of mistakes and misconduct by superiors and subordinates |
| Mentoring| Formalized Mentoring |
| Cascade System| Experienced soldiers take „novices“ by the hand so that they can develop professionally, personally and socially. |
| Peer Exchange| Regular Peer coaching (individual initiatives of superiors) |
| Onboarding| Detailed and adequately timed onboarding by the predecessor |
“I have also learned a lot from non-commissioned officers who had this very distinctive social and character competence. It's not always the superior who trains you.”
New leadership situations and deployment are experienced as labilizing.

Self-, leadership and social competencies are developing particularly quickly and sustainably in emotionally unstable situations.

Support and assistance of experienced subordinates and superiors makes a significant contribution to competency development in unstable situations.
Take Away

• More intensive research on competency development (in deployment) necessary.

• Simulations cannot replace „real“ labilizing situations.

• Since guidance and support contribute significantly to competence development in labilizing and career advancement situations, it is necessary to examine how this could be systematized.
Bibliography


Bibliography

Moenning, Anne; Turnbull, Benton; Abel, Daniel; Meyer, Christine; Hale, Merritt; Guerlain, Stephanie; Brown, Donald (Hg.) (2016): Developing avatars to improve cultural competence in US soldiers: IEEE.


