

Szabolcs Sári¹

Military History, Selection, Competencies

Hadtörténelem, kiválasztás, kompetencia

Abstract

The aim of the study is to provide a general overview of the historical development of leadership competences, to draw conclusions and then to review the system of selection. It is my firm conviction that the latter will play an important role in the future, because we are not all equally suited to all tasks. Military career is a lifelong vocation, therefore selection is not just occasional, it defines the life of a person in the long run.

Keywords: *leadership, selection, competence, history*

Absztrakt

A tanulmány célja a vezetéshez szükséges kompetenciák történelmi fejlődésének általános áttekintése, következtetések levonása, majd a kiválasztás rendszerének áttekintése. Meggyőződésem, hogy ennek fontos szerepe lesz a jövőben, hiszen nem vagyunk minden feladatra egyformán alkalmasak. A katonai pálya egy életre szóló hivatás, így a kiválasztás nemcsak eseti, hanem hosszú távra szól.

Kulcsszavak: *vezetés, kiválasztás, kompetencia, történelem*

¹ Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem Hadtudományi Doktori Iskola, doktorandusz – National University of Public Service, Doctoral School of Military Sciences, PhD Student, e-mail: Sari.Szabolcs@uni-nke.hu, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7865-4894>

The aim of this study includes the general overview of the historical development of leadership competences. I have asked myself the question whether we can observe differences and deviations in the examination or not. The answer is very likely to be yes, because the role of the spirit of the era, the security policy situation at that time, and the historical events are significant. Of course, those different leadership competences of military leaders and commanders are highlighted which occur in periods of war and not in periods of peace.

I have chosen from the famous leaders of military history, without aiming to give an exhaustive list, I have rather been motivated by the leader and the type of leader typical of the concerned period of time. I did not aim to set priorities, and I did not aim to assess their significance, I rather focused on describing their most important characteristics in a straightforward manner, and on discovering the similarities and differences between them.

I am convinced that selection also had a role back then, because we are not equally suitable to perform certain tasks; military career is a lifelong vocation for everyone who, full of self-confidence, thinks in terms of long periods rather than short ones, while taking opportunities into consideration, preparing and developing himself or herself continuously. Thinking like this, everyone who has a proper level of motivation may get integrated into the system sooner or later, and the personal attitude that makes someone suitable for a certain task, role or field is established or developed.

But what is required for this? I do not believe in the utopian situation where we can meet already prepared and fully developed future leaders who are actually ready to perform the task, and the path of becoming an officer is only a waste of time, as everything can be downloaded by using the internet. I would like to add that we face this situation in practice quite often. Going back to the original question, we do not start building a house by constructing the roof, we need a stable basis: competences that are essential for someone to become a good leader from a general point of view. What are these basic competences?

After we find the answer to this question, the next milestone is selection. Selection has a very important role. There are objective indicators and circumstances to meet, such as the total number of points calculated for university application, having a language certificate, participating at the examination of suitability for work. But how can we decide whether someone will be a good leader or not?

Can we make a 100% accurate decision? Or we can only discover the basics, the basic general military competences, and allow the person to start the path of learning, while monitoring him or her continuously, and follow this career path until the first employment, even while holding a customised competence map. This is a complex task that requires the creation of a standardised system based on internal communication and cooperation at every level. Training officers seems to be simple now, but it is actually a more complex task that also includes difficulties day by day. For example, I am convinced that patience will become one of the basic military competences during the next period of time, not only for officers just starting a career, but also for the mentoring staff.

History, Competences

Sun Tzu²

The Chinese author, philosopher and soldier is famous of his book, being influential even today, written about the rules of warfare. The work³ was written in an era characterised by the warring between less and more important Chinese states.

While we read the book and follow the thoughts of Sun Tzu about the skills of a leader, the following may be underlined:

- The commander shall be:
 - express
 - clear
 - decided
 - rigorous

In addition:

- he/she shall have:
 - wisdom⁴
 - trustworthiness
 - humanity⁵
 - bravery

Miklós Zrínyi⁶

The great-grandson of the Hero of Szigetvár was born on 1 May 1620. He was a military leader with a good theoretical knowledge, a high level of culture, an open mind and a significant knowledge of military history.

He believed that, together with professional knowledge, bravery – as a leadership competence – can make a commander successful. ("Indeed, understanding military science increases bravery, because nobody is afraid of a thing that has been learned well before").⁷

Over the course of our military service, we have already heard this quote many times:

"If you are the one to know the art of war better, you will be the one to have victory in battle."

² Sun Tzu (543 B.C. – 495 B.C., deceased at 47–48) was a military commander of the ancient China, the classic author of military science, the author of the book *The Art of War*.

³ Tzu, Sun: *The Art of War*, Translated from the Chinese by Lionel Giles, M.A. (1910), Allandale Online Publishing, Leicester, 2000. https://sites.ualberta.ca/~enoch/Readings/The_Art_Of_War.pdf (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

⁴ Tzu (2000): *op. cit.* 2. "The Commander stands for the virtues of wisdom, sincerely, benevolence, courage and strictness."

⁵ Tzu (2000): *op. cit.* 38. „Therefore soldiers must be treated in the first instance with humanity, but kept under control by means of iron discipline. This is a certain road to victory."

⁶ Magyar hadszervezet és hadművészet a honfoglalástól a XVIII. század végéig [Military Organisation and Warfare in Hungary before the End of the 18th Century]. <https://szantomihaly.gportal.hu/gindex.php?pg=28223680> (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

⁷ Ibid.

Flexibility and reaction capacity are very important personal skills of a leader.⁸

“In each hour of military affairs, we are under the attack of new histories and countless changes. There is no regulation in military science that must be applied by the captain at all time. We must make a difference and make changes in things, as being ordered by time and suitability.”⁹

He wrote his work *Vitéz Hadnagy* [The Valiant Commander] around 1650–1653. He was an active writer, and he pointed out that the end of correct judgment and the exaggeration of the phenomenon causing fear have an adverse effect on the outcome of a battle, and a leader shall never ignore that.

Napoleon Bonaparte¹⁰

Napoleon (15 August 1769 – 5 May 1821) was a French military leader, politician, one of the most important characters of the history of Europe. He had extraordinary skills in mathematics, and he also delivered excellent results in history and geography.

What did we learn from Napoleon, the military leader?¹¹

- Aim high, do not be satisfied with just enough, when you can have the most.
- Be where you are needed.
- Be the first to do something, set an example.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Acknowledge that you cannot do everything by yourself.
- Be different, act different.
- Respect your people, respect your soldiers regardless of military rank.
- Look people in the eye.
- Control your temper.
- Have respect for your time.
- Never stop learning.

George Patton¹²

Patton was born on 11 November 1885 in Saint Gabriel, California. He finished his training at the U.S. Military Academy in 1909. He has participated at the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm.

What did we learn from Patton?¹³

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Napoleon Bonaparte – History. www.history.com/topics/france/napoleon (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

¹¹ Luenendonk, Martin: 11 Leadership Lessons From Napoleon, 2016. www.cleverism.com/11-leadership-lessons-from-napoleon-bonaparte/ (Downloaded: 15.03.2019.)

¹² Lovelace, Alex: George Patton – United States General. www.britannica.com/biography/George-Smith-Patton (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

¹³ Hobbs, Brad: 3 Leadership Lessons From General George S. Patton, 2015. www.linkedin.com/pulse/3-leadership-lessons-from-general-george-patton-brad-hobbs (Downloaded: 15.03.2019.)

Leadership abilities are never an entitlement. Patton started to respect his own limits, he preferred the school of real experience.¹⁴

Actually, General Patton was a rude person seeking conflicts, but he still had an imposing presence. This was probably related to the fact that he was a person of practice.

Further characteristics of a leader defined by him:

- A good solution applied with vigour now is better than a perfect solution applied ten minutes later, (i.e. the importance of being fast).
- A pint of sweat will save a gallon of blood, (he believed that working hard can save one from lots of pain later).
- Leaders are found at the front of a march. If you're at the back, you're following.
- Rigour.
- Bravery.
- Self-confidence.
- Faith (faith in yourself, faith in your people).

Erwin Rommel¹⁵

Erwin Johannes Eugen Rommel (Heidenheim, 15 November 1891 – Herrlingen [today a part of Blaustein], 14 October 1944), a significant character of World War II, was equipped with similar characteristics too. He was assertive on the battlefield, he always fought at the front and he always set an example.

Norman Schwarzkopf¹⁶

Norman Schwarzkopf, a Vietnam veteran, a four-star U.S. general.¹⁷

What did we learn from Norman Schwarzkopf?

A leader shall:

- set an example
- take responsibility
- pay attention to preparation and training

¹⁴ "Real Leaders are Trained in a Real World Classroom." Hobbs, Brad: 3 Leadership Lessons from General George S. Patton, 2015. www.linkedin.com/pulse/3-leadership-lessons-from-general-george-patton-brad-hobbs (Downloaded: 15.03.2019.)

¹⁵ Tarján M. Tamás: 1891. november 15. – Erwin Rommel születése [15 November 1891 – The Birth of Erwin Rommel]. www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/1891_november_15_erwin_rommel_szuletese/ (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

¹⁶ Norman Schwarzkopf. www.biography.com/people/norman-schwarzkopf-9476401 (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

¹⁷ Kruse, Kevin: Norman Schwarzkopf: 10 Quotes on Leadership and War, 2012. www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/12/27/norman-schwarzkopf-quotes/ (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

Stanley A. McChrystal¹⁸

Stanley A. McChrystal, a four-star U.S. general, commander of the U.S. Special Forces during the Gulf Wars and the Afghanistan operations.

What did we learn from Stanley A. McChrystal?¹⁹

I would underline the following leadership attitudes:

A leader shall be:

- empathic
- credible
- humble
- humane

Outcome Requirements (Currently)²⁰

The Government Decree that provides a legal framework has defined the outcome requirements of the different bachelor's programs clearly. In addition, professional and certain general military competences have been listed too, and I would like to underline these, because I would rather focus on them. Some of the basics of general military competences is required, and it should be assessed and evaluated separately during the selection whether the candidate has the competences or not, and if not, whether they may be developed or not in the future.

Professional competences can be learned, the objective of the training is mastering them on the path of becoming an officer before the end of the 4th year. I believe that everything can be mastered before the end of the process, they are about professional competences, and of course, general skills are required for them. Moreover, there are skills and abilities that can be developed.

For example, the leaders who have completed the Bachelor in Military Leadership training program shall have:

- the proper basic military leadership (commander) competences
- a respect to the military traditions of Hungary
- an excellent mental, physical and psychological condition

They shall be able to:

- execute the orders and tasks they receive in a logical, timely and effective manner

¹⁸ Stanley A. McChrystal, www.britannica.com/biography/Stanley-McChrystal (Downloaded: 13.03. 2020.)

¹⁹ 16 Leadership Lessons from a Four Star General, <https://fs.blog/2014/03/stanley-mcchrystal-my-share-of-the-task/> (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)

²⁰ Government Decree No. 282/2016 (IX. 21.) on Defining Bachelor's and Master's Programs in the Study Field of Public Administration, the Training and Outcome Requirements, and the Amendment of the Related Government Decrees.

Another example: the abilities and skills required for the Bachelor in Military Operation training program have been defined, too:

- performing military-professional tasks in a manner following and respecting our warrior predecessors

Characteristics and skills:

- creativity, flexibility, autonomy
- problem-discovering skills and problem-solving skills
- being intuitive and having a methodological approach
- learning skills and good memory
- broad cultural knowledge
- high standards towards ourselves
- high resistance to stress
- ability of processing information
- sensitivity to the environment
- dedication and inner need for quality work
- positive approach to further professional trainings
- taking initiative, taking personal responsibility, practice, making decisions
- ability to cooperate, participating in teamwork, performing leadership tasks after having a proper amount of experience

Selection²¹

From the academic year of 2013/2014, in the admission procedure to the Faculty of Military Sciences and Officer Training of the National University of Public Service, the examination of suitability is followed by a career guidance consultation. Currently, there is no time gap between the two events, but the information available about the candidate is still incomplete, because the results of the examination of suitability are not known.

According to current statistics, the increase in the number shows that the situation of the system is even more difficult now. First, the chances of maintaining the standards will be reduced, and second, it will be more likely to encounter with persons who are leaving the military on the simplest ground that they were thinking of something different, the life of a soldier was not for them, or they have lost motivation.

²¹ Bolgár Judit – Szekeres György: A pályaeorientáció jellemzői, kapcsolata a pályaealkalmassági vizsgálattal [The Characteristics of Career Guidance and Its Relation with Aptitude Tests], *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 8 (2015/1) 283–293.

The concept of career guidance

"According to sources of professional literature and scientific researches, the conceptual and contextual understanding of career guidance is primarily related to the guidance towards a professional career, therefore it is closely related to concepts like career orientation and career socialization."²²

For persons applying to military training programs, contrary to the above concept, the existence of competences expected from cadets is examined. This could give the impression that the committee wanted to meet fully formed leaders, and had already arrived at the opinion that the candidate was certainly not suitable for the career. If we assessed general military competences and provided a guidance in line with the process accordingly, it would be possible for them to find a place in the system more easily, because "career guidance cannot be limited to one occasion, it shall not show the position of a young person in society, it shall provide help for finding this position".²³

The experts have recommended the persons organising admission tests and guidance consultations to have a one-day preparation (workshop) session within the framework of processing situations.

From 2018, the basic training will be organised on site, hosted by the Hungarian Defence Forces, Ludovika Battalion; this will allow to develop the area of selection from multiple aspects. I believe that we have to underline on-site because professionals participating in the selection process are provided with more opportunities of follow-up, in accordance with the goals of the career guidance consultation.

Coordinating the organisation of the selection in a timely manner with other events beyond our control is difficult. A possible solution is enrolling more candidates; this will happen during this year, because the target number will be higher than the years before.

Selection at Other Places

*Assessment Center/AC*²⁴

The role of an assessment center is to evaluate the expected suitability of the candidates to be selected. The candidates must face tasks that are typical of the work. A similar conception may be applied in the application procedure of cadets, as the proper experience is available. Of course, the primary task would not be solving battle tasks, because the objective is different, but performing tasks with others or being locked in for two days can discover many things.

The methodology itself was developed by the German army after World War I to select officers. During the several days of the procedure, the candidates are

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ujházy László: Tisztjelöltek kiválasztása a Brit Szárazföldi Erőknél [Selection of Cadets at the British Armed Forces], *Honvédségi Szemle*, 147 (2019/2) 101–102.

evaluated by military leaders and psychologists. The candidates must face stressful situations, so a more precise overview can be obtained on their performance expected to be made under pressure.

Of course, further developments have been performed in recent years. The application of the method is popular not only for soldiers, but also for the civil life. The assessments may include, for example:

- different situation practices
- presentation practices (may give a significant help for the areas of problem-solving and straightforwardness)
- tests
- interview situations

Ministry of Internal Affairs²⁵

In 2013, the Scientific Council for Internal Affairs ordered a research on the implementation of leadership competences; the leadership competences of certain fields of law enforcement were discovered by using questionnaires and interview questionings, and a standardised system of leadership competences of law enforcement was established on the basis of the research.

The study summarised the steps of competence-based selection as follows:²⁶

1. Preparing a competence map.
2. Testing employees who are efficient and effective in terms of competences.
3. Assigning assessment methods to competences.
4. Selecting and training the persons performing the assessment.
5. Selection process, evaluation and feedback.

Generally, the leadership competences were sorted into 8 different groups.²⁷

- leadership and decision-making
- support and cooperation
- establishing relations and presentation skills
- analysing and understanding
- creativity and establishment of concepts
- organisation and implementation
- adapting and managing challenges
- entrepreneurial spirit and performance

I would like to underline that I have discovered many similarities between the two systems in terms of competences. This may also prove that there has been some mobility between the two organisations recently.

²⁵ Hegedűs Judit (ed.): Tanulmánykötet a belügyi vezető-kiválasztási eljárásról [Collection of Studies on the Selection Procedure of Leaders in Home Affairs], 2014, 5.

²⁶ Ibid. 7.

²⁷ Ibid. 7–8.

General Military Competence

If we analyse the characteristics of military leaders, we can conclude that certain personal attitudes are present anywhere, regardless of the certain era we live in. For example, such attitudes include bravery, a broad cultural knowledge and rigour. The historical situation can also have an effect, for example, today we cannot speak about a constant war situation where bravery must be proven day by day, but according to my personal experience, the lack of bravery comes forth in case of certain colleagues soon in everyday life, represented by the approach to the tasks or having an entrepreneurial spirit.

The general military competence may consist of multiple elements. We need a military competence that must be discovered in future military cadets and military officers. This basic military competence may consist of genetically encoded personal attitudes that are determining the possibility of becoming a good leader, but it may also lead to another direction from the beginning, everyone will become some kind of a leader, because if we observe the leaders of today, contrary to the previous periods of time, we cannot be certain that there will be no mobility between the certain types of professions, within certain limits, of course.

General military competences may include:

- bravery
- ability for cooperation
- being a team player
- compliance with the law (moral values)
- camaraderie
- learning skills

Summary

The review of the characteristics and general skills of historical persons has showed that we also need to take a look at our past, because things with positive effects must be used and presented to the young leaders of today. In some cases we realise that wise thoughts discovered by the above mentioned famous persons earlier, are recurring.

Selection also has an important role, because on the basis of a defined criteria, it decides whether someone is suitable for becoming an officer or not. It is closely related to basic competences. In the short-term, successful selection helps to maintain motivation, we often experience that a person who considers preparation for a military career as being compulsory is also weakening his or her environment morally. In the long term, selection is not a decision made only for four years. Unfortunately, according to the statistics, the number of drop-outs has increased even in the period after finishing school.

Bibliography

- 16 Leadership Lessons from a Four Star General. <https://fs.blog/2014/03/stanley-mcchrystal-my-share-of-the-task/> (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Bolgár Judit – Szekeres György: A pályaeorientáció jellemzői, kapcsolata a pályaalakmassági vizsgálattal [The Characteristics of Career Guidance and Its Relation with Aptitude Tests], *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 8 (2015/1) 283–293.
- Government Decree No. 282/2016 (IX. 21.) on Defining Bachelor's and Master's Programs in the Study Field of Public Administration, the Training and Outcome Requirements, and the Amendment of the Related Government Decrees. <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1600282.KOR&txtreferer=A1100132.TV> (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Hegedűs Judit (ed.): Tanulmánykötet a belügyi vezető-kiválasztási eljárásról [Collection of Studies on the Selection Procedure of Leaders in Home Affairs], 2014, 5–8.
- Hobbs, Brad: 3 Leadership Lessons From General George S. Patton, 2015. www.linkedin.com/pulse/3-leadership-lessons-from-general-george-patton-brad-hobbs (Downloaded: 15.03.2019.)
- Kruse, Kevin: Norman Schwarzkopf: 10 Quotes on Leadership and War, 2012. www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/12/27/norman-schwarzkopf-quotes/ (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Lovelace, Alex: George Patton – United States General. www.britannica.com/biography/George-Smith-Patton (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Luenendonk, Martin: 11 Leadership Lessons From Napoleon, 2016. www.cleverism.com/11-leadership-lessons-from-napoleon-bonaparte/ (Downloaded: 15.03.2019.)
- Magyar hadszervezet és hadművészet a honfoglalástól a XVIII. század végéig [Military Organisation and Warfare in Hungary before the End of the 18th Century]. <https://szantomihaly.gportal.hu/gindex.php?pg=28223680> (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Napoleon Bonaparte – History. www.history.com/topics/france/napoleon (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Norman Schwarzkopf. www.biography.com/people/norman-schwarzkopf-9476401 (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Stanley A. McChrystal. www.britannica.com/biography/Stanley-McChrystal (Downloaded: 13.03.2020.)
- Tzu, Sun: The Art of War, Translated from the Chinese by Lionel Giles, M.A. (1910), Allendale Online Publishing, Leicester, https://sites.ualberta.ca/~enoch/Readings/The_Art_Of_War.pdf (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Tarján M. Tamás: 1891. november 15. – Erwin Rommel születése [15 November 1891 – The Birth of Erwin Rommel]. www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/1891_november_15_erwin_rommel_szuletese/ (Downloaded: 03.01.2019.)
- Ujházy László: Tisztjelöltek kiválasztása a Brit Szárazföldi Erőknél [Selection of Cadets at the British Armed Forces], *Honvédségi Szemle*, 147 (2019/2) 101–102.