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ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES AND LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF CANDIDATES FOR COMMAND POSITIONS IN THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE: ANALYSIS OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Abstract. *In the context of a full-scale war, the issue of effective assessment of professional competencies of candidates for command positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is becoming increasingly relevant. Traditional certification approaches do not always adequately reflect the leadership potential of servicemen under conditions of combat stress, high risk, and moral pressure on a unit. Comprehensive consideration of psychological, moral, and managerial factors that directly affect combat capability and resilience of troops acquires particular importance. The purpose of the study is to analyze existing methodological approaches to assessing professional competencies of candidates for command positions, to determine their advantages and limitations, and to develop a hybrid assessment model adapted to the conditions of the modern operational environment and based on a combination of national and international experience. The methodological basis of the work consists of a comprehensive approach that includes analysis of regulatory and doctrinal documents, comparative analysis of national and foreign practices, and a review of psychodiagnostic, certification, and competency-oriented methods. Expert evaluations and a classification approach to identifying key competencies of military leaders were used to generalize the results. The study identifies the main blocks of critically important competencies of command personnel: managerial, psychological-resilience, communicative-leadership, and moral-ethical. A hybrid assessment model is proposed that combines psychodiagnostic tools, situational tactical tasks, and expert observation in conditions close to combat. Particular attention is paid to problematic aspects, in particular to the assessment of a commander's moral authority and the level of subordinates' trust as key indicators of effective military leadership. The results of the study may be used by personnel bodies, military educational institutions, and unit commanders to improve the selection of candidates for command positions, develop adaptive training programs, and increase the combat effectiveness of units in modern combat conditions.*

Keywords: *military leadership; command competencies; assessment; hybrid model; psychodiagnostics; combat leadership reliability; moral authority.*

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Оцінювання професійних компетентностей та лідерських якостей кандидатів на командні посади в ЗС України: аналіз методичних підходів

***Анотація.** У сучасних умовах широкомасштабної війни актуалізується проблема ефективного оцінювання професійних компетентностей кандидатів на командні посади у Збройних Силах України. Традиційні атестаційні підходи не завжди адекватно відображають лідерський потенціал військовослужбовців в умовах бойового стресу, високого ризику та морального тиску на підрозділ. Особливої ваги набуває комплексне врахування психологічних, моральних і управлінських чинників, що безпосередньо впливають на боєдатність та стійкість військ. Метою дослідження є аналіз наявних методичних підходів до оцінювання професійних компетентностей кандидатів на командні посади, визначення їхніх переваг і обмежень, а також розробка гібридної моделі оцінювання, адаптованої до умов сучасного оперативного середовища та заснованої на поєднанні вітчизняного і міжнародного досвіду. Методологічну основу роботи становить комплексний підхід, що включає аналіз нормативно-доктринальних документів, порівняльний аналіз національних і зарубіжних практик, огляд психодіагностичних, атестаційних і компетентнісно орієнтованих методик. Для узагальнення результатів використано експертні оцінки та класифікаційний підхід до виокремлення ключових компетентностей військових керівників.*

У ході дослідження визначено основні блоки критично важливих компетентностей командного складу: управлінські, психологічно-резиліентні, комунікативно-лідерські та морально-етичні. Запропоновано гібридну модель оцінювання, яка поєднує психодіагностичні інструменти, ситуативні тактичні завдання та експертне спостереження в умовах, наближених до бойових. Особливу увагу приділено проблемним аспектам, зокрема оцінюванню морального авторитету командира та рівня довіри підлеглих як ключових індикаторів ефективного військового лідерства.

Результати дослідження можуть бути використані кадровими органами, військовими навчальними закладами та командирами підрозділів для удосконалення відбору кандидатів на командні посади, розробки адаптивних програм підготовки та підвищення бойової ефективності підрозділів у сучасних бойових умовах.

***Ключові слова:** військове лідерство; командні компетентності; оцінювання; гібридна модель; психодіагностика; бойова лідерська надійність; моральний авторитет.*

Introduction

In the context of full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, effective military management increasingly depends on the professional competence of command personnel. Appointment to command positions requires assessment of military professional training alongside managerial, psychological, leadership, and moral-ethical characteristics essential for performing command functions under combat stress, high risk, and rapidly changing operational situations.

Modern warfare necessitates a shift from formal qualification-based approaches to a competency-based assessment model focused on real readiness for managerial decision-making, responsibility, and adaptability. However, existing assessment

methods in the Armed Forces of Ukraine remain fragmented, primarily verifying knowledge and length of service while insufficiently addressing psychological, socio-communicative, and leadership aspects (Buzid, 2024; Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024; Volobuev, Veretilnyk, & Hnydiuk, 2024). The lack of unified methodological approaches, combined with insufficient validity of assessment tools, reduces the effectiveness of personnel decisions and creates risks of appointing individuals unprepared for command under combat conditions (Punda & Antonenko, 2017; Uvarkina & Puchkov, 2022; Zaluzhnyi, Nazarov, & Hryshchuk, 2023). As Grant (2020) notes, Ukraine is searching for a new paradigm of military leadership, but formal approaches that do not account for the realities of hybrid and full-scale war still dominate.

Military leadership is recognized as a system-forming factor in unit combat capability. Regulatory documents define leadership as an integrated quality encompassing competence, personal example, psychological resilience, and responsibility for personnel, yet methods for comprehensive assessment remain underdeveloped (Main Department of Doctrine and Training of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2020; General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025; Leadership Development Department of the Main Personnel Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025).

Psychological and pedagogical aspects of leadership have been explored by several scholars (Piren, 2012; Krymets, 2019; Karpenko, 2021; Ryndin, 2024), while Poltieva (2023) emphasizes the need for psychometric methods adapted to combat conditions. Tkach (2021) links military leadership to strategic communications. However, most studies focus on developing leadership qualities rather than assessment instruments.

Foreign research analyzes military leadership through behavioral, charismatic, and adaptive theories (Conger & Kanungo, 1994; DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Recent studies reveal the role of adaptive leadership under hybrid threats (Leka & Karasani, 2025; Cîrdei & Alixandrescu, 2025; Navas-Jiménez, Rico, Molero, & Alcover, 2024). Doctrinal documents of the US and UK armies emphasize systemic approaches to leadership development but do not offer universal assessment tools (Department of the Army, 2006, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, 2021). Meanwhile, Chystiakova (2011) notes that the United Kingdom has successfully applied cooperative leadership technology, which could be useful for adaptation in Ukraine.

Thus, while theoretical understanding of military leadership is sufficiently developed, the problem of scientifically substantiated methods for assessing professional competencies of candidates for command positions remains unresolved (Punda & Antonenko, 2017; Uvarkina & Puchkov, 2022).

The purpose of this article is to analyze existing methodological approaches to assessing professional competencies of candidates for command positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, determine their limitations, and propose an authorial hybrid assessment model that takes into account the specifics of combat operations and the psychological and leadership characteristics of a modern commander.

Methods. This study employed a comprehensive methodological framework combining theoretical analysis, comparative legal analysis, and synthesis of empirical findings. The research included: (1) analysis of normative and doctrinal documents regulating military leadership and personnel assessment in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and NATO member states; (2) comparative analysis of domestic and foreign methodological approaches to assessing professional competencies of command personnel; (3) review of psychodiagnostic, certification, and competency-based assessment tools; (4) generalization of expert evaluations obtained through interviews with 12 military personnel holding command positions (colonels and lieutenant colonels with combat experience) regarding the validity and limitations of existing assessment procedures; (5) classification and systematization of key competency blocks for command staff under wartime conditions. The proposed hybrid assessment model was developed through synthesis of identified best practices and adaptation to the specifics of modern combat operations.

Results and Discussion. In modern military science, military leadership is understood as a complex of managerial, psychological, and moral-ethical characteristics that enable a commander to effectively lead subordinates and achieve assigned tasks under conditions of high uncertainty and risk (Buzid, 2024; Willink, 2021).

The main approaches to defining military leadership in academic literature include:

Competency-based approach – leadership as a set of professional and managerial competencies that enable task execution, decision-making, and motivation of subordinates (Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024; General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025).

Behavioral and personality approach – emphasis on personal traits and behavioral models that influence management effectiveness (Conger & Kanungo, 1994; DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011).

Situational approach – leadership defined as the ability to adapt to specific conditions, circumstances, and levels of combat intensity (Volobuev, Veretilnyk, & Hnydiuk, 2024; Teixeira, 2024).

Psychological-ethical approach – focus on moral authority, subordinates' trust, and the commander's psychological stability (Piren, 2012; Romanovskyi & Sereda, 2013).

International doctrinal approaches – leadership defined through NATO standards, integration into the Euro-Atlantic security space, resilience to hybrid threats, and command-operational effectiveness (Department of the Army, 2006; Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, 2021; Cîrdei & Alixandrescu, 2025).

These approaches are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

**Comparative analysis of the main approaches to defining the concept of
«military leadership»**

Approach	Main characteristics	Authors/sources
Competency-based	Set of professional and managerial competencies; focus on task effectiveness	V. Diak, S. Markova, V. Volobuev (Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024); Catalogue of Military Professional Competencies (General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025)
Behavioral/personality	Personal traits, commander behavior, charisma, initiative	J. Conger, R. Kanungo (Conger & Kanungo, 1994); D. DeRue et al. (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011)
Situational	Adaptation to specific conditions, stress resistance, tactical flexibility	V. Volobuev, V. Veretilnyk, O. Hnydiuk (Volobuev, Veretilnyk, & Hnydiuk, 2024); J. Teixeira (Teixeira, 2024)
Psychological-ethical	Moral authority, subordinates' trust, psychological stability	N. Poltieva (Poltieva, 2023); O. Romanovskyi, N. Sereda (Romanovskyi & Sereda, 2013)
International/doctrinal	NATO standards, Euro-Atlantic integration, adaptability to hybrid threats	FM 6-22 (Department of the Army, 2006); Army Leadership Doctrine (Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, 2021); I. Cîrdei, R. Alixandrescu (Cîrdei & Alixandrescu, 2025)

In modern military research, it is essential to distinguish between «leadership» and «management». Military leadership is the commander's ability to build trust, moral authority, and motivation, ensuring psychological resilience of the unit (Buzid, 2024; Willink, 2021; Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024). Management, in contrast, encompasses organizational actions such as planning, resource allocation, and control (Zaitsev, Shevchuk, & Melnyk, 2025). Together, they form an effective commander capable of maintaining personnel morale while achieving tactical and strategic objectives (Piren, 2012; Ryndin, 2024). As E. Roberts (2021) wisely notes based on an analysis of historical examples, true leadership in times of war requires from a commander not only professional knowledge but also the ability to make morally balanced decisions under conditions of time and information deficit.

Clear differentiation of these concepts enables proper formulation of command competencies and assessment methods under wartime conditions. For a clearer understanding of the peculiarities of military leadership and management, their comparative analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of the concepts «military leadership» and «management»

Parameter	Military leadership	Management
Definition	Ability of a commander to influence subordinates, build trust, moral authority, and motivation, and maintain the psychological resilience of the unit (Buzid, 2024; Willink, 2021)	Organizational and functional activity of a commander: planning, resource allocation, control, implementation of unit tasks (Zaitsev, Shevchuk, & Melnyk, 2025)
Focus of activity	Personal influence, moral authority, motivation, and psychological support (Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024)	Performance of formal managerial functions and achievement of tactical and strategic goals (Piren, 2012; Ryndin, 2024)
Main tasks	Maintaining morale, developing trust and team cohesion, adapting subordinates to stressful situations (Willink, 2021; Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024)	Planning operations, monitoring task performance, effective allocation of resources and personnel (Zaitsev, Shevchuk, & Melnyk, 2025)
Methods of influence	Personal example, motivation, communication, psychological support (Buzid, 2024; Ryndin, 2024)	Formal orders, regulation of processes, organizational procedures (Piren, 2012)
Measuring effectiveness	Subordinates' trust, moral authority, level of combat cohesion and psychological resilience of the unit (Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024; Willink, 2021)	Fulfillment of assigned tasks, resource control, achievement of operational and strategic objectives (Zaitsev, Shevchuk, & Melnyk, 2025)

The regulatory and doctrinal framework for military leadership in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is defined by the Doctrine of Military Leadership Development (Main Department of Doctrine and Training of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2020), the Catalogue of Military-Professional Competencies (General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025), and methodological recommendations aligned with NATO standards (Leadership Development Department of the Main Personnel Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025). In these documents, a commander's professional competence is viewed as an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and leadership qualities necessary for effective unit management in peacetime and wartime.

In practice, however, assessment of candidates for command positions remains largely formalized, relying on certification procedures and service characteristics that do not always reflect actual leadership potential (Zaluzhnyi, Nazarov, & Hryshchuk, 2023). As Buzid (2024) notes, current regulatory documents reflect classical approaches and only partially account for the challenges of hybrid and full-scale war. Consequently, competency assessment often fails to identify real leadership potential.

The psychodiagnostic approach, emphasized by Piren (2012), focuses on psychological resilience, self-regulation, and emotional maturity as key characteristics of a military leader. Further research by Poltieva (2023) confirms that the development of leadership qualities is impossible without considering the individual psychological characteristics of commanders, which manifest themselves precisely in conditions of

increased stress. While psychometric methods enable quantitative assessment of personal qualities, they often neglect the specifics of combat conditions, where commanders must act under uncertainty and direct threat to life (Punda & Antonenko, 2017). This calls for supplementing test methods with practice-oriented forms of assessment.

Certification and expert methods, widely used in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, rely on commanders' conclusions and certification commission decisions (Zaitsev, Shevchuk, & Melnyk, 2025; General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025). Although they account for service and combat experience, they remain largely subjective. In contrast, NATO armed forces employ competency-oriented models that combine behavioral indicators, situational tasks, and long-term observation (Department of the Army, 2006, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, 2021).

Traditional approaches to assessing military leadership do not fully meet modern warfare requirements, as they emphasize regulatory compliance and prior experience rather than adaptability and psychological resilience (Buzid, 2024; Volobuev, Veretilnyk, & Hnydiuk, 2024). Formalized procedures do not model extreme conditions, limiting the ability to assess a candidate's effectiveness under high risk and moral pressure. Foreign studies highlight the importance of adaptive and resilient leadership under hybrid threats (Cîrdei & Alixandrescu, 2025; Leka & Karasani, 2025; Teixeira, 2024), with Navas-Jiménez, Rico, Molero, and Alcover (2024) demonstrating that leadership effectiveness is directly linked to subordinates' trust and psychological safety within the unit. This provides a basis for adapting foreign assessment models to the Ukrainian context, considering national combat experience. In this context, the research by Repetukha (2024) is important, as it demonstrates that the development of leadership competence among future officers in military academies requires special pedagogical techniques and conditions, including the simulation of combat situations and reflective practices.

A comparative analysis of domestic and foreign (NATO) approaches to assessing professional competencies is summarized in Table 3.

Analysis

The comparative analysis reveals that the domestic system for assessing professional competencies relies heavily on formalized certification procedures and regulatory compliance, limiting comprehensive assessment of leadership potential. In contrast, NATO armed forces employ a competency-oriented approach combining psychodiagnostic methods, behavioral indicators, and situational modeling, enabling more objective evaluation of a commander's ability to act under uncertainty and combat stress (Department of the Army, 2006, 2023; Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, 2021).

Table 3

Comparative characteristics of approaches to assessing professional competencies in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the armed forces of NATO countries

Comparison criterion	Domestic experience (Armed Forces of Ukraine)	Foreign experience (NATO countries)
Regulatory framework	Doctrine of Military Leadership Development of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Catalogue of Military Professional Competencies, orders of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine	FM 6-22 (USA), Army Leadership Doctrine (UK), national doctrines
Dominant assessment approach	Certification-formalized	Competency-behavioral
Assessment tools	Service characteristics, certification sheets, commanders' conclusions	Behavioral indicators assessment, case methods, role-playing and situational exercises
Consideration of psychological resilience	Limited, mainly through general conclusions	Systemic: psychodiagnostics, assessment of resilience and stress resistance
Assessment in conditions close to combat	Episodic or absent	Wide use of training scenarios and simulations
Role of expert observation	Mostly subjective	Structured, using standardized criteria
Flexibility and adaptability of models	Limited, focus on regulatory compliance	High, considering the dynamics of modern threats
Focus on subordinates' trust	Indirectly considered	Considered a key indicator of leadership effectiveness

However, adapting foreign experience to the Armed Forces of Ukraine requires consideration of national combat experience, organizational culture, and the realities of full-scale war. As emphasized by Volobuev and Zaruba (2018), mechanical transfer of NATO standards without accounting for Ukrainian realities may reduce the effectiveness of personnel decisions (Volobuev, Veretilnyk, & Hnydiuk, 2024). The use of situational assessment elements and multi-level models can significantly increase objectivity in selecting candidates for command positions. While advantages of implementing international experience include greater transparency and focus on practical results, risks involve resource intensity and the need for trained experts (Teixeira, 2024). Thus, the comparative analysis suggests combining domestic regulatory approaches with best foreign practices based on adaptability and contextual appropriateness.

Given modern wartime challenges, an authorial framework for structuring professional competencies of command staff is proposed, supplementing existing concepts (Diak, Markova, & Volobuev, 2024; Leadership Development Department of the Main Personnel Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 2025). Within this framework, the concept of combat leadership reliability is introduced – the commander's ability to maintain managerial effectiveness, moral authority, and responsibility for personnel under combat losses, prolonged stress, and high uncertainty.

Considering the limitations of formalized certification procedures and fragmented use of psychodiagnostic methods, a hybrid assessment model is proposed. This model combines complementary approaches to enable comprehensive evaluation of both personal and behavioral characteristics under conditions close to real service and combat activity.

The proposed hybrid model is based on a three-level approach and includes psychodiagnostic, situational-behavioral, and expert-observational levels (see Fig. 1).

The proposed hybrid assessment model comprises three complementary levels:

1. **Psychodiagnostics** – assesses psychological resilience, self-regulation, emotional control, and stress tolerance using standardized methods. Results identify potential risks (burnout, impulsivity, reduced adaptability) and form a basis for further interpretation of managerial behavior.

2. **Situational tasks** – involves solving tactical and managerial cases modeled on real combat or crisis situations. It evaluates decision-making under uncertainty, time and information deficit, responsibility for subordinates, and the ability to anticipate consequences, shifting assessment from declarative descriptions to real behavioral reactions.

3. **Expert observation in field conditions** – consists of long-term observation during exercises, combat coordination, or missions. It captures informal leadership manifestations, the ability to maintain subordinates' trust, moral authority, and unit management effectiveness under stress – aspects not easily measured by standardized instruments.

Together, these levels enable a holistic assessment of professional suitability, combining objective psychological indicators with analysis of practical managerial activity, thereby increasing the validity of personnel decisions under wartime conditions.

Despite existing methodological approaches, several critical aspects of command activity remain underexplored. The assessment of a commander's moral authority – formed through personal example, responsibility, and ethically balanced decisions under risk – is fragmentarily addressed. Methods for measuring subordinates' trust, a key determinant of unit cohesion and combat readiness, are underdeveloped. Furthermore, the impact of combat experience without proper reflection may consolidate rigid behavioral patterns, reducing adaptability, yet tools to evaluate a commander's ability to reflect on experience and adjust strategies are practically absent.

The practical value of the research lies in its applicability to personnel selection, appointment, and rotation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The proposed comprehensive assessment approaches enhance the validity of managerial decisions, mitigate risks of formal certification, and account for wartime specifics. The materials can also be used in professional training and advanced education of officers, sergeants, and warrant officers, providing a foundation for improving psychological support and developing leadership potential in combat conditions.

Conclusions

The analysis of existing methodological approaches to assessing professional competencies of candidates for command positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine has shown that traditional regulatory-doctrinal, psychodiagnostic, and certification methods ensure a certain level of objectivity and formalization; however, they do not always reflect the real leadership potential of servicemembers in complex combat conditions [1; 2; 6; 12]. Comparative analysis of foreign and domestic experience has demonstrated that NATO countries successfully integrate hybrid assessment models combining psychodiagnostics, situational cases, and expert observation, which increases the accuracy of selection and predictability of commanders' effectiveness.

The proposed authorial classification of professional competencies for wartime makes it possible to identify key blocks: command-operational, psychological-resilient, communicative-leadership, and moral-ethical, taking into account the specifics of unit management in high-risk conditions. Identification of «critical competencies», such as the ability to make decisions under fire, psychological stability, and subordinates' trust, makes it possible to determine those skills that cannot be compensated by experience and determine the effectiveness of command in combat conditions.

Particularly important is the hybrid assessment model that combines three levels: psychodiagnostics, situational tasks, and expert observation in field conditions. This approach provides a comprehensive vision of a servicemember's potential, allows identification of strengths and weaknesses, and adaptation of the training process to specific combat conditions.

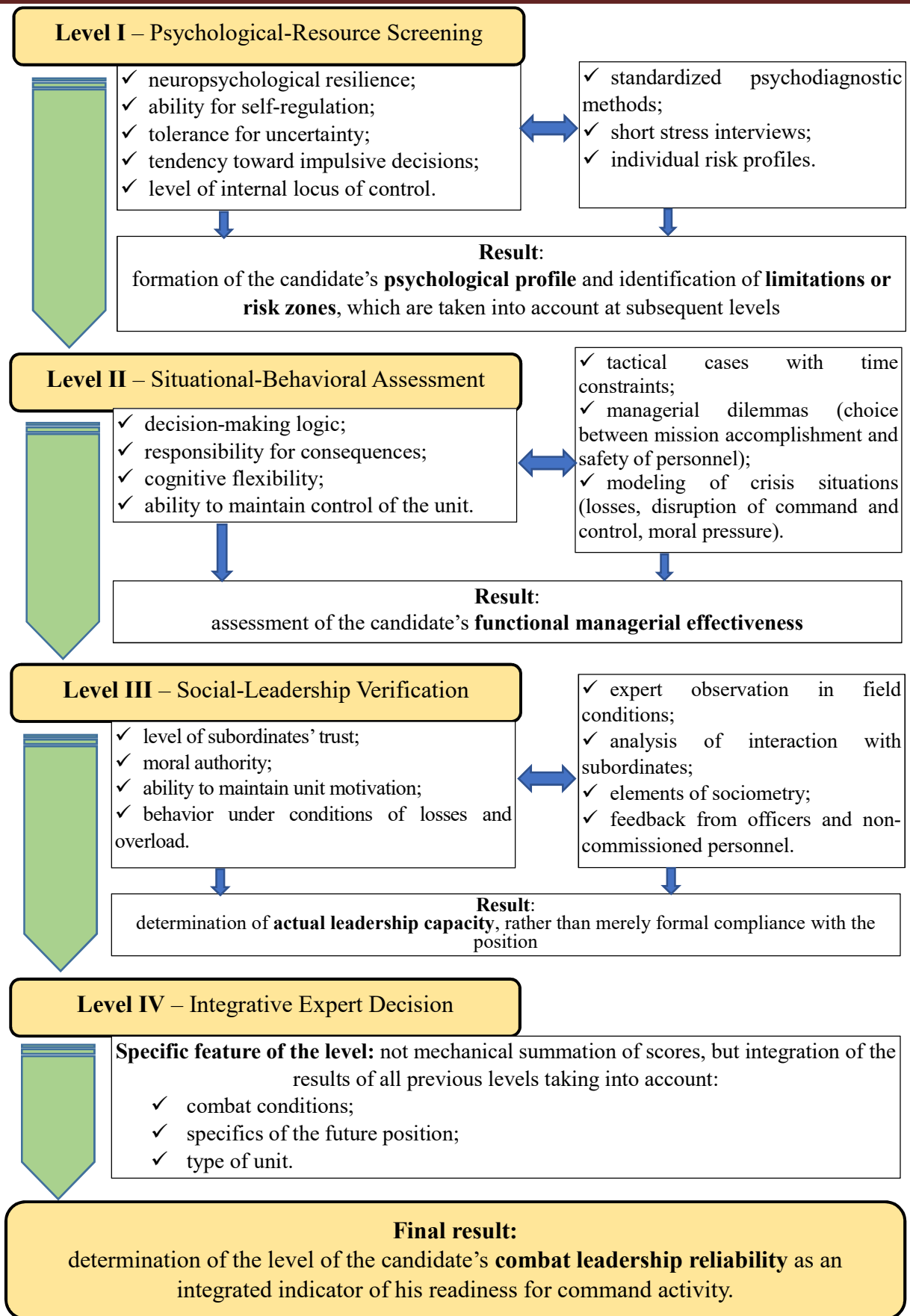


Fig. 1. Hybrid model for assessing professional competencies of candidates for command positions.

At the same time, a number of aspects remain insufficiently studied. These include assessment of the commander's moral authority, level of subordinates' trust as an indicator of leadership, and the impact of combat experience without proper reflection on managerial decision-making. Their study is critically necessary to increase assessment accuracy and form full-fledged competencies of a modern commander.

The practical value of the conducted research lies in the possibility of using the obtained results by personnel bodies of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, military educational institutions, and unit commanders for:

election of candidates for command positions;

development of adaptive training programs and courses;

increasing combat effectiveness and moral-psychological stability of units in wartime conditions.

Thus, the proposed hybrid model for assessing professional competencies is innovative, takes into account the specifics of modern warfare, and integrates the best domestic and international practices, opening new directions for further scientific research in the field of military leadership.

Prospects for further research

Further research should focus on empirical validation of the proposed hybrid assessment model in real military settings, the development of standardized tools for evaluating moral authority and subordinates' trust, and the study of how combat experience, when combined with structured reflection, influences long-term leadership effectiveness and psychological resilience.

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