



Social and psychological cohesion as a factor in responsible conduct under crisis conditions and military operations

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◆ **Abstract.** The relevance of this study stems from the need to increase the level of effectiveness in the activities of structured groups in crisis situations, such as military units, rescue organisations and volunteers, for which the social and psychological cohesion of the team is important as a factor of responsible behaviour, coordination of actions, trust and psychological stability. This study aimed to theoretically substantiate the role of social and psychological cohesion as a factor of responsible behaviour formation in crisis and military teams, and to find effective ways of organising interaction in the context of high stress levels. The research was based on such general scientific methods as analysis, generalisation, systematisation and synthesis of modern scientific sources on military psychology, organisational psychology, interaction of teams and leadership. The distinctive features of the activities of traditional, mixed and crisis groups, including military ones, were identified by the comparative analysis method. In the framework of the study, it was proved that social and psychological cohesion is an important factor in the formation of responsible behaviour in military and crisis groups, as it contributes to increasing trust, coordination of actions and readiness to complete joint tasks in risk conditions. The main conditions for the efficient organisation of interaction were identified, including the presence of a common goal, the distribution of roles, effective communication and stable psychological climate even in the context of high stress. It was substantiated that, within military units, particular importance is attached to team-building and training activities that contribute to the development of cohesion, improvement of combat coordination, and formation of collective responsibility. In mixed and remote forms of interaction, the organisation of digital communication and the provision of continuous feedback play an important role as factors supporting team unity. The results of the study are practically significant for application in systems of personnel work in civilian, military and crisis organisations to improve the efficiency of team interaction, cohesion, communication, and responsible attitudes to the performance of professional duties in combat and emergency situations

◆ **Keywords:** team-building; combat conditions; organisational communication; morale; personnel management

◆ Introduction

The effectiveness of any activity largely depends on the ability of people to interact, since people are in a permanent or situational social contact with each other in all spheres of life. It is especially acute in military activity and in crisis situations and emergency situations, where effectiveness depends directly on the coordination of actions, the level of trust and the sense of responsibility of each member of the team. Given the current context of military

threats, hybrid conflicts and social turbulence, social and psychological cohesion takes on particular significance as a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of the activities of the military units, rescue organisations and volunteers, the key elements of which are the ability to behave responsibly, discipline and readiness to decide in situations of risk and uncertainty. Teams with a high level of cohesion are characterised by lower staff turnover, higher job satisfaction

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and better mental well-being among employees. According to the empirical study of J.E. Mathieu *et al.* (2019), cohesion was found to be a significant determinant of job satisfaction and turnover intention, and it had a positive effect on mental health by means of social support and trust. In addition, studies conducted by A. Pandey *et al.* (2025) and R. Fernández-de-Caleya-Dalmau *et al.* (2025) confirmed that team cohesion performs a mediating role in the relationship between organisational conditions, leadership, and personnel performance outcomes, including emotional burnout and work engagement.

Cohesion is one of the key characteristics of effective organisational functioning and an important factor in achieving high performance as well as fostering responsible employee behaviour. In modern psychology, cohesion is considered a key criterion of the quality of interpersonal relationships, the degree of trust, the unity of goals, and the ability of employees to interact and align their efforts. Trust and understanding are established via constant and reliable communication. When team members feel heard and understood, they are more inclined to actively and meaningfully participate in team discussions. In this respect, effective communication is of primary importance, including active listening, empathy, and prompt feedback. Cohesion is of most importance in a military organisation, where it affects combat readiness. The readiness for fighting is affected not just by professional and personal qualities of the individual, but also by the degree of their interaction and coordination of actions. M. Fors Brandebo *et al.* (2022) confirmed that combat cohesion is one of the main factors that determine combat effectiveness, psychological resilience, and adaptation under stress. Y. Lin *et al.* (2022) also found that leadership has a significant impact on the formation of cohesion in military organisations. In particular, effective leadership is identified as a mediator of stress effects on military personnel adaptation through group cohesion mechanisms. In other words, commanders serve as key actors in the promotion of trust, coordination, and responsibility in uncertain circumstances. Other research findings by J. Griffith (2022) and G.L. Siebold (2007) revealed that cohesion in military groups is correlated with combat motivation, performance on tasks and the mental health of members. Moreover, cohesion acts as a mediator between combat stress and military personnel's psychological adaptation, which helps strengthen their resilience (Fernández-de-Caleya-Dalmau *et al.*, 2025). According to the conclusions of M. Mach *et al.* (2022), transformational leadership is one of the most effective management styles in military units, as it promotes the formation of a shared purpose and supports the development of trust and cohesion among personnel.

Thus, contemporary scholarly approaches make it possible to consider cohesion and leadership as interrelated factors determining the effectiveness of military unit operations and the formation of responsible behaviour under crisis conditions. This study aimed to determine the influence of social and psychological cohesion on the

formation of responsible behaviour in crisis-response and military teams, as well as to analyse approaches aimed at improving the effectiveness of team interaction under conditions of heightened stress. The objectives of the study included: identifying contemporary approaches to the organisation of communication and the role of leadership in fostering the social and psychological cohesion of a team; establishing the relationship between the level of cohesion and responsible behaviour; and generalising the influence of group processes on operational effectiveness under crisis conditions.

◆ Materials and Methods

A theoretical and analytical study design was employed to investigate the role of the development of efficient interaction in ensuring the successful completion of professional tasks by members of a team, especially in conditions of stress, risk and combat situations. The focus was placed on the social and psychological mechanisms underlying the organisation of effective team interaction. The object of the study was the social and psychological cohesion of professional groups operating under conditions of heightened stress and uncertainty, including military units. The subject of the study comprised the psychological mechanisms through which social and psychological cohesion influences the formation of responsible behaviour, communication effectiveness, and leadership processes in crisis and combat conditions. The theoretical foundation of the article was formed by studies devoted to examining the positive impact of team cohesion on organisational performance outcomes. In particular, the findings of the meta-analyses conducted by C.J. Resick *et al.* (2010) and S.-H. Bae *et al.* (2023) were used, with emphasis placed on the importance of effective team communication and a high level of cohesion as factors contributing to increased productivity and organisational effectiveness. The source base of the study included contemporary scholarly publications devoted to issues of military psychology, team interaction, and organisational behaviour. In particular, the research of M. Fors Brandebo *et al.* (2022) was used to analyse cohesion within military units, while the study by E. Salas *et al.* (2018) was employed to examine issues of team effectiveness and coordination. Questions of leadership and adaptation under military conditions were analysed on the basis of publications by G.L. Siebold (2007), Y. Lin *et al.* (2022), and M. Mach *et al.* (2022).

The chosen concepts and literature sources have been selected following such criteria as their scientific significance, relevance to the research scope, as well as their ability to facilitate a comprehensive analysis and systematisation of processes of organisations' functioning in the professional communities. The theoretical analysis of scientific literature related to the psychology of influence, management, social and legal psychology made it possible to reveal certain regularities and correlations between social-psychological processes in the professional environment, as well as to identify specific patterns of interaction

within the organisation and factors that contribute to the joint coordinated work of the team. The classification of the information obtained during theoretical analysis made it possible to identify such psychological factors that influence individual behaviour and cohesion levels in the team, as well as the stages and indicators of their development. The synthesis and generalisation of the research results made it possible to identify conditions and means for organising efficient interaction in professional communities and to develop recommendations which, if followed, will facilitate its successful establishment when carrying out work tasks in teams with normative and mixed models of interaction. The study involved the use of general scientific and specialised psychological methods. The use of the systems approach to the analysis of the cohesion as a complex social and psychological phenomenon, which encompasses communication, leadership and group interaction. Comparative analysis was used to examine approaches to leadership and team interaction in civilian and military organisations. The content analysis of scientific publications made it possible to identify the basic regularities of scientific studies on the efficiency of team performance. Theoretical generalisation was aimed at developing an integrative model of the influence of cohesion on responsible behaviour. An interpretative method was employed to explain the mechanisms underlying the relationship between leadership, communication, and group cohesion. These methods ensured a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon of social and psychological cohesion and made it possible to determine its role in securing the effectiveness and responsibility of groups operating under crisis and combat conditions.

◆ Results and Discussion

Research in military psychology and organisational psychology views communication as a fundamental mechanism of team interaction, ensuring the coordination of actions, the formation of a common representation of the situation and effective functioning of the team under conditions of

uncertainty. Communication is an especially important factor in military units for the perception of the current state of affairs and the implementation of joint coordinated actions in combat situations, where even minor mistakes can lead to fatal consequences (Mach *et al.*, 2022). According to the findings of M. Fors Brandebo *et al.* (2022), intra-group communication influences the work effectiveness of the team as a whole and the psychological resilience of the armed forces. The cohesion and communication processes are some of the key factors of the functioning of small military teams in terms of their combat efficiency. The authors note that both vertical communication (leader-subordinate) and horizontal (between group members) affect the level of trust and coordinated actions in the unit.

According to the team coordination theory, communication is also considered as the process of alignment of individual actions to the joint activity, which is particularly relevant in hybrid and distributed teams. S. Schilling (2024) proved that in the team, effectiveness is determined by communication structures and the ability to maintain a shared understanding of objectives, even in remote or stressful working conditions. Professional activity is the dominant type of activity performed by employees in the context of both traditional and hybrid models and has a characteristic of continuity, active participation, coordination and understanding of goals, tasks, time and place. Using the analytical instrument of this model, it is possible to understand the interaction of personal traits, organisational structures and team cohesion. Through combining remote flexibility and face-to-face contact, the hybrid model creates conditions for balancing independence and co-operation, and building a workplace environment that can adapt to different needs and working styles. In contrast, the remote model emphasises the importance of digital technologies and project management tools and supports a decentralised but equally efficient team. On the basis of the analysed theoretical and practical material, practical recommendations aimed at improving the level of personnel cohesion were proposed (Table 1).

Table 1. Practical recommendations for the cohesion of employees in the organisation and military teams

Activities	Detailed characteristics
Regular scheduled meetings and informal gatherings (a platform for open dialogue)	♦ exchange of ideas, concerns, and personal experiences, contributing to the strengthening of trust and ensuring coordinated action within the team; ♦ daily or systematic check-ins and briefing/debriefing sessions that reinforce interpersonal ties and reduce hierarchical barriers; ♦ development of a shared understanding of the operational situation and improvement of adaptability to change.
Feedback mechanisms	♦ clarity and constructiveness in communication between commanders and personnel; ♦ focus on behaviour, task performance outcomes, and compliance with standards; ♦ provision of specific recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of combat task performance.
Regular assessment of personnel effectiveness	♦ discussion of professional development, combat training, and readiness to perform assigned tasks; ♦ identification of individual strengths and areas for development among service personnel; ♦ development of plans for professional advancement and adaptation to combat conditions.
Integration of systems of recognition and encouragement	♦ enhancement of motivation and morale through recognition of the contribution made by service personnel; ♦ demonstration of the importance of personal commitment to service and task fulfilment; ♦ fostering a culture of mutual respect and responsibility within the unit.
Team-building activities and unit coordination exercises	♦ development of trust, mutual assistance, and collective thinking; ♦ formation of skills required for work under stress and time constraints; ♦ joint training sessions, tactical exercises, physical training, and simulation of combat situations; ♦ informal activities (joint gatherings, cultural or restorative events) aimed at reducing psychological tension.

Table 1. Continued

Activities	Detailed characteristics
Development of strong leadership	♦ creation of an effective and psychologically resilient team environment; ♦ development of emotional resilience, decisiveness, and responsibility among commanders; ♦ conflict management under conditions of stress and combat operations; ♦ mentoring of junior service personnel; ♦ regular individual meetings (1:1) to support morale and monitor operational readiness.
Training sessions, role-playing exercises, and tactical simulations	♦ practice of combat and crisis scenarios under controlled and safe conditions; ♦ development of decision-making skills under pressure; ♦ formation of automated team responses; ♦ enhancement of psychological readiness for real combat tasks.
Virtual and remote forms of interaction (for dispersed units)	♦ maintenance of communication between units located in different areas; ♦ use of secure digital platforms for coordination of actions; ♦ brief online meetings for the exchange of operational information; ♦ preservation of morale and interpersonal connection among unit members.
Regular surveys and monitoring of morale and psychological condition	♦ assessment of stress levels, motivation, and cohesion among personnel; ♦ identification of communication and interaction problems; ♦ adjustment of management decisions on the basis of feedback; ♦ improvement of morale and psychological support measures.
Formation of cultural and morale-psychological groups	♦ involvement of representatives from different units in the development of a unified value system; ♦ strengthening of military identity and team culture; ♦ support for the adaptation of newly arrived service personnel; ♦ reinforcement of internal unity within the unit.
Recognition and reward system	♦ official recognition of combat achievements and discipline; ♦ awards, commendations, and distinctions from the command staff; ♦ public acknowledgement of contributions to task fulfilment; ♦ strengthening motivation through fair evaluation of service.
Individual encouragement of service personnel	♦ individual distinctions for exceptional achievements in service; ♦ opportunities for additional training and professional development; ♦ provision of additional leave or rotational advantages; ♦ support for personal and professional growth.

Source: compiled by the author based on C.J. Resick et al. (2009; 2010), J.P. Meyer & A.J.S. Morin (2016), S.H. Bae et al. (2023), R. Fernández-de-Caleya-Dalmau et al. (2025), L. Tang et al. (2024)

Enhancing organisational communication is the necessary condition for efficient interaction, decision-making, and commitment. Regular formal and informal meetings should take place to not only report project progress and changes in the organisation, but also to provide opportunities for dialogue. Such discussions should encourage the exchange of ideas, the voicing of concerns and the sharing of personal experiences, thereby helping to build trust and foster a sense of unity within the team. Informal meetings facilitate the exchange of information, provide fast feedback, develop relationships and communication between employees, and remove the formal barriers that affect the sense of involvement and importance for an individual and an employee. Concurrently, crossdepartmental meetings will allow each department to gain a better understanding of the operations of others within the organisation, to encourage the exchange of ideas between departments, and to formulate a more holistic vision of the operations of the organisation as a whole. Feedback mechanisms must be founded upon principles of clarity, constructiveness and bidirectionality. Managers should provide feedback that is specifically focused on the employee's behaviours and performance, and provide recommendations for how the employee can improve in these areas. Performance review processes should include discussions of professional development, goals and career prospects and be an active element of the review process. Fostering feedback loops that entail the active participation of employees in discussions is vital, as this transforms the process into a mechanism for continuous improvement. Integrating a system

of recognition and rewards into the feedback framework further reinforces staff motivation and helps embed core organisational values.

The regular execution of team-building interventions is often recognised as a significant factor in the development of team cohesion (Salas et al., 2018). These interventions can include activities related to the completion of work tasks as well as activities that focus on social interactions outside of the workplace. In addition, it helps to develop creative thinking, build strategic thinking, and identify potential leaders. The social events, such as gatherings, cultural activities, and recreational activities, contribute to the reduction of formal and informal barriers and the improvement of the relationships between individuals. Professional events can include seminars and workshops on professional and general competencies, in particular, communication. It also helps to build cohesion in the group (Noe, 2020).

Organisational development is also closely related to the effective development of leadership. In particular, it is not only the development of management competencies, but also emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and effective communication, both in a civil and military team. Through implementing a supportive leadership style, the manager becomes a mentor to the employees, who fosters the professional and personal development of employees (Northouse, 2021). Mentorship programmes allow for the transfer of experience and knowledge within the organisation, strengthening internal connections and enhancing the competence of the personnel. It can also be one-to-one

meetings, which help the staff to establish more open and trusting relations, discuss their career and goals, and resolve problems. When carrying out this activity, it is also very important to take into account individual characteristics, working styles, culture and diversity, which will help the management to choose the right management style and improve the effectiveness of work interactions. The use of training sessions, role-play and scenario-based exercises helps to develop leadership skills in a practical way. For remote and hybrid teams, it is especially important to organise and maintain social activity in a virtual format (Waizenegger *et al.*, 2020). Structuring online meetings – such as virtual coffee breaks or informal chat sessions – helps replicate the casual interactions characteristic of an office environment. The use of interactive methods such as games and quizzes will help to create additional motivation and engagement, and develop common interests and experiences. Surveys conducted on a regular basis are an important tool for systematically collecting feedback on the employee attitude towards different areas of work, organisational climate and employee satisfaction (Meyer & Morin, 2016). This data is useful for managers to make decisions and to understand what changes need to be made in organisational policy and processes. M. Armstrong & S. Taylor (2020) said that an effective recognition programme should have a systematic approach. This can be both formal and informal methods of rewarding employees. Public acknowledgement of accomplishments, individualised rewards and integration of the above-mentioned practices into the organisational daily activities help to raise motivation and engagement. For individual accomplishments, personalised rewards tailored to employees' preferences or requirements can be especially effective. Recognition and reward programmes should be woven into the organisation's routines and culture. The integration of these elements requires the review and updating of the strategies to ensure their relevance and ability to inspire the employees, ensuring that the leadership of the organisation is continually developed professionally.

Modern empirical research further supports the notion of cohesion's direct and indirect impact on an organisation's performance outcomes. E. Salas *et al.* (2018), for instance, demonstrated that team performance largely depends on such factors as level of coordination, mutual backup, and understanding of the goals among team members, which can all be regarded as key elements of cohesion. Besides, L. Tang *et al.* (2024) proved that cohesion serves as a mediator between leadership and the team's productivity. According to A.C. Edmondson (2018), cohesion is strongly related to the concept of psychological safety. Psychological safety is defined as the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking, including the willingness to speak up, to take the lead, and to own mistakes without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Such psychological safety promotes openness, trust, and thus contributes to a higher level of staff cohesion. The importance of leaders' efforts to ensure cohesion

and the influence of leadership on responsible employees' behaviour are crucial. In addition, modern research also shows that leadership style affects cohesion and, in turn, performance (Kozłowski & Chao, 2018). Analysis of the State of the American Manager (2015) and State of the Global Workplace 2023 Report... (2023) reveals that high levels of employees' engagement and cohesion are linked with higher levels of productivity, reduced staff turnover, and other positive impacts on the overall performance of organisations. This has allowed cohesion to be viewed not only as a psychological phenomenon but also as an important managerial resource. N.I. Pilat (2018) argued that team cohesion is an important factor of an organisation's control and an important determinant for managers' effectiveness. It is commonly thought that to influence a cohesive team, it is much simpler. O.V. Dyakiv (2018) examined cohesion as an important sociological property of a group. In other words, cohesion is a concept similar to an economic characteristic of productive activity in a team – labour productivity. Accordingly, in terms of orientation, team cohesion may be positive (functional), that is, directed towards the aims and objectives of its work activity, or negative (dysfunctional), directed towards the achievement of goals that conflict with societal aims and the objectives of production activity.

◆ Conclusions

Thus, according to the theoretical and empirical analysis, the study investigated social and psychological cohesion in organisational and military contexts, paying attention to psychological roots, measurement of this cohesion, and its practical application. Cohesion has been proven to be a complex and dynamic systemic property of the group that affects the effectiveness of the organisation, the psychological health of individuals, and the level of responsible behaviour of employees and service personnel. The study involved the synthesis of theoretical provisions and an analysis of the functioning of real-world organisational and military groups. The findings confirm that cohesive groups are more satisfied with their jobs, which, among military personnel, translates into a higher level of morale, spirit and readiness to work under challenging and potentially dangerous circumstances. This is facilitated by the development of a sense of support, trust and responsibility for the actions of one's own individual and its recognition as a critical element for military teams, the territorial defence of the country or rescue formations. Cohesive teams and units are characterised by a higher level of coordination of actions, as well as their alignment and communication, which allows them to work more effectively on complex tasks in difficult conditions of combat stress and uncertainty. The level of stability and operational efficiency also confirms the role of cohesion as a predictor of combat readiness and organisational resilience. The study proposed a number of strategies for enhancing cohesion and fostering responsible behaviour, which can be applied in both civilian and military contexts. This can be

done through team-building and training exercises adapted to work in extreme operation situations, and contributing to the development of trust, alignment and responsibility of action. Also important is the implementation of transparent communication processes, which in military and critical situations is an important condition for the exchange of information at the speed needed, the development of situational awareness and the reduction of risks of poor decision-making. The use of modern tools, such as digital communication and information management systems, can help maintain unity in a group even in situations of geographical dispersion or combat-related dispersion. Research indicates that leaders are key factors in increasing cohesion. Those who are empathetic, stress-resistant, decisive, and concerned about the well-being of their subordinates have a significant impact on the level of trust, morale and combat effectiveness in the unit. This is an important factor for the development of individual potential as well as the formation of a shared goal in the

conditions of risk of transformational leadership. Given the reality of present-time challenges, such as armed conflict, crisis situations, and hybrid threats, the implementation of these strategies is essential to ensuring the cohesion, psychological resilience and effectiveness of teams. Further research may be conducted to verify the discovered relationships in different types of organisational and military teams with the use of quantitative analysis methods and to expand the scope to include real situations in the field of crisis.

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Соціально-психологічна згуртованість як чинник відповідальної діяльності в умовах кризових ситуацій та військових гій

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♦ **Анотація.** Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю підвищення ефективності діяльності організованих груп у кризових умовах, зокрема у військових підрозділах, рятувальних службах і волонтерських організаціях, де соціально-психологічна згуртованість колективу є важливим чинником відповідальної поведінки, узгодженості дій, довіри та психологічної стійкості. Мета дослідження полягала у теоретичному обґрунтуванні ролі соціально-психологічної згуртованості як чинника формування відповідальної поведінки у кризових і військових колективах та визначенні ефективних підходів до організації взаємодії в умовах підвищеного стресу. У дослідженні використано загальнонаукові методи: аналіз, узагальнення, систематизацію та синтез сучасних наукових джерел із проблем військової та організаційної психології, командної взаємодії та лідерства. Застосовано порівняльний аналіз для виявлення особливостей функціонування традиційних, змішаних та кризових (зокрема військових) колективів. Встановлено, що соціально-психологічна згуртованість є критично важливим чинником формування відповідальної поведінки у військових та кризових групах, оскільки забезпечує підвищення рівня довіри, координації дій та готовності до виконання спільних завдань в умовах ризику. Визначено ключові умови ефективної взаємодії: наявність спільної мети, чіткий розподіл ролей, ефективна комунікація та підтримання стабільного психологічного клімату навіть у стресових ситуаціях. Обґрунтовано, що у військових підрозділах особливого значення набувають тимблдингові та тренінгові заходи, які сприяють розвитку згуртованості, підвищенню бойової злагодженості та формуванню колективної відповідальності. У змішаних та віддалених формах взаємодії важливу роль відіграє організація цифрової комунікації та забезпечення безперервного зворотного зв'язку як чинника підтримання командної єдності. Практичне значення результатів дослідження полягає у можливості їх застосування в системі управління персоналом цивільних, військових і кризових організацій для підвищення ефективності командної взаємодії, розвитку згуртованості, вдосконалення комунікації та формування відповідального ставлення до виконання професійних обов'язків у бойових і надзвичайних ситуаціях.

♦ **Ключові слова:** тимблдинг; бойові умови; організаційна комунікація; моральний дух; управління особовим складом