

Intercultural Leadership in the Swiss Armed Forces

This project aims at the potential of intercultural competence in the upcoming cohorts of the Swiss Armed Forces to improve intercultural leadership for the military profession. Since the Swiss Armed Forces are based on a mandatory militia system, they reflect the demography of Swiss society more than a professional army would. In regard to upcoming demographic trends, it is important for modern armed forces to be prepared for an increased heterogeneous cultural background of their soldiers. The Swiss Armed Forces play an active role in foreign peacekeeping missions, where intercultural competences are crucial for successful leadership in multinational teams and negotiating with locals of different ethnic origin.

Switzerland has a longstanding cultural tradition in history and politics: There are four official languages, so in the Swiss Armed Forces a lot of young people enrich their experiences and competences with other cultures: The institution itself serves as an integrating force over various different cultural and social backgrounds. Due to increased migration in a globalized world, we have to expect new cohorts of young Swiss people with various different migrant backgrounds in the upcoming years and decades.

Due to the tradition of political and military neutrality of Switzerland and its republican government, members of Swiss Armed Forces have great potential to negotiate and mediate between or with people of different ethnic backgrounds. To keep the Swiss Armed Forces attractive as an employer, it is important to strengthen the Swiss foreign missions. This is a perfect opportunity to increase individual intercultural awareness in a foreign setting and to get a different perspective on upcoming tasks..

The present study has two key objectives: Firstly, to identify the potential of intercultural leadership among Swiss career officers. Secondly, to investigate how this potential can be optimized in the military profession, with a special focus on the Swiss foreign missions.

The main research questions are as follows:

1. Which parameters are crucial among Swiss career officers for intercultural leadership?
2. What can be improved in leadership training for foreign missions in regard to intercultural leadership?

According to the cultural dimensions concept of Hofstede (1980), cultures can be classified into several different dimensions. To identify problems or similarities between different cultures, this theory can be useful for foreign missions in regard to what to expect in intercultural interaction with the local population or military cooperation with international armed forces. Structured biographical interviews and surveys with veterans of Swiss foreign missions are crucial to identify what can be improved for future foreign missions. This research helps to identify the core principles of an individual mission officer that are important for successful leadership in an intercultural military setting.

The most important Swiss foreign mission is the KFOR mandate in Kosovo where the Swiss armed forces are present with a heavy contingent. Since there is an increased demography of young Swiss soldiers with Serbian and/or Kosovo-Albanian origin, these human resources can be essential for negotiating between the frictions. This study also serves as an opportunity for these individuals to improve their intercultural skills and to broaden their experience horizon.

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