

LUDOVIKA UNIVERSITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE
Doctoral School of Military Science

THESIS BOOKLET

Boglárka Barna

Organizational Socialization Challenges in Modern Armed Forces

Author's synopsis of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Consultant: Ildikó Szelei, PhD

associate professor

Budapest, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	4
4. HYPOTHESES	6
5. RESEARCH METHODS	7
5.1. RESEARCH STRATEGY.....	7
5.2. DATA COLLECTION	7
6. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH BY CHAPTER.....	8
6.1. CHAPTER THREE	8
6.2. CHAPTER FOUR	9
6.3. FIFTH CHAPTER	9
7. CONCLUSIONS.....	10
8. NOVEL SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS.....	12
9. RECOMMENDATIONS	13
10. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	13
11. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	15
12. CURRICULUM VITAE	16

1. INTRODUCTION

The global and technological changes shaping the 21st century have fundamentally transformed social values, human relationships, and individual experiences. These changes, which permeate the fabric of society, also affect human-based systems, including the armed forces. This is particularly true for military organizations that are based on voluntary service. The core problem of this research stems from the recognition that classical military socialization models can no longer effectively address the personnel challenges presented by the 21st-century workforce, particularly with the emergence of Generations Y and Z. The gap between traditional methods and the characteristics of the modern employee is widening. This must be addressed during the organizational integration process, as a lack of successful integration can lead to high attrition rates and jeopardize the supply of new personnel, representing a strategic-level challenge.

The relevance of this research is underscored by the fact that all-volunteer forces must now compete with the civilian sector for skilled labour, while the appeal of a military career is declining in many NATO member states. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the roots of these challenges from an organizational psychology perspective and to develop a new, comprehensive framework that offers systemic solutions for the recruitment, selection, and integration processes, as well as for the retention of personnel. Although the military science literature is rich with valuable national and international research on similar topics, their findings have not been integrated into a single framework. A comprehensive model that addresses the process of becoming a soldier in its entirety—from recruitment to long-term retention—is currently lacking.

My personal motivation and professional experience also played a significant role in initiating this research. As an organizational psychologist, I have a theoretical background and extensive first-hand experience in the civilian HR sector. I was intrigued by how the processes and challenges I observed might manifest in the armed forces. My research at the National University of Public Service, followed by my experience at the Ministry of Defence, contributed to a deeper investigation and understanding of the topic. Through my work and research, I encountered the practical difficulties of military socialization first-hand.

In this research, by analysing domestic and international literature and examining the organizational socialization process, I create a comprehensive, integrative model. This model

is designed to unify disparate research findings into a single framework while also offering practical tools and methodologies for the armed forces to manage the human resource challenges of the 21st century.

2. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The operational effectiveness of modern all-volunteer forces hinges on highly skilled and committed personnel. Securing a steady supply of personnel and reducing attrition are of strategic importance, with the most critical element being the successful organizational socialization of new recruits. However, military organizations face significant challenges in attracting, integrating, and retaining young employees, particularly members of the late Y and Z generations.

The dissertation is based on the premise that traditional military socialization methods have lost their relevance. They are no longer able to effectively address the challenges arising from 21st-century social and labour market changes, which in turn exacerbates recruitment and attrition difficulties. Due to the complexity of the problem, the phenomenon must be examined on several interrelated levels: societal, organizational, and individual.

The core of the scientific problem is the gap in the field of military science: there is no unified, modern framework that integrates the fragmented findings of related research. A systematic, practical methodology that covers the entire process from recruitment to retention and provides a comprehensive response to 21st-century military socialization challenges, including the widening gap between generations, is also lacking. This study primarily draws on scientific findings from the last three decades, relying on data from the 1990s onwards.

Research Questions:

- I. How can the fragmented findings in this field be integrated into a unified framework?
- II. What model would be suitable for providing a comprehensive response to the contemporary challenges of organizational socialization?
- III. How can the gap between the characteristics of younger generations and the specific nature of military organizations be bridged?

- IV. What practical tools and methods are effective for establishing a dynamic and adaptive systemic framework, which not only addresses existing socialisation challenges but can also continuously integrate environmental and generational changes?

This research was undertaken to provide answers to these questions.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of my research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the organizational socialization process within the armed forces, to identify its challenges, and to develop practical methods, as summarized in the following objectives:

- I. To identify the organizational socialization factors that are essential for understanding the integration process of new recruits.
- II. To identify, based on these factors, the points of risk that arise from discrepancies between organizational and job-specific characteristics and the value systems of 21st-century Western societies, and which may affect the outcome of organizational socialization.
- III. To reframe the concept of military socialization by developing a modern, integrative model applicable to the integration process within the armed forces.
- IV. To explore, within the integrative framework, alternatives that can help bridge and ultimately resolve the tension arising from the differences between generational cohort experiences and the mission structure of the armed forces.
- V. To develop and present elements of a medium- and long-term strategy for successful integration, thereby contributing to the establishment of an adaptive organizational socialization practice that reduces attrition.
- VI. To formulate, based on a modern interpretation of military socialization, alternatives for the Hungarian Defence Forces to secure, integrate, and retain personnel, thereby supplementing and diversifying the current recruitment and retention strategy.

4. HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses were formulated based on the four research questions.

H1: Within the field of military science, there is no unified, comprehensive framework that systematizes the stages and partial findings of the process of becoming a soldier, which would enable a system-level interpretation of emerging issues and the development of interdependent phases of practical solutions.

H2: A new, comprehensive organizational socialization model must be developed for the armed forces that is both universally applicable and capable of addressing the challenges arising from generational differences, as well as diversifying according to the characteristics of the target group, thereby contributing to the successful implementation of military socialization.

H3: The military socialisation of late Generation Y and Generation Z members is more effective when the traditional hierarchical model is supplemented by a supportive mentoring system and the application of an approach based on transparent communication and flexible career path planning.

H4: To address the organizational socialization challenges arising in modern armed forces, solutions developed by the civilian sector can be applied at the strategic level (data-driven decision-making), the operational level (target-group-specific mentoring programs and digital onboarding tools), and the individual level (personalized development plans).

5. RESEARCH METHODS

The initial phase of the research design involved a review of the relevant literature, which substantiated the need for a new system and a new approach to address the organizational socialization challenges within the armed forces. The theoretical framework for the research was provided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model¹, which enabled the analysis of the socialization process at the macro, meso, and micro levels. The methodological approach adopted the paradigm of applied research, in accordance with EU Regulation 651/2014², as the research aimed to develop practically applicable solutions for Hungarian military organizations. A proprietary model was developed for this research, utilizing a deductive research strategy.

5.1. RESEARCH STRATEGY

In line with the main research objectives, the topic was approached in an exploratory manner, often employing summative evaluation.³ Drawing on the relevant literature, the dissertation sought to form a comprehensive assessment of the current state of the organizational socialization process, with a particular focus on the integration process within the armed forces.

5.2. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was based on systematic literature review and document analysis. Following a screening protocol adapted from the Cochrane system, nearly 380 scientific publications were analysed, with over 300 of them published between 1990 and 2024.⁴ Of these, approximately 50% (n = 209) of the cited sources were published within the last 15 years. Articles from the Scopus and Web of Science databases constituted approximately 70% of the core material used for the research, while the ProQuest Military Collection provided the remaining 30%. An effort

¹ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *International encyclopedia of education*, 3(2), pp. 37-43.

² Európai Parlament és Tanács. (2014). 651/2014/EU rendelet bizonyos állami támogatási kategóriák összeegyeztethetőségének elismeréséről a belső piacon való működéssel kapcsolatban (általános blokkvételi rendelet). *Európai Unió Hivatalos Lapja*, L 187, pp. 1–78.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0651>

³ Lampek K., Horváthné Kíves Zs. (2015). Általános kutatómódszertani alapok. In.: Boncz I. (ed.). *Kutatómódszertani alapismeretek*. Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Egészségtudományi Kar, pp. 9-59.

⁴ The scope of this work does not extend to results obtained after December 2024 or to current measures taken by the armed forces.

was made to exclude non-peer-reviewed university notes and to limit the inclusion of meta-analyses older than 20 years. However, in some cases, relevant bachelor's or master's theses were cited as examples for their thematic or conceptual relevance, though no scientific findings or conclusions were based on these works. Research materials and theoretical works older than 20 years were included only if they are considered integral to the development of the research field and continue to define contemporary organizational integration practices.

In addition to scientific publications, the research draws upon the relevant legal framework, as well as various research reports and briefings. Furthermore, it occasionally relies on statistics from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), data from the databases of foreign research institutes, and international statistical offices.

The international comparison draws on the experiences of the armed forces of several countries, with significant research data originating from:

- the evaluation of the all-volunteer model of the USA,
- analyses of the Swedish armed forces regarding volunteerism,
- British and Australian studies examining relevant segments of civil-military relations.

6. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH BY CHAPTER

The **first chapter** of the dissertation outlines the rationale and relevance of the research topic, the statement of the problem, the research objectives, hypotheses, methodology, and the scope and limitations of the study. The **second chapter** provides a review of the relevant literature and a clarification of fundamental concepts. These chapters form the basis for testing the hypotheses, given that the research is exploratory in nature and the validation of the hypotheses relies predominantly on a systematic literature review.

6.1. CHAPTER THREE

The first hypothesis (H1) focused on the search for a comprehensive model. To this end, the **third chapter** presents a systematic analysis of the classic and modern theoretical models of

organizational socialization. The chapter is structured to emphasize my professional view that the process of becoming a soldier is not synonymous with the few-week period of basic training. It demonstrates and substantiates that existing frameworks are incapable of addressing the process of becoming a soldier in its full complexity while also integrating modern generational expectations.

Upon identifying these theoretical deficiencies, the foundations for a new, synthesizing approach were laid, leading to the development of my proprietary model: the integrative model of organizational socialization. This integrative model serves as the central element for the subsequent chapters. Thus, the chapter not only validates the lack of a theoretical framework as stated in the first hypothesis, but it also establishes the solid conceptual foundation upon which the dissertation's proprietary model is built.

6.2. CHAPTER FOUR

The fourth chapter examines the second hypothesis (H2), which addresses the applicability of a generation-independent organizational socialization model within the armed forces. The chapter presents the personnel challenges facing the armed forces, which stem from its role in the labour market. The dissertation's central problem statement is embedded in a practical context, detailing the external environmental factors that fundamentally challenge the effectiveness of traditional military socialization practices.

This chapter validates the H2 hypothesis and lays the groundwork for the solution to be presented in Chapter 5, as well as for the validation of the H3 hypothesis. The situation analysis, based on presented international and domestic empirical findings, justifies and validates the need to develop a new, much more adaptive socialization model.

6.3. FIFTH CHAPTER

The **fifth chapter** represents the culmination of the dissertation, in which my proprietary integrative organizational socialization model is tested within the context of the armed forces. This section not only offers a theoretical framework but also provides practical solutions tailored to the specific environment of modern armed forces. The chapter details how proven human resource management tools from the civilian sector can be adapted, thereby validating the legitimacy of adopting external best practices. In essence, this chapter constitutes the

practical component of the dissertation, representing one of its primary contributions. It provides a tangible guide for the defence leadership on enhancing integration effectiveness. The chapter validates hypothesis H4, while also reinforcing hypotheses H2 and H3.

Finally, the **sixth chapter** summarizes the research findings, presents a detailed account of the confirmed hypotheses, and outlines the new scientific contributions of the study and their potential applications.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In my dissertation, I have summarized and systematized the 21st-century challenges of military socialization. I have presented a comprehensive, complex, and dynamic model capable of integrating previous research in the field as well as the sub-processes of organizational integration in daily practice. The model dynamically follows the stages of integration, offering opportunities to establish measurement points, interpret processes flexibly, and develop rapid solutions.

The questions posed and hypotheses established at the outset of the research were tested through a systematic literature review, the results of which clearly substantiated and answered the scientific problem. The investigation confirmed that a significant gap exists on multiple levels between the organizational socialization practices of all-volunteer forces and the realities of the modern labour market and society.

The first hypothesis (H1) posited that military science currently lacks a unified, comprehensive framework for the process of becoming a soldier. This theoretical deficiency complicates the system-level interpretation of emerging problems, such as attrition, and hinders the development of effective, interdependent solutions. This hypothesis was validated in Chapter 3, where a critical analysis of classic and modern socialization theories revealed that existing models are partial and research findings are fragmented. The research showed that while some frameworks can offer a starting point and there are valuable partial results, a unified, system-level interpretation has not been established. The investigation confirmed that these approaches do not provide answers to the 21st-century challenges of the armed forces, thereby reinforcing the need for a new, integrative model. Thus, H1 was fully validated.

Building on this theoretical gap, the second hypothesis (H2) formulated the need to develop a new, comprehensive organizational socialization model. The hypothesis posited that such a model must be both universally applicable and flexible enough to manage generational differences and the unique characteristics of target groups. Validation was achieved in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 explored and contextualized the generational challenges, while Chapter 5 demonstrated how the integrative model developed in this dissertation allows for target-group-specific interventions, thereby confirming the hypothesis. The exploratory and analytical work thus confirmed H2.

The third hypothesis (H3) focused on the methodology for integrating young employees (late Y and Z generations). It asserted that for these individuals, a supportive socialization strategy based on mentoring, transparent communication, and flexible career planning is needed instead of the traditional hierarchical model. The essence of the hypothesis is that prioritizing personal development and establishing trust-based relationships, rather than command-and-control principles, increases commitment. Validation occurred in Chapter 5, where the detailed presentation of the mentoring system, career path planning, and solutions reflecting generational values—all integrated into the model—proved that a supportive, person-centric strategy provides a more effective response to the military socialization challenges of the modern era.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis (H4) examined whether the modern armed forces can successfully adapt proven HR solutions from the civilian sector. The assumption was that this transfer is possible on three levels: strategic (data-driven decision-making), operational (target-group-specific mentoring programs, digital onboarding), and individual (personalized development plans). Validation was also provided in Chapter 5. The chapter demonstrated that innovations from the market sphere—adapted to military specifics—can be successfully transferred to the armed forces. This confirmed that integrating external best practices is a pragmatic and effective path to improving socialization.

The research presented in this dissertation validated all four hypotheses formulated at the outset. The testing of the hypotheses formed a coherent chain of argumentation that substantiated the study's main claims. The findings collectively demonstrated and confirmed that instead of the current fragmented and outdated practices, a systematic, consciously designed, and managed process is needed, spanning from recruitment to full integration. For this purpose, I developed the integrative model of organizational socialization, which can be used not only as a framework but also as a tool at the strategic, operational, and individual levels. I have proven

that the model is capable of managing generational differences, creating a supportive organizational environment, and aligning recruitment promises with reality, thereby systemically improving the retention capabilities of the armed forces.

However, the value of the dissertation lies not only in its systematization of the topic but also in the numerous new and exciting directions it identifies for future research. The proposals include specific empirical studies, such as controlled impact assessments and longitudinal follow-up studies, to further test the presented model. Furthermore, it lays the groundwork for developing a new quantitative measurement tool validated for the military context. The findings may also be useful for future technological developments, such as digital onboarding platforms or machine learning-based predictive attrition systems.

8. NOVEL SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

- I. I have developed the first framework that allows the recruitment and retention challenges of the armed forces to be analysed dynamically and as a process, while simultaneously considering the individual, the organization, and the broader socio-cultural context. This holistic framework represents a scientific contribution in its own right, as it establishes a new, systems-based approach to research within military science.
- II. I have redefined the concept of military socialization and formulated a triad that constitutes and shapes its process, tailored to the specific characteristics of the armed forces. Furthermore, I have integrated this core triad into the holistic, dynamic system described in the first scientific contribution.
- III. I have developed the first integrative model of organizational socialization capable of dynamically tracking the process of organizational socialization in its full complexity.
- IV. I was the first to integrate the challenges of military socialization into a unified, comprehensive framework from the perspective of organizational socialization.
- V. I have developed a practical methodology, based on the integrative model, to enhance the effectiveness of the armed forces' integration process by providing methodological support at strategic, operational, and individual levels.
- VI. I have established the viability of an adaptation framework for implementing human resource innovations from the civilian sector into the military context.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and methodology of this dissertation have broad applications. At the policy and strategic levels, it provides decision-makers, such as the Ministry of Defence and the Command of the Hungarian Defence Forces, with a new, comprehensive approach to human resource management. At the operational level, the work can serve as a practical handbook for the armed forces' mid- and lower-level military leaders.

In the field of military science, the dissertation can serve as valuable educational material and a key reference for higher education institutions, such as the National University of Public Service. For the latter, its theoretical background and the developed integrative model can serve as a starting point for further research. This work is also recommended as an inspiration and a foundation for future theses and PhD research in the fields of military sociology, organizational psychology, and leadership studies.

10. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The findings of this research have practical applications at several levels.

Policy and Strategic Level Planning

1. The dissertation can be utilized in the strategy formulation activities of the Ministry of Defence. It provides a foundation for modernizing the human resources strategy, for the more efficient allocation of budgetary resources (e.g., developing mentoring programs, digital advancements in personnel management), and for establishing a data-driven HR policy adapted to the labour market conditions of the 21st century.
2. The dissertation can also be utilized by leaders within the Command of the Hungarian Defence Forces. Beyond strategy formulation, its findings—particularly the methodological recommendations—can contribute to the work of commanders by enhancing personnel cohesion, reducing attrition, and boosting motivation. Ultimately, this contributes to improved combat readiness at the personnel level.
3. The definitions, their core components, and the associated methods developed in this dissertation can serve as tools for reframing and developing the concept of military socialization. The application of these findings can thereby contribute to the enrichment and transformation of the organizational culture.

Operational Level Applicability

4. The methodological recommendations of the dissertation can also be utilized by military leaders at the mid- and lower levels. The work serves as a 'handbook' for these leaders, helping them understand the mindset, expectations, and communication style of soldiers from Generations Y and Z. Its practical recommendations—such as mentoring, transparent communication, immediate feedback, process training, and breaking down tasks—are directly applicable to daily leadership work.
5. The dissertation can also be utilized in the daily work of professionals involved in recruitment, training, and personnel management. In its analysis of current socialization practices, the research offers specific recommendations for reforming recruitment campaigns, basic training methodology, and career planning systems. Implementing these recommendations can enhance recruitment effectiveness, reduce attrition during training, and provide a career path model that makes military service more appealing to young people.

Applications in Military Science Education and Research

6. The dissertation, particularly its theoretical background, literature review, and its integrative, complex, and dynamic process analysis of military socialization, can serve as valuable educational material and a key reference for the National University of Public Service and other higher education institutions.
7. The dissertation's framework, its interpretation of organizational socialization within the integrative model, and its linkage of generational theories with military socialization all represent areas that can serve as starting points for further research. Thus, the dissertation provides both inspiration and a foundation for future empirical studies, theses, and PhD research in the fields of military sociology, organizational psychology, and leadership studies.

11. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Barna, B. (2018a). A munkahelyi stressz idői vetülete és főbb forrásai a hadseregben. *HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE*, 11(1), 124–141.

Barna, B. (2019). A harci stressz kezelésének alternatívái a modern fegyveres küzdelmek fényében. *HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE*, 12(3), 145–162.
<http://doi.org/10.32563/hsz.2019.3.9>

Barna, B. (2020a). A munkaelégedettség szerepe és jelentősége a katonai pályán. *HADTUDOMÁNY: A MAGYAR HADTUDOMÁNYI TÁRSASÁG FOLYÓIRATA*, 30(3), 55–66. <http://doi.org/10.17047/HADTUD.2020.30.3.55>

Barna, B. (2020b). A pályakezdő katonák megszólításának és megtartásának lehetősége a szervezeti szocializáció eszközével. *HONVÉDSÉGI SZEMLE: A MAGYAR HONVÉDSÉG KÖZPONTI FOLYÓIRATA*, 148(6), 67–80. <http://doi.org/10.35926/HSZ.2020.6.6>

Barna, B. (2021b). Kompetenciák és elvárások hatása a honvéd tisztjelöltek szervezeti szocializációs folyamatára. *HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE*, 14(4), 83–97.
<http://doi.org/10.32563/hsz.2021.4.8>

Barna, B. (2021). A nemzetbiztonsági szolgálatok szervezeti értékei és szerepük a toborzásban. *Hadtudományi Szemle* (benyújtva, megjelenés alatt)

Barna, B. (2021). Main stressors in the armed forces divided by the the time aspect of the stress event. *Hadtudományi Szemle* (benyújtva, megjelenés alatt)

Barna, B. (2021a). Az elégedettség szerepe a katonai pályán. In *Fiatal tisztek zsebkönyve* (pp. 201–210).

Barna Boglárka (2023). A katonai hivatás megjelenése a primer és a referenciacsoportokban, a pályaválasztásra gyakorolt hatása. In: Krajnc Z. (Ed.). *A hadtudomány aktuális kérdései 2021*. Budapest, Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó. https://doi.org/10.36250/01104_20

Boglárka, B. (2018). The Security Situation of Egyptian Christians in 2018. In *Budapest Report 2018 On Christian Persecution* (pp. 77–86).

12. CURRICULUM VITAE

Barna Boglárka earned her degree in psychology from the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, specializing in Work and Organizational Psychology. This laid the foundation for her subsequent professional and academic career. Following her master's degree, her interest turned to military science, leading her to begin her PhD studies at the Doctoral School of Military Science at the National University of Public Service. Here, she researched the process of becoming a soldier, building upon her prior knowledge of and interest in organizational socialization. Alongside her research, she became actively involved in the Hungarian Defence Forces, holding a position as a scientific organizer and expert consultant at the Ministry of Defence.

Another defining pillar of her professional profile is her qualification as a specialist in sexual psychology, which she obtained from Eötvös Loránd University while pursuing her PhD. This specialization enabled her to launch her own private psychology practice in 2023. Throughout her career, she has also gained valuable experience in the corporate sector, working in recruitment and selection before serving as an HR Generalist responsible for comprehensive personnel administration and process improvements.

Alongside her professional work and studies, she has also been active as a lecturer. She has taught courses related to military leadership at the National University of Public Service and is currently a contracted lecturer at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, where she leverages her expertise by teaching courses in organizational psychology, cognitive social psychology, and sexual psychology. Throughout her PhD studies, she has maintained an active academic profile, which includes giving conference presentations, serving as a thesis opponent, and supervising theses. She has also been involved in university life, participating in the editing of academic volumes and briefly holding the position of Communications Officer for DOSZ (National Association of Doctoral Students).