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Motivation to lead, values, and well-being in civilian and military university students

Abstract

With the aim of comparing civilian and military college students in their motivation to lead, their values, and their well-being, a quantitative empirical study was conducted, with a non-experimental design, and a comparative-correlational scope. The sample consisted of 404 college students (145 civilians and 259 military). The participants completed the Motivation to Lead Questionnaire (POTENLID), the Schwartz Value Scale, and the Pemberton Happiness Index. Independent-sample t-tests were performed, reporting the effect size, and the effects of gender and age were controlled through hierarchical regressions. Results showed that military students had higher social-normative motivation to lead and greater well-being, while civilians scored higher in extrinsic motivation and self-enhancement values. These differences remained even after controlling for gender and age. The relationships between the variables were generally moderate. The results show two distinct profiles: for military students, leadership is linked to duty and vocation, along with greater well-being, whereas civilians tend to have a more instrumental orientation. These findings suggest that military training consolidates a duty-based motivation to lead that coexists with greater well-being, whereas civilian universities may need to foster more autonomous, less instrumental forms of motivation to lead. Longitudinal studies are needed to disentangle the effects of institutional socialization from those of self-selection.

Keywords: motivation to lead, values, well-being, university students, military psychology

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Introduction

Leadership is a core competency for the functioning of organizations and institutions. Accordingly, one of the most widespread goals of education, and of universities in particular, is to prepare and train leaders.[1] Although much research has focused on the traits, behaviors, and styles of leaders, before a person actually exercises leadership there is a prior disposition to take it on, which varies from person to person. Understanding why some people assume leadership roles while others try to avoid them, and which values and psychological states accompany that motivation, is highly relevant in educational settings, where the orientations that individuals will later carry into their professional lives are shaped. Civilian and military university institutions represent two such settings, each with distinct characteristics. Military institutions in particular are regarded as training grounds for leaders; therefore, the internalization and development of leadership and command skills are essential for the proper functioning and success of their various missions.

Moreover, they constitute a particular socialization environment, built around discipline, hierarchy, and commitment to the institution, which suggests that those trained there develop value and psychological configurations that differ from those of civilians. In Argentina, studies have shown differences in values between the two groups, with military personnel emphasizing conservation values such as security, tradition, and religion, and civilians emphasizing openness to change and self-enhancement.[2–4] However, little is known about how these orientations relate to the reasons why a person wants to lead or takes on leadership, or to well-being, a dimension that has received little attention in either population. Analyzing these three variables together, and doing so among university students, makes it possible to move toward a more complete characterization of the profiles associated with each educational setting.

Motivation to lead

Traditionally, the study of leadership has focused on the traits, behaviors, and styles of those who occupy leadership roles. However, before a person exercises leadership, there must be a prior disposition to take it on. Chan and Drasgow[5] termed this disposition *motivation to lead*. This individual-differences construct helps explain why some people seek, accept, or reject leadership roles. It not only determines the decision to assume a leadership role and to participate in leadership training programs, but also relates to the intensity of effort and to persistence in the role. These authors distinguished three dynamic dimensions: affective-identity motivation, associated with an intrinsic liking for leading and identification with the leader role; non-calculative motivation, which refers to taking on leadership without a prior analysis of personal costs and benefits; and, finally, social-normative motivation, linked to a sense of duty, obligation toward the group, commitment, and responsibility. This three-dimensional structure has been validated across different cultural and occupational contexts, and a meta-analysis has confirmed its relevance for leadership emergence and effectiveness.[6] It also helps explain the extent to which a leader is resilient: whereas people driven by extrinsic incentives tend to give up in the face of adversity, those with an identity-based and normative foundation sustain their commitment and responsibility even when external benefits disappear.

In Argentina, Castro Solano et al.[7] operationalized this construct through the Motivation to Lead Questionnaire (POTENLID),[7] developed largely from work with samples of military cadets. The instrument distinguishes three types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, which corresponds to the affective-identity dimension and reflects personal interest in and inclination toward leadership; extrinsic motivation, which concerns the willingness to lead based on the personal advantages or benefits it provides; and social-normative motivation, which involves leading out of obligation or moral duty.

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This distinction is relevant to the present study because it allows us to move from the question of *how much* a person wants to lead to *why* they do so.[8] Educational institutions, including universities and, more specifically, military training institutions, may generate different motivational configurations, since they socialize their members within different value frameworks and role expectations. In terms of Chan and Drasgow's[5] model, the extrinsic motivation assessed by the POTENLID corresponds to the calculative pole of motivation to lead: high scores indicate that the willingness to lead depends on an assessment of its personal costs and benefits.

Values

Triandis[9] defines culture as a body of knowledge shared by a group of individuals who have a common history and participate in a social structure. From a subjective or psychological perspective, people internalize values, attitudes, and beliefs that dispose them to act in certain ways.[10] Schwartz's[11] theory of basic human values, the most widely used in social-psychological and cross-cultural research, defines values as desirable, trans-situational goals that vary in importance and serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity, orienting attitudes and behaviors. What distinguishes values from one another is the type of motivational goal they express. Accordingly, ten motivational types of values are proposed: power (social status and control over people and resources), achievement (personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards), hedonism (pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself), stimulation (excitement, novelty, and challenge in life), self-direction (independent thought and action, creativity, and exploration), universalism (understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of the welfare of all people and of nature), benevolence (preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact), tradition (respect for, commitment to, and acceptance of the customs and ideas provided by traditional culture or religion), conformity (restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and to violate social expectations or norms), and security (safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self). In turn, these values are grouped into four higher-order dimensions: openness to change (self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism), which is opposed to conservation (security, conformity, and tradition), and self-enhancement (power and achievement), which is opposed to self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence). Several studies have indicated that value orientations, together with other psychological variables such as personality traits, help predict individuals' preferences and behavior, and that, in the case of leaders, values guide their style and decisions. For this reason, it is relevant to analyze how values relate to the disposition toward, and the exercise of, leadership among people socialized in different institutional frameworks.

Well-being

The study of well-being has revolved around two major traditions.[12] On the one hand, the hedonic tradition conceives of it as people's subjective evaluation of their lives in terms of satisfaction and the balance between positive and negative affect. On the other hand, the eudaimonic tradition associates it with personal growth and optimal psychological functioning, that is, with the way a person faces life's challenges and is able to realize their potential.[13] In addition to these two perspectives, there is social well-being, understood as individuals' appraisal of their functioning in their social environment.[14]

With the aim of integrating these dimensions and assessing well-being briefly, Hervás and Vázquez[15] developed the Pemberton Happiness Index (PHI), which combines remembered well-being, comprising hedonic, eudaimonic, and social well-being, with experienced well-being. In Argentina, Delfino, Botero, and González Insua[16] administered the instrument to an adult population and proposed using the remembered well-being dimension, obtaining adequate psychometric properties. Few studies[17] have compared military and civilian populations, which opens a relevant area of inquiry for the present study.

Motivation to lead, values, and well-being in civilian and military students

Social psychology of work explores the meaning of work, understanding it as a dynamic construct shaped by personal and environmental variables. It not only varies over time, but within the same period there are differences across nations and occupational groups, according to age, sex, and other relevant characteristics.[18] Ruiz Quintanilla[19] associates it with a set of values, beliefs, and expectations resulting from the action of socialization agents such as the family, educational institutions, and work organizations. Thus, individuals and groups develop a set of beliefs and values in the process of socialization *for* work and during the process of socialization *at* work. Accordingly, these tendencies are found both in institutional selection and in self-selection processes, so it is to be expected that institutions select personnel compatible with their hierarchical functions, just as individuals, in their institutional choices, choose social roles compatible with their beliefs and values. In this sense, military training constitutes a particularly intense socialization context, aimed at transmitting a value system that prioritizes order, discipline, hierarchy, and commitment to the institution. It is therefore to be expected that students attending this type of institution will show differential profiles compared with civilians.

Several local studies[7,17] have shown differences in values between the two groups, with the military population characterized by a predominance of conservation values (security, conformity, and tradition), compared with civilians, who lean more toward openness to change and self-enhancement. Differences in leadership styles between the two groups have also been studied.[3] Comparisons of well-being have received little attention in previous work, which, using other instruments, has linked it to variables such as insecurity and the perception of social problems. These studies suggest that differences between the two groups may vary depending on the dimension of well-being considered: whereas civilians tend to perceive greater personal growth in their environment, military personnel feel more useful and more able to contribute to the community, even when controlling for sex.[20] However, comparisons of overall well-being between civilian and military students have received less attention, an aspect the present study seeks to address.

Although comparative studies of both populations exist, little research has examined how these variables relate to one another and to motivation to lead, particularly among university students. In light of the above, the present study aimed to compare civilian and military university students in their motivation to lead, values, and well-being, and to examine the relationships among these variables within each group. In this way, we sought to characterize the differential profiles associated with both educational settings.

Methods

Type and design of the study. An empirical study with a quantitative approach was conducted, using a non-experimental, cross-sectional design with a comparative-correlational scope.

Participants. The non-probabilistic, purposive sample consisted of 404 university students, 145 of whom attended a civilian institution

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and 259 a military institution, both in Argentina. Of the sample, 58.9% identified as male and 41.1% as female. Notably, the groups differed significantly in composition: the civilian sample was 73.1% female, whereas the military sample was 76.8% male ($\chi^2 = 95.77$, $p < .001$, Cramér's V = .49). Mean age was 21.15 years (SD = 2.40), ranging from 18 to 40. Age differences were also observed, with military students being older (M = 22.07, SD = 2.30) than civilian students (M = 19.50, SD = 1.53), $t(390.24) = -13.46$, $p < .001$. Because of these differences, gender and age were included as covariates in the corresponding analyses.

Inclusion criteria were being enrolled as a regular student at one of the participating institutions, being 18 years of age or older, and agreeing to participate after giving informed consent. Questionnaires with less than 75% of the items answered were excluded from the analyses, resulting in the final sample of 404 participants.

Sample size. No a priori sample size calculation was performed, as the sample was purposive and its size was determined by the accessible population of students at both institutions during the data collection period. To establish the sensitivity of the study, a sensitivity power analysis was conducted.[21] With the achieved group sizes (n = 145 and n = 259), a two-tailed α of .05, and a power of .80, the study was able to detect between-group differences of $d \geq 0.29$ ($d \geq 0.37$ with a power of .95). All the significant differences reported exceeded this threshold, whereas the two non-significant differences (d = 0.11 and d = 0.17) fell below it. For within-group correlations, the minimum effects detectable with a power of .80 were $r \geq .23$ in the civilian group and $r \geq .17$ in the military group.

Regarding year of study, most civilian students were in their second year (53.8%), followed by 26.9% in their first year, 15.2% in their third year, and 4.1% in their fourth year. Military students, by contrast, were all in their second year. Regarding place of birth, in the civilian sample 45.5% were born in Greater Buenos Aires (the metropolitan area surrounding the capital), 29.7% in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA), 13.1% in another city in the province of Buenos Aires, 9% in other provinces of the country, and 2.8% abroad. In the military sample, 66.4% were born in other provinces of the country, 13.9% in a city in the province of Buenos Aires, 9.3% in Greater Buenos Aires, 8.1% in CABA, and 2.3% abroad. *Instruments*. The questionnaire included sociodemographic questions (such as gender, age, year of study, and place of birth) and the following scales:

- Motivation to Lead Questionnaire (POTENLID; Castro Solano & Casullo, 2004). It assesses motivation to lead across three dimensions: intrinsic, extrinsic, and social-normative motivation. It consists of nine items rated on a *Likert*-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Internal consistency was α = .76 for intrinsic motivation, α = .76 for extrinsic motivation, and α = .65 for social-normative motivation.

- Schwartz Portrait Values Questionnaire.[22,23] It consists of 21 items, each representing a value in the author's taxonomy, which describe characteristics of people; participants respond on a continuum ranging from 1 (*not like me at all*) to 6 (*very much like me*). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .67 for self-transcendence, .64 for self-enhancement, .67 for openness to change, and .47 for conservation (because of the low reliability of this dimension, results involving it were interpreted with caution).

- *Pemberton Happiness Index*.[15] Following the local adaptation by Delfino et al.,[16] one of the two subscales of the index was used: Remembered Well-Being, which assesses components of the different well-being traditions (hedonic, eudaimonic, and social). Ten items were analyzed (excluding the negative-affect item) on a *Likert*-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of this subscale was satisfactory (α = .91).

Procedure. The questionnaire was self-administered individually through the *SurveyMonkey* platform.

At the military institution, for reasons related to the internal administrative use of the information, data were collected nominally. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the present study, a dissociation procedure was applied (Argentine Personal Data Protection Law No. 25,326; Ley N.º 25.326, 2000),[24] so that the dataset analyzed contained no information that could identify participants. For civilian students, the questionnaire was administered anonymously. In both cases, participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from participants, who were assured that their decision to participate or not would have no consequences for their standing at their institution.

Ethical considerations. The study protocol was not submitted to an institutional ethics committee because the institution does not currently have one; an ethics committee is in the process of being established. Data collection at the military institution was authorized by its authorities. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013)[25] and the guidelines for ethical conduct in the social sciences and humanities of Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council.[26] The research involved minimal risk: it consisted solely of the self-administration of standardized questionnaires, did not include any intervention, and did not collect clinical information. Participants were informed of the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidential and exclusively scientific use of the data, and gave their informed consent before answering the questionnaire.

Use of artificial intelligence tools. During the preparation of this work, the authors used a generative artificial intelligence tool (Claude, Anthropic) to translate the manuscript from its original language (Spanish) into English. The authors subsequently reviewed and edited the translation and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Data analysis. Analyses were performed with SPSS version 21. First, the internal consistency of the scales was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, and descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. For group comparisons, independent-samples Student's *t* tests were used. Given the sample size, effect size (Cohen's d) was reported as the main criterion of practical relevance. When Levene's test indicated heterogeneity of variances, the statistics for equal variances not assumed were used.

To rule out the possibility that sociodemographic differences between the groups accounted for the results, hierarchical regressions were conducted controlling for gender and age (Step 1) and group membership, military vs. civilian (Step 2), with all dimensions of values, motivation, and well-being as dependent variables. Finally, correlations among motivation to lead, values, and well-being were calculated separately for each group.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the most marked differences were found in motivation to lead. Social-normative motivation was significantly higher among military than civilian students, representing the largest effect in the study. Military students also showed higher intrinsic motivation to lead. This reflects an orientation toward leadership grounded in duty and vocation. Conversely, civilian students scored higher in extrinsic motivation, that is, a more instrumental orientation

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toward leadership. Regarding values, civilian students scored higher than military students in self-enhancement, showing greater interest in success, self-improvement, and being admired. Military students, in turn, showed higher levels of conservation, placing greater value on norms, traditions, and security. No significant differences were observed in openness to change or self-transcendence.

Table 1 Differences in values, motivation to lead, and well-being between civilian and military students

Dimensions	Civilian M (SD)	Military M (SD)	t	df	p	d
Intrinsic motivation	3.40 (1.02)	3.77 (0.83)	−3.71	251.295	< .001	0.40
Extrinsic motivation	2.06 (1.04)	1.50 (0.76)	5.74	232.847	< .001	0.65
Social-normative mot.	2.52 (0.82)	3.96 (0.83)	−16.64	402	< .001	1.73
Self-transcendence	5.08 (0.55)	5.01 (0.71)	1.19	363.928	.234	0.11
Self-enhancement	3.96 (0.96)	3.50 (0.87)	4.93	402	< .001	0.51
Openness to change	4.58 (0.68)	4.45 (0.72)	1.67	402	.096	0.17
Conservation	4.12 (0.63)	4.35 (0.69)	−3.38	402	.001	0.35
Well-being (PHI)	7.53 (1.36)	8.62 (1.47)	−7.35	402	< .001	0.76

Note. n = 404. Civilian n = 145; military n = 259.

In addition, military students reported higher levels of well-being than civilian students. Given the gender and age differences between the two samples, hierarchical regressions were conducted for the variables showing statistically significant differences, entering gender and age in the first step and group membership in the second, to determine whether the results held after controlling for these variables. Group membership was a particularly strong predictor of social-normative motivation ($\beta = .59$, $R^2 = .205$, $p < .001$) and extrinsic motivation ($\beta = -.29$, $R^2 = .052$, $p < .001$), and remained significant, though with smaller magnitude, for well-being ($\beta = .29$, $R^2 = .049$, $p < .001$), intrinsic motivation ($\beta = .21$, $R^2 = .026$, $p < .001$), self-enhancement ($\beta = -.18$, $R^2 = .020$, $p = .004$), and conservation ($\beta = .17$, $R^2 = .017$, $p = .008$). For self-enhancement, age was also a relevant predictor, implying that the differences may be partly related to the age of the groups. These data indicate that the differences are not explained by the composition of the samples but by group membership.

Relationships among motivation to lead, values, and well-being

Complementing the between-group comparison, the associations among motivation to lead, values, and well-being were examined within each group, according to whether students belonged to the civilian or the military institution. As shown in Table 2, among civilian students extrinsic motivation was positively associated with self-enhancement and negatively, and more weakly, with self-transcendence. In addition, well-being was positively associated with self-transcendence and openness to change, as well as with intrinsic and social-normative motivation. Among military students, as shown in Table 3, the variables were more strongly interrelated. Intrinsic motivation correlated with all values. Extrinsic motivation, as among civilians, was positively associated with self-enhancement and negatively, and more weakly, with self-transcendence. Social-normative motivation, although less strongly, correlated with all values except self-enhancement. Similarly, well-being correlated with all values except self-enhancement. It was also positively associated with intrinsic and social-normative motivation, and negatively associated with extrinsic motivation.

Table 2 Correlations among values, motivation to lead, and well-being in civilian students

Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-transcendence	1							
2. Self-enhancement	-.08	1						
3. Openness to change	.28**	.28**	1					
4. Conservation	.19**	.27**	.09	1				
5. Intrinsic motiv.	-.041	.148	.11	.07	1			
6. Extrinsic motiv.	-.19*	.30**	.02	.05	-.13	1		
7. Social-normative motiv.	.07	-.02	.09	.05	.06	.03	1	
8. Well-being (PHI)	.20*	-.05	.35**	.04	.23**	-.14	.18*	1

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3 Correlations among values, motivation to lead, and well-being in military students

Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-transcendence	1							
2. Self-enhancement	.14*	1						
3. Openness to change	.53**	.37**	1					
4. Conservation	.49**	.30**	.47**	1				
5. Intrinsic motiv.	.29**	.25**	.29**	.25**	1			
6. Extrinsic motiv.	-.18**	.27**	-.04	-.06	-.11	1		
7. Social-normative motiv.	.22**	.03	.19**	.17**	.26**	-.19**	1	
8. Well-being (PHI)	.38**	.01	.27**	.31**	.20**	-.24**	.22**	1

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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Discussion

The aim of the present study was to compare civilian and military university students in their motivation to lead, values, and well-being, and to explore the relationships among these variables within each group. The results revealed two distinct profiles. In line with previous studies conducted in Argentina,[3,4] military students prioritized conservation values, related to preservation, respect, and commitment to norms and customs. These results, which are to be expected given the importance placed on order, discipline, and adherence to norms in the military setting, replicate previously documented findings, suggesting that the sample behaves consistently with the literature. However, the low reliability of the conservation dimension means that this result should be interpreted with caution and does not constitute a central contribution of the study. Civilian students, also in line with previous studies, scored higher in self-enhancement, valuing personal success and the pursuit of power.

Regarding motivation to lead, the largest difference was found in the social-normative dimension, which was higher among military students, with a very large effect size that remained virtually unchanged after controlling for gender and age. This is consistent with Chan and Drasgow,[5] who linked this type of motivation to a willingness to lead out of a sense of duty and to the acceptance of hierarchical structures. Military training, organized around duty, discipline, and respect for hierarchy, provides a framework that strengthens this motivational orientation. Likewise, military students showed higher intrinsic motivation, that is, they seek to lead out of interest and identification with the role, whereas civilian students showed higher extrinsic motivation, that is, a willingness to lead more closely tied to the evaluation of personal rewards or benefits. These results outline different motivational profiles: among military students, leadership is associated with duty and vocation, whereas among civilians it has a more instrumental orientation.

These profiles can also be read in light of Moskos's[27] distinction between an institutional model of the military profession, legitimized by values and a sense of calling, and an occupational model, legitimized by market rewards. Civilian students' higher extrinsic motivation, together with their higher self-enhancement, points to a calculative orientation toward leadership, in which the willingness to lead depends on its expected returns. Such an orientation may act as a disincentive to take on leadership roles when personal costs exceed perceived benefits, and it is less likely to sustain commitment under adverse conditions.[7] Moreover, evidence from West Point cadets shows that instrumental motives can undermine the benefits of internal motives, reducing persistence and performance over time.[28] From the perspective of self-determination theory, controlled forms of motivation tend to displace autonomous ones when external contingencies become salient.[29] In our data, military students showed higher, not lower, intrinsic motivation to lead. However, the cross-sectional design does not allow us to determine whether this intrinsic drive is maintained throughout training or gradually erodes, giving way, for instance, to a predominantly normative or compliance-based motivation as hierarchical demands accumulate. This possible attrition of intrinsic motivation is a relevant question for longitudinal research.

Regarding well-being, both groups scored high, indicating high levels of life satisfaction, enjoyment, sense of personal growth, and perceived connection with the social environment. However, military students showed higher levels than civilian students, with a medium-to-large effect that remained significant after controlling for participants' gender and age. This finding could be interpreted in terms of person–environment fit. That is, the congruence between military students' value and motivational orientations and the characteristics of the institution in which they are trained could promote their well-being.[22]

This result is noteworthy considering the dual burden of roles that military students face. Unlike their civilian peers, they must simultaneously meet the requirements of a university degree and those of military training, which include physical training, a highly structured daily routine, hierarchical obligations and, in many cases, living at the institution away from their families; indeed, most of them (66.4%) were born in provinces other than Buenos Aires. Rather than reducing well-being, this combination of demands appears to coexist with higher well-being, which could be explained by the sense of purpose, belonging, and social support that the institution provides, as well as by the self-selection of students who are better suited to these demands. It should be noted, however, that the study did not directly measure role overload or academic–military role conflict, so this interpretation remains tentative.

These latter findings contribute to knowledge about these populations beyond the previously analyzed differences in values. Finally, the relationships among motivation to lead, values, and well-being were generally moderate in magnitude. In both civilian and military students, some consistent associations were found, such as the relationship of openness to change and self-transcendence with well-being. This is consistent with Páez and Martínez Zelaya's[30] proposal that these values may foster social connection, autonomy, and personal growth, which are generally considered basic psychological needs. Following these authors, the association between conservation and well-being in the military sample could be understood in terms of how maintaining traditions, customs, and religion may foster integration into personally meaningful social groups. Similarly, intrinsic motivation to lead was associated with well-being, in line with the idea that more autonomous forms of motivation, linked to genuine interest, may be accompanied by better psychological functioning.[12] However, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow a causal direction to be attributed to these associations.

Also, in both groups, social-normative motivation to lead showed a positive, albeit weak, association with well-being. This could be understood in the sense that taking on leadership out of duty or responsibility, when integrated into meaningful contexts and values, may form part of a valued identity and be associated with higher levels of well-being.[22] The fact that these relationships appear similarly in both groups suggests that certain links among the disposition to lead, values, and well-being may operate relatively independently of the educational setting. The military group showed a more extensive pattern of associations, which may reflect a more integrated system of values and motivations, probably linked to the type and intensity of institutional socialization. This, however, should be confirmed in longitudinal studies specifically designed for that purpose. It should also be noted that, given the larger size of the military group, smaller correlations reached statistical significance in that group ($r \geq .17$ vs. $r \geq .23$ among civilians). However, several associations were also larger in magnitude among military students (e.g., between self-transcendence and openness to change, $r = .53$ vs. $r = .28$), so this difference does not appear to be attributable solely to statistical power.

Finally, from the perspective of the social psychology of work, these distinct profiles can be understood as a product of the socializing action of educational institutions, which transmit their own set of beliefs and values to their members.[19] However, these patterns could also reflect a process of institutional self-selection, that is, people choose roles and organizations that are compatible with their prior

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orientations. Beyond this distinction, understanding the values that underlie individuals' behavior is a relevant input for analyzing person–institution fit, with implications both for diagnosis and for potential intervention in institutional cultures.

These findings also have implications in light of the changing realities of military activity. The growing digitalization of defense, including cyber operations, remotely operated systems, and the coordination of geographically dispersed teams through technology, demands forms of leadership that are exercised at a distance and mediated by technology, that is, e-leadership.[31,32] In these contexts, where leaders have less face-to-face contact with their subordinates and fewer opportunities for direct supervision, a motivation to lead grounded in duty and in identification with the role, rather than in external rewards, may be especially important for sustaining commitment. At the same time, constant connectivity in demanding environments poses new challenges for well-being, such as difficulty disconnecting and information overload, which makes digital well-being a relevant dimension for future research on military training.[33] Our data do not allow these issues to be examined directly, but they suggest that the motivational and value profiles identified here may constitute a resource for adapting to these new demands.

Regarding the limitations of the study, first, the cross-sectional design precludes establishing causal relationships or the direction of the associations; the profiles described are concurrent patterns, not causal sequences. Second, the study cannot distinguish between the effect of institutional socialization and that of self-selection, as the differences found may reflect either the effect of training or the prior characteristics of those who choose it. Third, the groups differed in gender and age composition. Although these variables, which are also representative particularly of the military sample, were statistically controlled and the effects held, the samples were not equivalent. Fourth, the low reliability of the conservation dimension limited the conclusions involving it. Fifth, gender and type of institution were partly confounded, as most civilian students were women and most military students were men. Although gender was controlled statistically, the small size of some subgroups (women in the military group and men in the civilian group) did not allow for an intersectional analysis of how gender and institutional context jointly shape motivation to lead, values, and well-being.[34] This is particularly relevant in military education, where women remain a minority and may face specific evaluative pressures.[35] Sixth, no information was available on whether military students had prior military service, so it was not possible to compare cadets with prior service and those who entered directly from secondary school, two groups whose motivations and adaptation to the institution may differ. Finally, all military students were in their second year, which limits the generalization of the results to other stages of training.

Conclusion

The present study made it possible to characterize two distinct profiles among university students from two types of educational institutions, contributing to knowledge about motivation to lead and well-being, dimensions that have been less explored among civilian and military students. Military students were distinguished by a motivation to lead oriented toward duty and vocation and by greater well-being, whereas civilian students showed a more instrumental orientation toward leadership. These findings contribute to the literature in three ways. First, they show that the largest difference between the two groups lies not in values, which previous studies have emphasized, but in the reasons why students are willing to lead, with a very large effect for social-normative motivation. Second, they indicate that, despite the dual demands of academic and military training, military students report greater well-being, which is consistent with a good fit between their value and motivational orientations and their institutional environment. Third, they suggest that values, motivation to lead, and well-being are more closely interrelated among military students. Taken together, the results indicate that leadership development programs should consider not only how much students want to lead, but also why they want to do so.

Future research

Future research could examine these variables through longitudinal designs that make it possible to explore whether values precede motivation to lead and how they relate to well-being over time. It would also be valuable to have samples that are more balanced in sociodemographic composition, in order to strengthen the validity of the comparisons. In addition, future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of innovative interventions aimed at strengthening autonomous forms of motivation to lead. Leadership training has been shown to be effective, especially when it is based on a needs analysis and includes practice and feedback.[36] In line with self-determination theory, it would be valuable to compare autonomous leadership development models, which promote identification with the leadership role and the internalization of its meaning, with controlled models, based mainly on external rewards, sanctions, and compliance.[37] Value-alignment interventions, which help students reflect on the congruence between their personal values and those of the institution and the leadership role, could also strengthen person–organization fit and, consequently, well-being.[38,22] Research on institutional architecture, that is, on how curricula, evaluation systems, and the organization of daily life in training institutions promote or hinder these motivational orientations, would allow these findings to be translated into concrete institutional policies. Finally, future studies should include information on prior military service and measures of role overload and digital well-being, in order to address the issues raised in this study.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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