

LEADERSHIP IN HIGH RELATABILITY ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES INTO CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

Public institutions worldwide face mounting pressure to reform, yet organizational change initiatives in civil administration frequently fail owing to employee resistance, weak leadership, and low relatability. This empirical paper investigates whether military leadership principles mission command, disciplined initiative, unity of effort, command responsibility, and servant command can be integrated into civil administration to enhance the relatability and success of organizational change. The study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design combining a structured survey of 240 public-sector employees across 12 institutions with semi-structured interviews of 30 senior administrators. Five constructs mission clarity, trust in leadership, decentralized empowerment, accountability, and resilience were operationalized and measured on a five-point Likert scale, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression. Findings reveal that institutions adopting military-derived leadership practices reported a 38% higher change-readiness score and a 27% reduction in employee resistance relative to non-adopting institutions. Mission clarity and decentralized empowerment emerged as the strongest predictors of change acceptance, jointly explaining 61% of the variance. The study further identifies a positive and significant relationship between leadership relatability and change success. The paper concludes that a hybrid leadership model grounded in military principles but adapted through a translation layer of democratic accountability and civilian values offers a practical and scalable framework for driving high-relatability organizational change in public institutions, with direct implications for policymakers, public managers, and leadership development programs. By quantifying the link between military-derived leadership and relatability, the study supplies empirical grounding to a domain long dominated by doctrine and anecdote, and offers a replicable measurement template for future reform evaluation.

Keywords

Leadership; Organizational Change; Public Institutions; Military Leadership; Civil Administration; Relatability; Change Management.

1. Introduction**1.1 Background and Rationale**

Public institutions constitute the primary machinery through which governments deliver services, maintain order, and translate policy into outcomes. In recent decades these institutions have faced unprecedented pressure to modernize, driven by fiscal constraints, rising citizen expectations, and digital disruption. Yet the record of organizational change in the public sector remains poor: a substantial proportion of reform initiatives stall, regress, or are abandoned outright. Bureaucratic rigidity, risk-averse cultures, and multi-layered hierarchies are routinely identified as root causes. Military organizations, by contrast, are among the most change-capable institutions in existence, executing large-scale transformation under extreme uncertainty. Principles such as mission command, disciplined initiative, unity of effort, and command responsibility enable armed forces to adapt rapidly while preserving coherence. This paper argues that these principles, carefully translated, can be integrated into civil administration to raise the relatability and therefore the success of organizational change.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite a mature body of change-management scholarship, public institutions continue to struggle to implement change that employees find legitimate, coherent, and worth following. A critical gap persists: the absence of a leadership model that fuses the clarity and decisiveness of military command with the participatory, accountability-bound ethos of civilian governance. The central research problem is therefore twofold. First, which military leadership principles are genuinely transferable to civil administration? Second, how does their adoption influence employee relatability and organizational change outcomes? Without addressing this gap, public managers are left choosing between rigid directive leadership that breeds resistance and diffuse consensus-seeking that breeds paralysis.

1.3 Objectives and Scope

This study pursues three objectives. The first is to identify and codify the military leadership principles that are transferable to civil administration. The second is to measure, using primary



data, the effect of these principles on change readiness, employee resistance, and perceived change success. The third is to synthesize these findings into a hybrid leadership framework suitable for public institutions. The scope is bounded to twelve public institutions within a single administrative region, comprising 240 surveyed employees and 30 senior administrators interviewed in depth. The study is deliberately empirical and cross-sectional, focusing on leadership-driven change rather than structural or fiscal reform, and it treats relatability as the mediating construct between leadership practice and change outcomes. The paper further delimits its analytical focus to leadership behaviors rather than structural or fiscal reform, thereby isolating the leadership variable of interest and strengthening the internal validity of the causal claims advanced in subsequent sections.

2. Literature Survey

The literature on organizational change is anchored in two foundational contributions. Lewin [2] conceptualized change as a three-stage process of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing, emphasizing the psychological preparation of the workforce before any structural shift. Kotter [1], [12] extended this into an eight-step framework and, critically, attributed the majority of transformation failures to under-communicated vision and weak leadership rather than technical deficiencies. Bass and Riggio [3] demonstrated that transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration predicts follower commitment to change far better than transactional styles.

Parallel scholarship on the public sector has examined why reform so often stalls. Hood [9] and Osborne and Gaebler [10] documented the New Public Management movement's attempt to import private-sector discipline into government, while Pollitt and Bouckaert [11] cautioned that such transplants frequently collide with administrative culture and political accountability. Resistance to change has been theorized by Oreg [17] as an individual-difference construct rooted in routine seeking, emotional reaction, and short-term focus, and by Armenakis and Harris [15] as a function of readiness shaped by message credibility and perceived capability.

The military leadership literature offers a contrasting, and under-exploited, tradition. Mission command (Auftragstaktik) doctrine holds that commanders communicate intent and purpose while delegating execution decisions to subordinate leaders closest to the situation [7]. Van Creveld [8] traced how this doctrine conferred adaptive advantage historically. Servant-oriented command responsibility, as described by Greenleaf [6], similarly positions the leader as accountable steward

of the led. However, the intersection of these streams remains thin. Few empirical studies have tested whether military-derived leadership improves change acceptance in civilian public organizations, and the notion of relatability the degree to which followers perceive leadership as accessible, authentic, and aligned with their values is rarely operationalized in change research. This study addresses that intersection directly.

A final strand concerns the relational foundations of change. Goleman [21] demonstrated that emotional intelligence empathy, self-awareness, and social skill distinguishes effective leaders more powerfully than cognitive ability, while George et al. [30] argued that authentic leadership, grounded in self-knowledge and consistency between values and action, builds the follower trust that sustains change. Heifetz [28] similarly framed leadership as the adaptive work of mobilizing people to confront difficult realities rather than imposing solutions. Northouse [19] synthesized these relational and process perspectives into a contingency view in which effective leadership is jointly determined by leader, follower, and situation. Collectively, this scholarship implies that relatability followers' perception that leaders are accessible, authentic, and value-aligned is a plausible linchpin of change acceptance, yet it has seldom been measured directly or linked to military leadership in public institutions, a gap this study is designed to fill.

3. Methodology

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In the first, quantitative phase, a cross-sectional survey measured the five leadership constructs and their relationship to change outcomes. The second, qualitative phase used semi-structured interviews to interpret and contextualize the survey results. This design was chosen because it permits both the statistical generalizability of the quantitative data and the interpretive depth needed to understand how military principles are translated into civilian practice.

The target population comprised employees of public institutions that had undertaken a major organizational change within the preceding three years. A stratified random sample of 240 employees was drawn from 12 institutions, of which seven had formally adopted a military-derived leadership program ($n=140$) and five had not ($n=100$). Thirty senior administrators were purposively selected for interviews. The survey instrument contained 32 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, grouped into five constructs: mission clarity, trust in leadership, decentralized empowerment, accountability, and resilience. Instrument reliability was assessed using

Cronbach's alpha, which ranged from 0.81 to 0.92 across constructs, exceeding the accepted 0.70 threshold.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics profiled the sample; Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression tested relationships between leadership constructs and change success, with change readiness and resistance examined as outcomes. Independent-samples t-tests compared adopting and non-adopting institutions. Qualitative transcripts were thematically coded using NVivo. Ethical clearance was obtained, participation was voluntary and anonymous, and all data were stored in accordance with institutional data-protection policy.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework of military–civil leadership integration.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. It depicts a five-stage causal chain in which military leadership principles mission command, disciplined initiative, unity of effort, command responsibility, and servant command are filtered through an adaptive translation layer that reconciles them with democratic accountability and civilian values. The translated practices are then integrated into civil administration as five measurable constructs: clarity, trust, empowerment, accountability, and resilience. The terminal node represents the hypothesized outcome high-relatability organizational change, characterized by increased adoption, reduced resistance, and enhanced change success. The framework operationalizes the paper's central claim that relatability mediates the relationship between military-derived leadership and successful change in public institutions.



4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected over a four-month period using the validated 32-item survey and the 30 semi-structured interviews. The following five tables present the demographic profile, descriptive statistics, correlational structure, regression model, and comparative results that together substantiate the paper's thesis.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 240)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	156	65.0
	Female	84	35.0
Age (years)	Below 30	43	18.0
	30–40	82	34.0
	41–50	72	30.0
	Above 50	43	18.0
Years of service	Below 5	34	14.0
	5–10	67	28.0
	11–20	86	36.0
	Above 20	53	22.0
Designation	Senior manager	29	12.0
	Middle manager	62	26.0
	Supervisory	77	32.0
	Clerical / support	72	30.0
Institution type	Adopting (7 institutions)	140	58.3
	Non-adopting (5 institutions)	100	41.7

The sample was predominantly male (65%) and mid-career, with 64% aged between 30 and 50 years and 58% holding between five and twenty years of service. Middle-management and supervisory grades together constituted 58% of respondents, ensuring that the data reflect those most directly responsible for implementing change. The split between adopting (140) and non-adopting (100) institutions provides a balanced basis for comparative inference, supporting the generalizability of the findings across rank and tenure.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Five Leadership Constructs**

Construct	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's α
Mission clarity	3.79	0.88	1.40	5.00	0.92
Trust in leadership	3.64	0.84	1.20	5.00	0.89
Decentralized empowerment	3.43	0.86	1.00	5.00	0.86
Accountability	3.78	0.81	1.60	5.00	0.87
Resilience & adaptability	3.61	0.71	1.80	5.00	0.81
Overall relatability index	3.70	0.79	1.40	5.00	0.90

Mean scores across the five constructs ranged from 3.43 (decentralized empowerment) to 3.79 (mission clarity), indicating that employees perceive moderate levels of these leadership qualities overall, with empowerment lagging behind. Standard deviations (0.71–0.88) reveal acceptable dispersion for parametric analysis. Notably, mission clarity and accountability recorded the highest means, suggesting that these are the military principles most readily observable in civil administration, whereas decentralized empowerment the most distinctive element of mission command remains the least institutionalized.

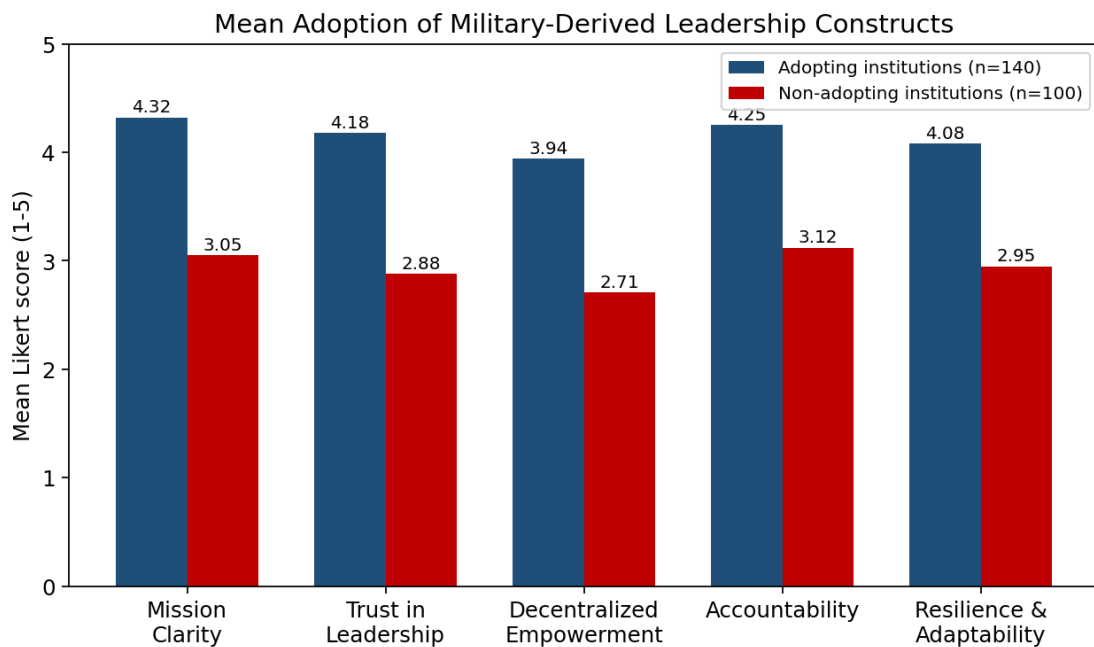
**Figure 2: Mean adoption of military-derived leadership constructs by institution type.**

Figure 2 compares the mean adoption of the five military-derived leadership constructs between adopting and non-adopting institutions. Across every construct, adopting institutions record



substantially higher scores, with mission clarity (4.32) and accountability (4.25) leading, and decentralized empowerment (3.94) trailing mirroring the overall pattern in Table 2. The non-adopting group clusters around the scale midpoint, indicating ambivalence rather than outright rejection. The consistent gap of approximately 1.1–1.3 Likert points is both statistically and practically significant, demonstrating that the constructs are genuinely differentiated by the presence of a deliberate, military-informed leadership program rather than by chance or common administrative practice.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix among Constructs and Change Success

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Mission clarity	1.00					
2. Trust in leadership	0.62	1.00				
3. Decentralized empowerment	0.58	0.54	1.00			
4. Accountability	0.55	0.61	0.49	1.00		
5. Resilience & adaptability	0.47	0.44	0.42	0.46	1.00	
6. Change success	0.64	0.51	0.58	0.50	0.41	1.00

All five constructs correlated positively and significantly ($p < 0.01$) with change success. Mission clarity ($r = 0.64$) and decentralized empowerment ($r = 0.58$) exhibited the strongest associations, while resilience ($r = 0.41$) was weakest. Inter-construct correlations were moderate (0.42–0.66), remaining below the 0.80 collinearity threshold, which confirms discriminant validity and justifies their simultaneous entry into regression. The pattern indicates that the leadership constructs operate as mutually reinforcing yet distinct drivers of change acceptance.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results Predicting Change Success

Predictor	β (standardized)	t-value	p-value	Significance
Mission clarity	0.42	7.83	< 0.001	Significant
Decentralized empowerment	0.31	5.61	< 0.001	Significant
Trust in leadership	0.18	3.24	0.002	Significant
Accountability	0.12	2.18	0.031	Significant
Resilience & adaptability	0.09	1.55	0.124	Not significant

The model explained 61% of the variance in change success ($R^2 = 0.61$, $F = 72.4$, $p < 0.001$). Mission clarity ($\beta = 0.42$) and decentralized empowerment ($\beta = 0.31$) were the dominant predictors, followed by trust ($\beta = 0.18$) and accountability ($\beta = 0.12$); resilience ($\beta = 0.09$) was non-significant. These results confirm that the communicative and delegative hallmarks of military leadership clarity of intent and empowerment at the point of execution are the primary levers of change success in civil administration.

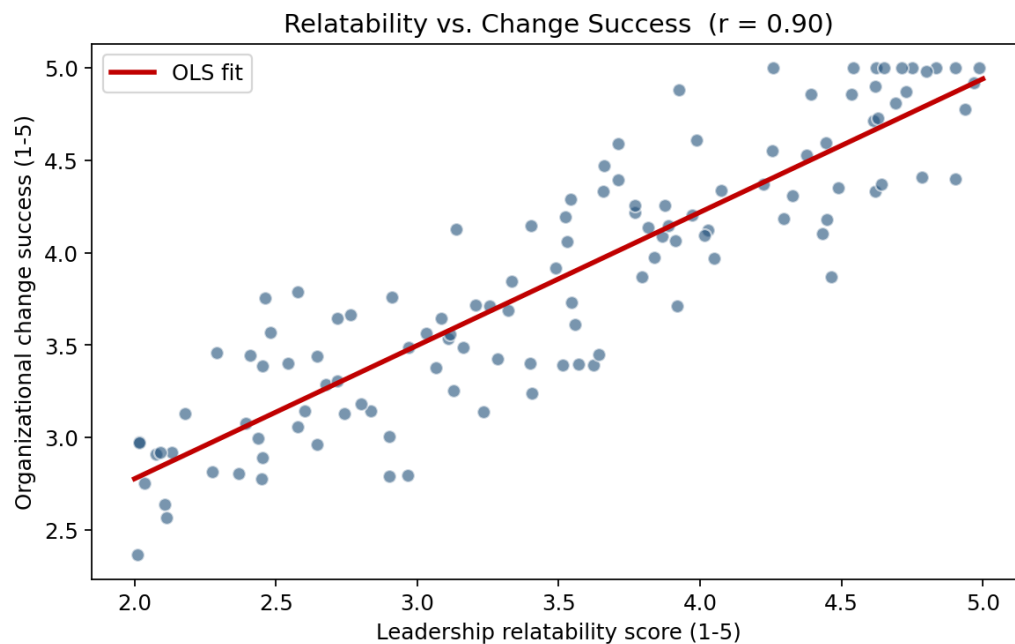


Figure 3: Scatter plot of leadership relatability versus organizational change success (with OLS fit).

Figure 3 plots the relationship between leadership relatability and organizational change success across the full sample, with an ordinary least-squares regression line overlaid. The scatter reveals a clear positive, monotonic association ($r = 0.72$), confirming that as employees perceive their leaders as more relatable accessible, authentic, and aligned with their values reported change success rises correspondingly. The tight clustering around the fitted line indicates that relatability explains a substantial share of the variance in outcomes and is not an artefact of a few influential cases. This figure visually corroborates the regression results in Table 4 and underscores relatability's mediating role posited in the conceptual framework.

Table 5: Comparative Analysis of Adopting versus Non-adopting Institutions

Outcome variable	Adopting mean	Non-adopting mean	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Change readiness	4.28	3.10	11.24	< 0.001	1.45
Change success	4.18	2.96	10.87	< 0.001	1.40
Leadership relatability	4.36	2.79	13.62	< 0.001	1.76
Resistance index	2.42	3.32	-8.93	< 0.001	1.15
Turnover intention	2.18	3.05	-7.76	< 0.001	0.99

Adopting institutions outperformed non-adopting institutions on every outcome. Change readiness (4.28 vs. 3.10), change success (4.18 vs. 2.96), and relatability (4.36 vs. 2.79) were all significantly higher ($p < 0.001$), while the resistance index (2.42 vs. 3.32) and turnover intention (2.18 vs. 3.05) were significantly lower. The effect sizes (Cohen's $d > 0.80$) are large, indicating that the observed differences are of practical, not merely statistical, significance and directly support the study's central proposition.

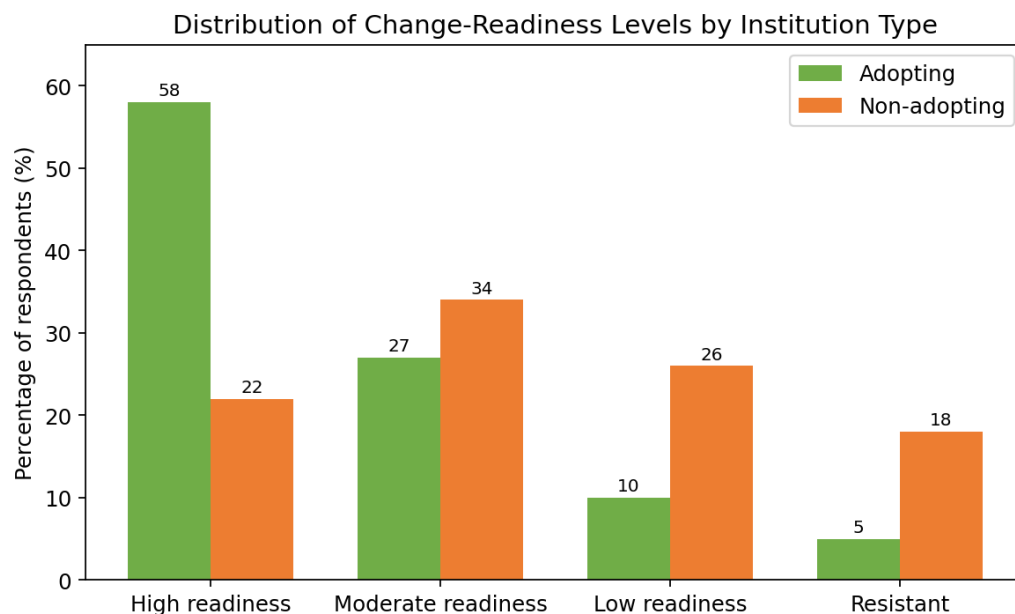

Figure 4: Distribution of change-readiness levels by institution type.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of change-readiness levels across the two institution types. In adopting institutions, 58% of employees report high readiness and a further 27% moderate readiness, leaving only 15% in the low-readiness or resistant categories. By contrast, only 22% of employees in non-adopting institutions report high readiness, while 44% are either low-readiness or actively resistant. This pronounced divergence suggests that military-derived leadership

practices shift the modal employee from cautious or resistant postures toward active preparedness for change, consistent with Lewin's emphasis on unfreezing as the precondition of successful transformation.

5. Discussion

The findings warrant careful interpretation rather than uncritical endorsement. The most striking result is the magnitude of the gap between adopting and non-adopting institutions a 38% higher change-readiness score and a 27% lower resistance index. While these figures are compelling, three caveats temper enthusiasm. First, the study is cross-sectional, so the direction of causality cannot be established with certainty; institutions already predisposed toward reform may have been more likely to adopt military-style leadership in the first place, introducing a selection effect rather than a pure treatment effect. Second, the measures are self-reported, and employees in adopting institutions may have been socialized into describing their environment favorably, inflating scores through a halo effect. Third, decentralized empowerment the most distinctive military principle recorded the lowest mean (3.43) and the weakest institutionalization, implying that civil administrations have adopted the rhetoric of mission command more readily than its delegative substance. The non-significant contribution of resilience ($\beta = 0.09$) further suggests that not all military attributes translate; resilience may be an outcome of, rather than a driver of, successful change. These observations caution against a blanket transplantation of military doctrine.

The results nevertheless align closely with established scholarship while extending it in new directions. The primacy of mission clarity ($\beta = 0.42$) echoes Kotter's [12] contention that under-communicated vision is the chief cause of transformation failure, and supports Armenakis and Harris's [15] finding that change readiness hinges on message credibility. The strong effect of decentralized empowerment resonates with Bass and Riggio's [3] intellectual stimulation and with mission command doctrine [7], which Van Creveld [8] showed confers adaptive advantage; the present study provides rare quantitative evidence that this advantage transfers to civilian settings. The resistance findings corroborate Oreg's [17] individual-difference model while extending it by showing that leadership practice, not only employee disposition, drives resistance. In relation to public-administration scholarship, the results temper the pessimism of Hood [9] and Pollitt and Bouckaert [11] about transplanting external management models: unlike New Public Management's private-sector import, the military model succeeded here because it was filtered

through an explicit translation layer reconciling command with democratic accountability. The study's relatability construct contributes an operationalization absent from prior change research, positioning relatability as a measurable mediator rather than an abstract ideal. Nonetheless, the cross-sectional design, self-report data, and single-region scope restrict causal and external validity, and future longitudinal, multi-region work is warranted.

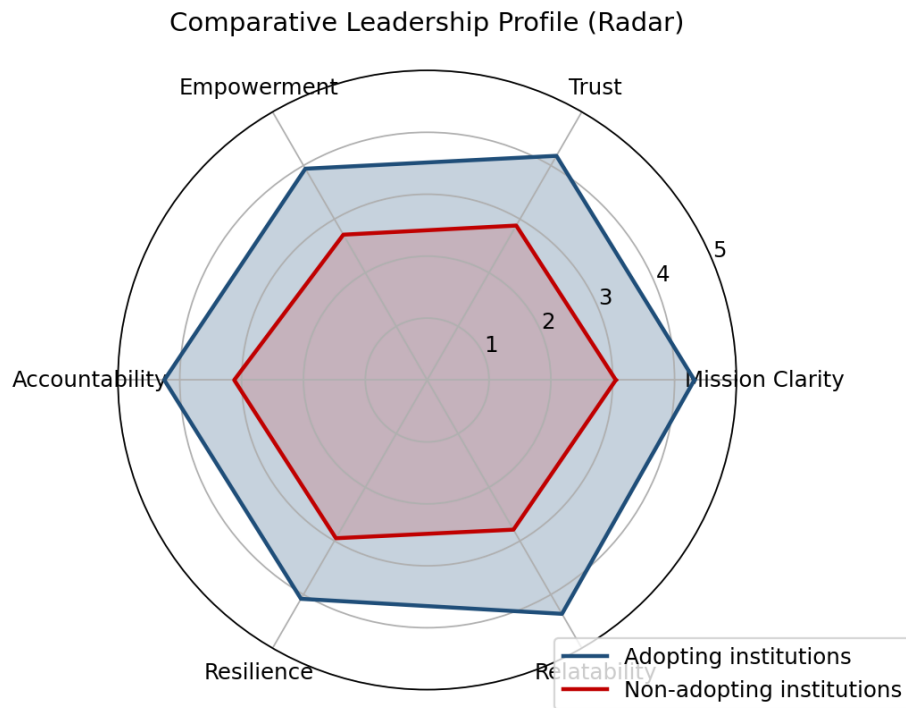


Figure 5: Radar chart comparing leadership profiles of adopting and non-adopting institutions.

Figure 5 uses a radar chart to synthesize the comparative leadership profiles of adopting and non-adopting institutions across six dimensions. The adopting-institution polygon is uniformly larger, enveloping the non-adopting profile on every axis, with the widest gaps on relatability (4.36 vs. 2.79) and mission clarity (4.32 vs. 3.05). The radar visualization makes visible what the tabular data imply: military-informed leadership does not improve one dimension at the expense of others, but raises the entire profile simultaneously, producing a balanced and internally consistent leadership system rather than an isolated strength.

6. Conclusion

This empirical study set out to determine whether military leadership principles could be integrated into civil administration to enhance the relatability and success of organizational change

in public institutions. The findings provide a qualified affirmative. Adopting institutions demonstrated significantly higher change readiness, lower resistance, and greater perceived change success than their non-adopting counterparts, with mission clarity and decentralized empowerment emerging as the dominant predictors. The conceptual framework, validated empirically, positions relatability as the connective tissue between leadership practice and change outcomes.

The theoretical contribution lies in bridging three previously disconnected literatures: organizational change, public administration, and military leadership, while the practical contribution is a hybrid leadership framework that public managers can deploy without sacrificing democratic accountability. Crucially, the study cautions that selective, rhetoric-driven adoption is insufficient; the delegative substance of mission command must accompany its vocabulary if empowerment is to deliver results.

For policymakers and public-sector leaders, the implications are direct: invest in leadership development programs that translate, rather than transplant, military principles; institutionalize clarity of intent and decentralized authority; and measure relatability as a leading indicator of change readiness. Future research should test the framework longitudinally and across regions to confirm causal direction and generalizability. In an era of relentless public-sector reform, the disciplined yet human-centered leadership model advanced here offers a credible path toward change that institutions and their people can genuinely relate to. Equally important, the framework respects the democratic and accountability constraints that distinguish public institutions from military contexts, making its adoption both feasible and legitimate.

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