A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MILITARY CRISIS DECISION-MAKING: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

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The article analyses theoretical and empirical scientific sources on resilience, attention control and stress management to develop a system for training military personnel to make decisions in crisis situations. The proposed researcher-designed conceptual framework for training military personnel to make decisions in crisis situations has ben developed to have a modular architecture that ensures both a rapid response to the crisis and the development of long-term resilience. The use of VR simulations enhances the effect of experiential learning and increases situational awareness without the need for lengthy field training, which has received positive feedback from experts in military psychology.

Keywords: *decision-making; military personnel; crisis management; cognitive resilience; military training system; virtual reality; stress management; adaptability.*

Introduction. In operational settings, military decision-making involves a combination of exacerbated uncertainties, time limitations, and high stakes outcomes. The significance of these choices goes beyond achieving instant mission success in order to effectively carry out life preservation and strategic goals (Carrie et al., 2023; Sekel et al., 2023). Recent developments in behavioural neuroscience and cognitive psychology have uncovered complex connections between stress and cognitive function, especially in domains that are essential for military decision-making, such as working memory capacity, attention allocation, and analytical judgement (Sarmiento et al., 2024). The distinctive cognitive and psychological demands placed on military personnel during crisis situations, which significantly differ from civilian decision-making contexts, necessitate specialised theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches (Sekel et al., 2023; Vartanian et al., 2022).

The empirical research on decision-making includes a variety of models, including rational choice theory-based and bounded rationality (BR) models. However, these models have limited relevance in military crisis situations, when decision-making is characterised by high time constraint, insufficient knowledge, and life-threatening repercussions (Keith, 2019; Wang et al., 2022). While naturalistic decision-making models, notably the Recognition-Primed Decision (RPD) framework, provide more relevant insights into quick, experience-based choice processes (Sadler-Smith, 2023), they have three major limitations:

(1) insufficient integration with military-specific methodological frameworks.

(2) limited examination of current combat complexity.

(3) inadequate focus on the function of technological augmentation in decision support.

The *purpose* of the study is to analyse the theoretical and methodological sources and provide a best practices-based researcher-designed conceptual framework that combines theoretical insights and practical implementations to cover the loopholes in studied military decision-making models aiming at improving cognitive resilience and operational efficacy in high-stress military environments while being empirically based and practically applicable. The objectives of this research are to (1) conduct a systematic exploration of key theoretical perspectives on decision-making under crisis conditions, (2) analyse documented cases of military decision-making to identify patterns of resilience and adaptation, and (3) develop a preliminary framework based on these findings. Experts will subsequently evaluate the framework's robustness, operational application, and

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possible incorporation into military training and decision-support systems.

Research Methodology and Design. The methodology follows a multi-stage process designed to ensure the framework's theoretical soundness and practical relevance which includes:

1. Systematic Review of Literature: It provided the theoretical foundation for the researcher-designed framework through comprehensive analysis of military psychology and decision science literature. The review was to identify theories and studies on cognitive mechanisms that underpin resilience, attention control, and stress management, integrating these insights to form the basis of the framework's theoretical model (Carrie et al., 2023; Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020).

The literature search strategy employed a systematic approach across multiple specialised databases: a) Primary databases: PsycINFO, Military and Government Collection, Web of Science;

b) Secondary databases: EBSCO Military Database, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC); c) Supplementary source: Google Scholar. The search strategy utilised three categories of search terms (see Table 1):

Table 1.

Search Terms Divided into Categories and Operators

Primary Terms	Secondary Terms	Search Operators
"Military decision-making"	"Cognitive resilience"	Boolean operators (AND/OR)
"Crisis response"	"Mental toughness"	Proximity operators
"Combat psychology"	"Decision fatigue"	Truncation symbols for variant word forms
"Tactical decision-making"	Stress management"	
"Battlefield stress"	"Attention control"	

To maintain scientific integrity, the systematic review adhered to the PRISMA protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). The selection and interpretation method included independent assessment utilising an updated CASP Systematic Review checklist by two subject matter experts (Doctor and Ph.D. holders in Psychology), which was supposed to improve the reliability of the source selection and analysis processes. The inclusion criteria were as follows: cognitive resilience, attention regulation, and stress management in crisis decision-making. The examined and shortlisted literature consisted of two primary categories: a) theoretical works (2000–2015) on naturalistic decision-making and constrained rationality; b) recent empirical research (2015–2024) on cognitive resilience, attention regulation, and stress management.

3. Analysis of Documented Crisis Scenarios: Analysing real-world military crisis decision-making cases revealed patterns in cognitive resilience and adaptive responses, which were to be incorporated into the researcher-designed framework to ensure its practical utility (Vartanian et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

2. Qualitative Analysis of Expert Interviews: Expert interviews were to be conducted to obtain the feedback and evaluate the researcher developed framework for its robustness, relevance, and potential for operational integration. The interviews which were administered to 5 people coming from different military branches (army, navy, air force and special forces) with crisis experience in combat operations, peacekeeping missions, disaster response, and counter-terrorism. The interviewed people were using the assessment criteria which included theoretical soundness (evidence base, logical consistency), practical applicability (ease of implementation, resource needs), and operational relevance (mission alignment, adaptability). Findings from these interviews were to inform the framework's practical dimensions, especially the resilience strategies used by military personnel in crisis (Sarmiento et al., 2024; Sekel et al., 2023).

This design synthesised theoretical insights with operational strategies, creating a a concept of a comprehensive framework aimed at advancing both academic knowledge and practical protocols for cognitive resilience in military crises.

Results and Discussion. The key findings of this study align with our research objectives, examining theoretical perspectives, documented decision-making cases, and the development and expert evaluation of our conceptual framework.

Systematic Literature Review

The systematic review yielded important findings that contributed to the development of a conceptual framework for decision-making training among military personnel in crisis situations. The review retrieved a total of 425 sources from the above-mentioned databases. Initial stage searches found 190 articles from PsycINFO, 125 articles from Military and Government Collection, and 85 sources from Web of Science. Additional 15 studies were yielded from the EBSCO Military Database and Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), and 10 more relevant articles sourced were drawn from Google Scholar. After applying inclusion criteria of cognitive resilience, attention control, and stress management in crisis decision-making, 82 articles were shortlisted for closer analysis.

Following a detailed evaluation, 16 studies were selected as relevant and were incorporated into the framework's theoretical foundation and empirical findings on cognitive mechanisms. These included 7 theoretical studies detailing core decision-making models, including naturalistic decision-making and bounded rationality, and 9 empirical studies investigating resilience, attention control, and stress management, which could provide the practical and cognitive elements of the framework. The findings drawn from the above sources were divided into theoretical insights and empirical findings on cognitive mechanisms that underpin resilience, attention control, and stress management.

Theoretical Findings

The review found theoretical models that highlighted how crucial cognitive resilience and flexibility were in high-stress environments. The military psychology literature, particularly work by Carrie et al. (2023), emphasised two critical factors: maintaining situational awareness and processing information quickly when faced with uncertainty. Decision scientific theories, especially naturalistic decision-making (NDM), have offered fundamental insights into how persons make intuitive judgements in dynamic, high-pressure situations (Gore et al., 2018). Furthermore, limited rationality theories were important, implying that cognitive limits in crises require adaptive and heuristic-based decision techniques (Viale, 2020). Together, these ideas were used as a theoretical background for creating a framework that relies on flexibility, fast appraisal of available information, and adaptive actions in situations when time and information are restricted.

Findings Drawn from Studies on Cognitive Mechanisms

The review's empirical investigations focused on cognitive mechanisms that enable resilience, attention regulation, and stress management, all of which are crucial for good crisis decision-making. Research on cognitive resilience has highlighted the relevance of mental toughness and adaptable thinking, with results demonstrating that these characteristics promote decision consistency and flexibility under stress. The studies that highlight the attention control have shown that competent decision-makers in high-stress circumstances may selectively focus on pertinent information while filtering out distractions, improving situational awareness and crucial assessment accuracy (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020). Furthermore, stress management emerged as an important component, with research indicating that resilience training, such as stress inoculation and biofeedback, might reduce cognitive overload and increase performance under pressure. Emotional regulation approaches, such as mindfulness, have been found to improve resilience by lowering physiological stress reactions, which can impair cognitive function (O'Connor et al., 2023). These empirical findings supported the framework's fundamental components of stress management, attention control, and resilience-building processes. Overall, the findings supported the importance for a modular strategy that incorporates various cognitive systems, which supports the framework's emphasis on both immediate crisis decision-making and long-term cognitive resilience.

Results Drawn from the Analysis of Documented Crisis Scenarios

The examination of real-world military crises revealed critical patterns in cognitive resilience and adaptive responses. These best practices were included into the framework to improve its practical usability and relevance for making decisions under extreme stress. Each scenario used fast situational evaluation, selective attention control, and flexible strategy adaptations in the face of ambiguity and altering threat environments. Table 2 summarises open source military crisis scenarios.

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Open Source Military Crisis Scenarios and Decision-Making Challenges Requiring Cognitive Resilience and Adaptability (based on the open sources such as Military Sphere: https://militarysphere.com/operation-gothic-serpent/; Modern War Institute, Small Wars Journal: https://smallwarsjournal.com/author/the-modern-war-institute; Bowden, 1999; Bright, 2007;).

Scenario	Year	Location	Key Decision-Making Challenges	Cognitive Resilience & Adaptive Skills Required
Operation Gothic Serpent	1993	Somalia (Battle of Mogadishu)	Complex decision-making during urban combat, the requirement for fast adaptability, and resilience within deteriorating circumstances	Quick situational evaluation, adaptability under quickly changing settings, and improvisation during stressful situations
Operation Red Wings	2005	Afghanistan	Tactical adjustments are necessary following team compromise, prioritising ethical decision-making and adaptability under fire.	Ethical judgement, quick tactical a readjusting, and cognitive flexibility under urgent threat
Falklands War	1982	Falkland Islands (Goose Green)	Adapting to fortified enemy positions despite logistical restrictions and limited support	Resilience in resource-limited settings, inventive problem-solving, and the capacity to overcome logistical difficulties
Siege of Sangin	2006–2010	Afghanistan	Constant engagement with Taliban forces necessitates ongoing adaptive decision-making under shifting dynamics and stress.	Long-term resilience, real-time tactical changes, flexibility to shifting local challenges, and shortages of resources
Battle of Marawi	2017	Philippines (Marawi)	Coordination in urban battle with insurgents requires fast adaptability and great resilience under heavy resource pressure.	Coordination, fast situational adaptation, and resilience in sustained high-pressure battle

The examination of military crisis scenarios, presented in Table 1, showed persistent patterns of cognitive resilience and adaptation, which are crucial for decision-making in high-stress military settings. Each instance illustrated the importance of quick situational awareness, selective attention, and adaptable plan revisions for efficiently responding to changing threats and operational problems. For example, in Operation Gothic Serpent (1993), forces fighting in intensive urban warfare had to swiftly adjust to deteriorating conditions, review the situation, and improvise to deal with the high-stress environment (Bowden 1999). Similarly, Operation Red Wings (2005) proved the importance of both tactical adjustment and ethical judgement in the face of imminent hazards resulting from a compromised position (Bright, 2007). The Falkland Islands War (1982) forced forces to adapt to entrenched enemy positions with limited supplies, demonstrating the need of resilience, resourcefulness, and innovative problem-solving. The Siege of Sangin (2006–2010)

necessitated continuous adaptive decision-making as local dynamics and resources changed, emphasising long-term resilience and the capacity to adjust strategies in real-time. Finally, the Battle of Marawi (2017) required soldiers to adapt quickly and be resilient in the face of limited resources and high-pressure urban battle settings (Small Wars Journal, 2023). These scenarios demonstrated the practical value of incorporating adaptability and resilience-focused components into the researcher-designed framework, allowing military personnel to respond flexibly and resiliently to complex, high-stress emergencies.

A Conceptual Framework for Training Military Personnel in Crisis Decision-Making Settings

This framework was developed to address the third study objective, as well as crucial gaps in military decision-making models, by offering a modular, empirically based structure that blends cognitive resilience with practical application in high-stress environments. This approach intends to address present

shortcomings in the currently used and reviewed instructional methods by combining cutting-edge technology, best psychology practices, and flexible learning architectures to increase military decision-making effectiveness. This conceptual framework, which incorporates virtual reality technology such as NeuroTrainer (www.neurotrainer.com/), takes a novel approach to military training by providing real-time cognitive resilience assessments, dynamic scenario adjustments, and a seamless blend of ethical decision-making within tactical operations.
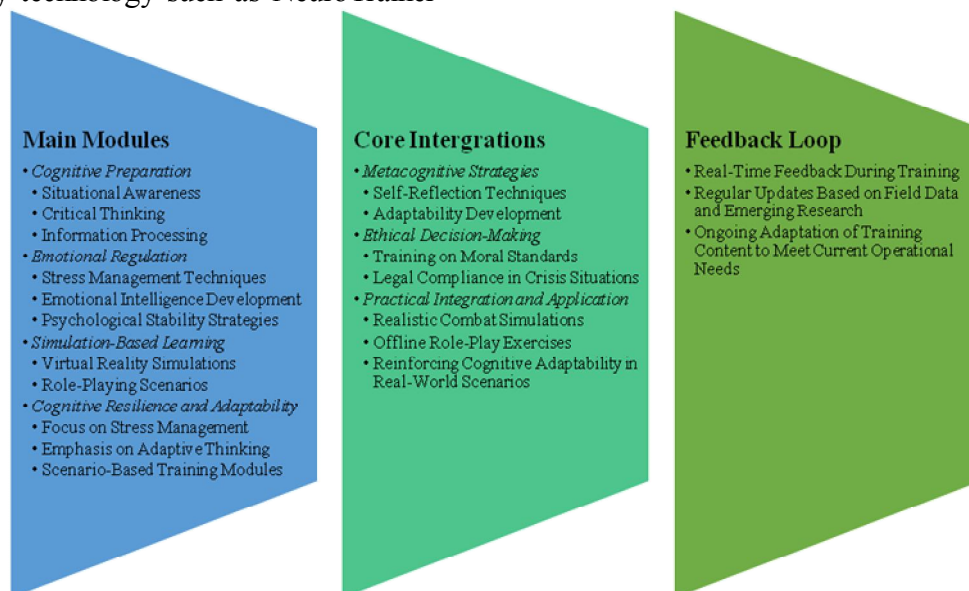
Main Modules
- *Cognitive Preparation*
  - Situational Awareness
  - Critical Thinking
  - Information Processing
- *Emotional Regulation*
  - Stress Management Techniques
  - Emotional Intelligence Development
  - Psychological Stability Strategies
- *Simulation-Based Learning*
  - Virtual Reality Simulations
  - Role-Playing Scenarios
- *Cognitive Resilience and Adaptability*
  - Focus on Stress Management
  - Emphasis on Adaptive Thinking
  - Scenario-Based Training Modules

Core Intergrations
- *Metacognitive Strategies*
  - Self-Reflection Techniques
  - Adaptability Development
- *Ethical Decision-Making*
  - Training on Moral Standards
  - Legal Compliance in Crisis Situations
- *Practical Integration and Application*
  - Realistic Combat Simulations
  - Offline Role-Play Exercises
  - Reinforcing Cognitive Adaptability in Real-World Scenarios

Feedback Loop
- Real-Time Feedback During Training
- Regular Updates Based on Field Data and Emerging Research
- Ongoing Adaptation of Training Content to Meet Current Operational Needs

Figure 1. Visualised Conceptual Framework for Training Military Personnel in Crisis Decision-Making

Figure 1 depicts the framework's three essential components: major modules, core integrations, and a feedback loop. These components operate together to improve both immediate decision-making abilities and long-term cognitive growth. This structure aligns directly with the study's objectives by systematically synthesising theoretical perspectives and documented case analysis into a robust training model that can be evaluated and refined through expert validation.

Modular Cognitive and Psychological Components: Each module focusses on key abilities for making resilient decisions in crisis situations. Cognitive preparation emphasises situational awareness, critical thinking, and quick information processing, all of which are essential for making good decisions in uncertain and dynamic environments (Keith, 2019; Bolstad et al., 2014). Emotional regulation techniques increase psychological stability under strain by utilising adaptive learning to promote resilience in high-stress situations (Sekel et al., 2023). Furthermore, simulation-based learning combines virtual reality and role-playing to generate realistic crisis scenarios that require staff to practise decision-making in real time, promoting adaptation in complicated, high-pressure circumstances.

Focus on Cognitive Resilience and Adaptability: Compared to conventional frameworks, the presented framework encourages cognitive resilience through modules that include stress management, adaptive thinking, and dynamic scenario changes. Real-time feedback from VR simulations and scenario-based training provide ongoing customisation, ensuring that training routes are matched to individual needs. This emphasis on adaptation guarantees that military personnel maintain cognitive flexibility and operational success in rapidly changing environments (Bourke, 2022; Waldeck et al., 2021).

Boost of Metacognitive and Ethical Training: Incorporating metacognitive and ethical training enhances self-awareness by allowing military personnel to examine and transform their decision-making processes in response to situational demands. This self-assessment is critical for making robust, flexible judgements in crisis circumstances.Ethical decision-making modules guarantee that activities adhere to moral and legal norms, which is critical in high-risk situations when ethical judgement has a direct influence on mission

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success and team safety (Kirchschlaeger, 2023). The researcher-designed framework's approach relies on tactical and ethical rigour.

Practical Integration and Application: Realistic (offline) combat simulations are to strengthen all previously learnt abilities, closing the gap between academic understanding and real execution. Offline role-playing exercises allow personnel to use cognitive and ethical concepts in stressful situations, which strengthens cognitive adaptation and resilience. This real-world application component is critical for training staff to respond successfully to actual situations.

Continuous Feedback and Improvement: This component combines continuing data from field experiences and developing research, ensuring that training remains relevant to current operational demands. The framework remains a dynamic, changing resource that adjusts to both individual performance and larger field changes, allowing for the continuing improvement of military decision-making training.

Results Drawn from the Qualitative Analysis of Expert Feedback

The qualitative analysis of expert feedback, obtained from five military professionals showed that the overall opinion of the experts was positive, affirming that the framework successfully integrates theoretical insights with real-world crisis demands. Theoretical soundness received high scores across the board, with experts noting the framework's strong evidence base and logical consistency. One expert from the special forces branch highlighted that the integration of resilience strategies was "…*logically structured and aligned with current military psychology research…,*" particularly regarding cognitive resilience and stress management. In terms of practical applicability, the experts appreciated the modular structure and the use of virtual reality (VR) simulations, which allow personnel to develop decision-making skills in a realistic, adaptive training environment. A navy expert with disaster response experience mentioned that the VR component "…*promotes experiential learning and improves situational awareness without resource-intensive field training... .*" Another expert emphasised that the ethical decision-making modules are particularly beneficial in preparing personnel to navigate morally complex situations, thus enhancing the framework's applicability. With regard to the operational

relevance, the experts found the framework well-aligned with mission requirements, emphasising its adaptability to various crisis scenarios, from urban combat to humanitarian missions. A counter-terrorism expert noted that the adaptability component "…*equips personnel with mental flexibility needed in unpredictable environments…,*" and recommended its integration into joint training operations for its potential to standardise resilience training across branches. These insights affirmed the framework as a novel model that combines theoretical insights with cutting-edge training techniques, setting a new benchmark in military decision-making preparation.

Thus, the study revealed key insights that served as the foundation for the creation of the conceptual framework described above. The similar trends seen throughout the scenarios demonstrated the need of cognitive resilience and adaptive decision-making abilities for workers working in high-stress, fast changing workplaces. Whether dealing with the intense urban combat circumstances associated with Operation Gothic Serpent, the immediate threats of Operation Red Wings, or the lengthy, resource-constrained engagements of the Siege of Sangin, military decision-makers had the ability to react quickly to situational changes, make flexible strategic adjustments, and maintain resilience. By grounding the framework's practical components in the lessons learned from these documented cases, the researchers ensured that the final product would effectively prepare military personnel to respond adaptively and resiliently to the complex challenges of crisis operations. This evidence-based approach and experts' judgements strengthened the framework's real-world applicability and relevance for enhancing cognitive performance under extreme conditions.

Conclusion. The findings obtained from the systematic review contributed to developing a conceptual framework for instructing military people to make decisions in the settings of crisis circumstances. By combining theoretical models and empirical data, the framework highlights three crucial cognitive mechanisms for effective crisis decision-making: resilience, attention regulation, and stress management. This best practices-based approach addresses the cognitive demands placed on military decision-makers in high-stress circumstances, emphasising the importance of quick information processing and

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flexible methods. The framework's modular architecture enables both quick crisis response and long-term resilience building, increasing its practical relevance for real-world applications. Feedback from military experts revealed that the proposed framework was consistent with the recent developments in military psychology, notably in cognitive resilience and ethical decision-making. The use of virtual reality simulations encourages experience learning and improves situational awareness without requiring lengthy field training. Military professionals stated that the suggested framework was consistent with recent advancements in military psychology, specifically in cognitive resilience, attention control, and stress management in crisis decision-making. Further research is needed to determine the framework's feasibility in various military settings, as well as to examine additional cognitive training components that may improve decision-making abilities under pressure.

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Анотація

СИСТЕМА ПІДГОТОВКИ ВІЙСЬКОВИХ ДО ПРИЙНЯТТЯ РІШЕНЬ У КРИЗОВИХ СИТУАЦІЯХ: ТЕОРЕТИКО-МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНІ ЗАСАДИ

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Вступ. Складність ситуацій, з якими стикаються військовослужбовці, підкреслює важливість навчання компетентному прийняттю рішень. В умовах високого стресу швидке та гнучке прийняття рішень має вирішальне значення для успішного виконання завдань і забезпечення безпеки людей. Існуючі підходи до навчання не завжди є недостатніми для підготовки військовослужбовців до швидкого реагування на надзвичайні ситуації, що вимагає системної стратегії, яка поєднує теоретичні та практичні знання для покращення когнітивних здібностей, стійкості та гнучкості.

Мета цієї статті - запропонувати концептуальну схему, засновану на передовому досвіді, яка базується на теоретичних і методологічних досягненнях у сфері вивчення процесів прийняття рішень військовослужбовцями в умовах кризових ситуацій. Ця концепція розроблена, щоб забезпечити військовослужбовців критично важливими когнітивними навичками для ефективного управління кризовою ситуацією, зосереджуючись на трьох ключових механізмах: стійкості, контролі уваги і управлінні стресом. Поєднуючи теоретичні моделі та емпіричні дослідження, ця стаття має на меті забезпечити міцну основу для навчальних програм, які покращують здатність приймати рішення під тиском.

Методи. У дослідженні використано системний аналіз теоретичних напрацювань та емпіричних досліджень, пов'язаних з прийняттям військових рішень у кризових ситуаціях. Цей етап передбачав аналіз задокументованих сценаріїв військових кризових ситуацій для визначення ключових когнітивних механізмів, що впливають на ефективне прийняття рішень. Для підвищення актуальності та застосовності концепції були враховані відгуки військових фахівців. Отримана в результаті модульна структура поєднує можливості негайного реагування на кризові ситуації з довгостроковим розвитком когнітивної стійкості, використовуючи інноваційні методи навчання, в тому числі симуляції віртуальної реальності.

Новизна цього дослідження полягає в його багатовекторному підході, що поєднує усталені академічні теорії з практичним військовим застосуванням. Концепція підкреслює когнітивну адаптивність і гнучкість, враховуючи психологічні потреби військовослужбовців у динамічному середовищі. Використання модулів прийняття етичних рішень і симуляцій віртуальної реальності підвищує її практичну цінність, сприяючи навчанню на власному досвіді і покращуючи ситуаційну обізнаність.

Висновок. Запропонована концепція є науково обґрунтованою стратегією покращення підготовки військовослужбовців до прийняття рішень у кризових ситуаціях. Акцентуючи увагу на стійкості, контролі уваги та управлінні стресом, вона успішно підготує військовослужбовців для роботи в складних ситуаціях. Відгуки військових фахівців про неї підтверджують її оперативну релевантність і адаптивність до місій різного типу. Майбутні дослідження мають оцінити ефективність системи в різних контекстах і вивчити додаткові когнітивні компоненти тренінгу для подальшого покращення здатності приймати рішення. Подальший розвиток цієї концепції дозволить значно покращити програми військової підготовки та оперативні результати.

Ключові слова: прийняття рішень; військовослужбовці; кризовий менеджмент; когнітивна резильєнтність; система тренування військовослужбовців; віртуальна реальність; управління стресом; адаптивність.