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# CHALLENGES IN MANAGING MILITARY CHAPLAINS' COMPETENCIES

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## Abstract

Enhancing competence management is one of the crucial dimensions in the field of human capital management, gaining increasing recognition in the military environment. It is currently of particular importance due to the dynamic technological and organizational changes necessary in the process of transforming the armed forces, which face new challenges due to the current geopolitical situation. As previous experiences indicate, one of the priority dimensions of the functioning of military units and subunits is the morale of soldiers, influenced by various factors. Among these, the most important is the psychological and spiritual support provided by military chaplains, who operate within the Polish Armed Forces under the Military Ordinariate of the Polish Armed Forces. This is a unique organization in many respects; on one hand, it is part of the armed forces and is subject to all internal military regulations, while on the other hand, it is a church institution obligated to adhere to ecclesiastical regulations. The resulting complex institutional character of the Military Ordinariate of the Polish Armed Forces necessitates a special, unique approach to managing the human capital that constitutes this institution.

The aim of the article is to identify and assess the directions for improving the competencies of military chaplains in the process of human resource management within the Military Ordinariate of the Polish Armed Forces. The structure of the article is subordinated to this aim, comprising four main parts directed towards solving the research problem formulated as the question: How can the necessary competencies of military chaplains be developed in the human resource management process so that they can properly provide psychological and spiritual support to soldiers?

*Keywords:* competence management, human resources, military, field chaplaincy

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## 1. Introduction

In 2021, the military chaplaincy in Poland celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This milestone provided an opportunity to take a broader look at the development of the Military Ordinariate over three decades and the ongoing changes resulting from a series of reforms within the Polish Armed Forces. The results of conducted

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studies reveal what truly makes the Military Ordinariate a unique ecclesiastical-military institution, endowed with a distinctive human capital, as well as the challenges that the military chaplaincy in Poland will have to face in the future.

## **2. Literature Review**

In contemporary literature, there are two distinct approaches to describing individuals working within an organization. The first approach refers to employees as ‘resources’ to be utilized or as ‘capital’ that should yield a decent return on investment [1, p. 75]. Some researchers argue, however, that terms like ‘human resources’ and ‘human capital’ are derogatory and demeaning. Therefore, efforts are being made to find alternative ways of referring to people management and to change managers' attitudes towards employees. One such concept is presented by S. Karla, which suggests that employees should not be treated merely as a resource or capital but as individuals who need appropriate conditions for personal and professional development [2, p. 276]. This approach aligns with the second trend, which draws heavily from Christian philosophy and views humans as persons who regard work as a way to fulfill their vocation, thus being able to take responsibility for their decisions and actions [1]. People's competencies (knowledge, experience, skills, and abilities), especially when unique and properly utilized, become a strategic resource. Humans, as integral beings, constitute the most important value of an enterprise. Therefore, the primary factor leading an organization to gain a competitive advantage is its people, and strategic human resource management is implemented to manage employees' skills, abilities, and knowledge efficiently and effectively to significantly impact the achievement of the organization's strategic goals [3]. As Adero and Odiyo state, strategic human resource management is the deliberate and planned use of human resources to achieve organizational goals [4, p. 6].

Nowadays, there is a noticeable shift from the formula of human resource management to the formula of human potential management. This shift aims to emphasize that it is the individual, with their knowledge, experience, skills, predispositions, abilities, and motivation, that constitutes the key resource of an organization. In this context, the term ‘potential’ means that certain human capabilities and talents may only be revealed and realized under specific conditions [5, p. 278], which will contribute to the common good of the organization. The “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” interprets the common good as the sum of social conditions that allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment. Today, this notion is becoming increasingly common and entails rights and responsibilities that concern the entire human race. Every social group must take into account the needs and rightful aspirations of other groups, and the common good of the entire human family [6].

In this context, military chaplains have a special role. They are responsible for the care of all soldiers regardless of their worldview or religious beliefs. When deployed on missions abroad, the chaplain's duties include supporting local populations, providing pastoral care to the sick and wounded, identifying and

reducing combat stress, assisting with moral dilemmas, preventing panic and aggression, and fostering mutual trust. Therefore, a military chaplain must have extensive education to fully perform their duties and possess competencies that enable them to cope with the challenges, dilemmas, and hardships of demanding missions [7, p. 108-110] outside the country.

### **3. The Role and Importance of Competencies in the Human Capital Management Process**

Transformations in the employment market during the latter half of the 19th century resulted in the emergence of formally defined competencies, indicating the extent of authority to make decisions and perform specific tasks. The execution of these tasks was tied to certain procedures, with knowledge and adherence to these procedures being decisive factors in ensuring that work was competently performed, regardless of whether the intended result was achieved. Since the 1980s, the conceptual significance of competencies has evolved beyond merely holding formal qualifications or knowledge of specific procedures to encompass the ability to perform tasks effectively. In contemporary understanding, the term “competencies” is most often considered in two main senses. The first is the ability to effectively perform assigned tasks related to work or to achieve measurable, desirable outcomes. The second is the ability to execute specific exemplary behaviors [8, p. 15]. According to Ch. Woodruffe, decide whether competencies can be developed, it is necessary to know what determines them. The issue is important both at selection and development. If competencies are hard to improve upon, then you can be less forgiving of a deficiency spotted at selection and obviously less optimistic about development. It is also important to remember that competencies are dimensions of behaviour, and so we are seeking to specify the causes of behaviour. Therefore, it is helpful to look at what lies behind the behaviour that is summarized by the competency or trait [9, p. 35].

C. Lévy-Leboyer described competencies as the integrated use of acquired knowledge, skills, abilities, personality traits, typical behaviors, and standard procedures “to successfully perform a complex mission within an enterprise that has assigned it to the employee in accordance with its strategies and culture.” Similarly, M. Armstrong and S. Taylor defined competencies as the attributes and dispositions of an individual that contribute to effective action or above-average performance [10, p. 17].

The level of employee competencies depends on their knowledge, which encompasses qualifications and professional experience, the ability to utilize them, personality traits, and individual abilities. Furthermore, the attitude and motivation of the employee are crucial, as an employee possessing desirable skills may lack the motivation to demonstrate them, leading to a perception of being less competent [11, p. 108].

Competencies have become a focal point in contemporary management, particularly in human capital management. Leading enterprises strive to gain a competitive edge by identifying and developing the core competencies of the organization [11, p. 109]. In modern companies, intellectual capital plays a pivotal

role since people's knowledge and skills, their learning, and the creation of knowledge networks are now the most valuable assets of any organization [12, p. 256]. Continuous participation of employees in training is not only an investment in the individual but also in the enterprise. Effective human resource management focused on developing each employee's potential is a key factor in the sustainability, reputation, and growth of the company [13, p. 39]. Investment in people aims to expand their range of competencies and knowledge, enabling them to achieve better results in the tasks assigned to them within the enterprise.

Training is a common practice to support employees in their development within the company, allowing them to meet personal needs internally as much as possible. Training also aims to reduce the time required to educate a new employee or one working in a new position, ensuring they are fully prepared in the shortest possible time and most efficient manner [14, p. 34]. Those responsible for employee development should adequately motivate employees to learn [15, p. 53-54]. Motivation is thus a crucial aspect of achieving success for an institution. It is a component of effective business management and a driving force behind human behavior and actions [16, p. 48]. The primary means of motivating employees include incentives (e.g., rewards), coercion (e.g., through commands and prohibitions), and persuasion (e.g., using techniques that influence behavior and attitudes). One of the latest methods is gamification, a form of transferring gaming behaviors into the real business environment [17, p. 15]. It is an informal term describing the use of video game elements in non-game systems to improve user experience and engagement [18]. R. C. Callan, K. N. Bauer, and R. N. Landers believe that gamification can be applied to any process affecting employees to increase engagement or experience, from selection and recruitment to training and performance [19]. Gamification transforms activities that are not particularly appealing into ones that capture our attention and create fun from something typically not associated with enjoyment. In other words, gamification transforms the workplace. For instance, using elements such as training, competition, rewards, points, badges, and satisfaction can increase employee engagement in activities that promote team interactions, collaboration, stress reduction, and enjoyment at work [20, p. 64]. Gamification should meet five essential criteria: goal, emotions, game mechanics, narrative, and motivation (Table 1.).

**Table 1.** Gamification Criteria. source: [21, p. 8]

Criteria				
Goal	Emotions	Game Mechanics	Narrative	Motivation
Must achieve a predetermined goal, such as increasing product sales or convincing drivers to reduce speed on the roads	It should be enjoyable and provide satisfaction from performing the assigned tasks	It must utilize mechanisms known from games, such as competition, winning, elements of surprise, and providing feedback	It must pertain to real-life activities that are not typically associated with games	It must increase people's motivation to perform these activities

Regardless of the size of the organization, the scope of its operations, or its organizational profile, the quality of human capital and the ability to manage it effectively directly impact the overall efficiency of the organization [22, p. 41]. A key element is the ability to identify individuals who possess the competencies desired by the employer, allowing them to carry out assigned tasks in accordance with established standards. Similar expectations are directed towards chaplains, who must not only be well-prepared to perform pastoral duties but also to promote moral values within the military. Bishop of the Polish Armed Forces W. Lechowicz emphasizes that “during the war in Ukraine, the morale of soldiers plays a significant role. It is not just a matter of mobilization and the will to fight, but also character, personality, rootedness in certain values, and spirituality. The purpose of a chaplain is to strengthen morale and support the soldier's spirit” [M. Rajfur, *Wojna na Ukrainie jeszcze bardziej uzasadnia obecność kapelanów wojskowych*, available online <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/7490677.Wojna-na-Ukrainie-jeszcze-bardziej-uzasadnia-obecnosc-kapelanow>].

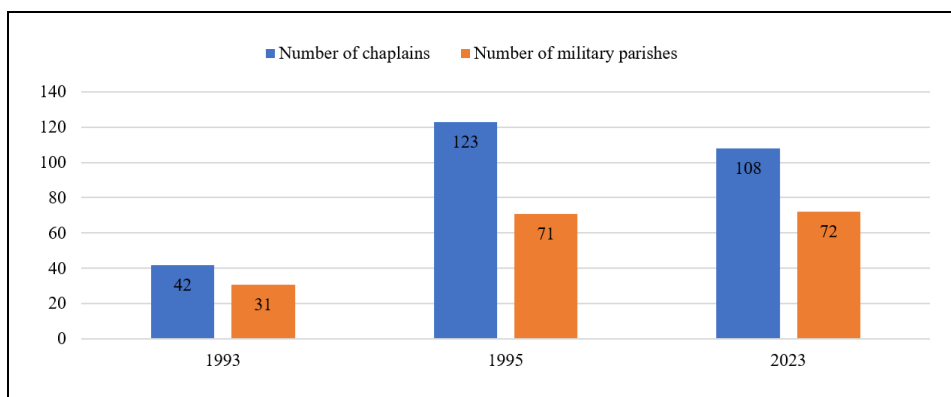
#### **4. Field Ordinariate as the Organization Responsible for the Psychological and Spiritual Support of Soldiers**

Pastoral care has accompanied soldiers from the very beginning of the Polish state. Clergymen participated in military campaigns, serving as pastoral support. Medieval Poland did not have a permanent institution of chaplains; instead, the army was served by royal or princely chaplains and camp chaplains only during wartime. Records regarding military pastoral care from this period are sparse but unequivocally indicate the existence of spiritual care for soldiers during wartime [23, p. 6]. The medieval period marked the beginning of field pastoral care, and the subsequent years saw its gradual development.

It was only during the interwar period that the establishment of permanent field pastoral care in some of the world's armies began, and the creation of field vicariates emerged. The need for such institutions was recognized in the context of contemporary armed conflicts, particularly World War I and World War II. On February 5, 1919, Apostolic Visitor Achilles Ratti communicated the creation of the Military Diocese in Poland by Pope Benedict XV [24, p. 245]. In August of the same year, the Polish Episcopate decided to allocate 5% of the total clergy, or 208 chaplains, to work in the military [25, p. 117]. The communist era and decisions made by the then-government limited pastoral activities among soldiers and changed the name from Military Diocese to General Chaplaincy. Between 1950 and 1958, various ad hoc regulations led to the creation of structures enabling pastoral care for different groups or categories of people, based on the office of chaplains, including military chaplains. The Second Vatican Council supported this specialized pastoral service and called upon bishops to “show particular care for the faithful who, due to their difficult life situation, cannot adequately benefit from the general, ordinary pastoral care of parish priests or are completely deprived of it, such as numerous emigrants, exiles, and refugees, those traveling by ship or airplane, nomads, and others in similar situations” [26, p. 9-10]. In 1983, the Code of Canon Law (CIC), promulgated by Pope John Paul II,

specified in Article 2, Canon 564, that a chaplain is a priest entrusted with at least partial permanent pastoral care of a community or a special group of the faithful, carried out in accordance with the provisions of universal or particular law [Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego promulgowany przez papieża Jana Pawła II w dniu 25 stycznia 1983 roku, z późn. zm., art. 2, kan. 564, available online [https://www.katolicki.net/ftp/kodeks\\_prawa\\_kanonicznego.pdf](https://www.katolicki.net/ftp/kodeks_prawa_kanonicznego.pdf)]. Canon 569 indicates that the position of military chaplains is regulated by special laws, but does not specify any particular features of the military pastoral care system of the Latin Church as a basic legislative document. Relevant special laws in this regard include the Apostolic Constitution *Spirituali militum curae* of April 21, 1986, and statutes approved by the Holy See for each country or region [26, p. 28].

It is worth mentioning that on January 21, 1991, Pope John Paul II established the Field Ordinariate in Poland. Within four years of its establishment, significant expansion of Catholic pastoral service occurred. In February 1991, pastoral work was carried out by 42 chaplains, and by October 1995, 123 priests were serving in the chaplaincy. Additionally, 53 assistant chaplains were employed part-time. Three chaplains were stationed with their units under the UN flag in Lebanon, former Yugoslavia, and Syria, 17 worked in military hospitals, 14 in military academies, and 22 were deepening their knowledge through studies. In February 1991, there were 31 garrison churches; by October 1995, the Field Ordinariate had 71 parishes and 92 pastoral centers, as well as 105 chapels and prayer rooms [27, p. 235]. Currently, the Field Ordinariate has 108 chaplains serving in 72 parishes and 22 pastoral centers [*Schematyzm Ordynariatu Polowego 2021*, Warszawa, 2021, 27-48]. According to church regulations, the Field Ordinariate is a diocese covering all of Poland and locations around the world where Polish soldiers are stationed. This reflects the specific nature of this ecclesiastical-military institution. Figure 1. illustrates the number of chaplains and military parishes in Poland in selected years.



**Figure 1.** Military Chaplains and Parishes in Poland in the Years 1993, 1995, and 2023. Source: [28], [Zarządzenie Ministra Obrony Narodowej nr 72/MON z dnia 6 kwietnia 1994]

Field Ordinariates are institutions situated within both Catholic Church law and the national legislation of the countries where they have been established. Due

to their specific nature and functions, field pastoral care is also subject to military regulations and directives. Church laws, in general, apply to all field ordinariates that have been established, while the statutes of individual ordinariates specify detailed provisions that account for the particular circumstances of each country. The primary ecclesiastical document governing military pastoral care in all countries with field ordinariates is the Apostolic Constitution *Spirituali Militum Curae*. In Poland, an additional legal foundation for field pastoral care is provided by the Statute of the Field Ordinariate and documents issued by the Ministry of National Defence. Reforms in the Polish Army also necessitate changes in field pastoral care. Accordingly, on May 8, 2021, the Congregation for Bishops approved a new Statute for the Field Ordinariate in Poland. This document emphasizes the pastoral care of soldiers in the Territorial Defence Forces, retired military personnel, pensioners, veterans, and allied soldiers serving in the Republic of Poland. The statute also stipulates that the service of chaplains in the Field Ordinariate should extend to officials and employees of the Border Guard and the State Protection Service, as they have been under the pastoral care of the Field Bishop since the inception of these formations [28]. The evolving nature of modern military forces and the new tasks being undertaken by the military also require ongoing changes and reforms in field pastoral care.

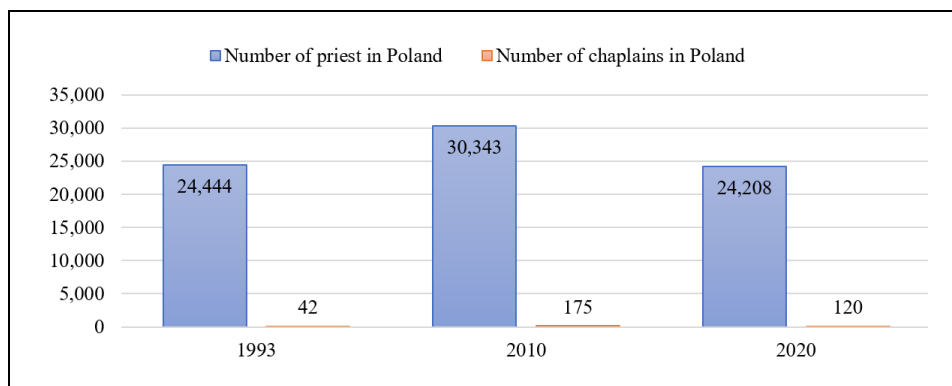
Chaplains are appointed to the positions of parish priest, resident, or vicar of a military parish, or to other roles within field pastoral care (e.g., hospital chaplain) by the Field Bishop. Additionally, the Field Bishop delegates chaplains to serve in specific military units. In the Field Ordinariate, the Field Bishop is the direct superior of all chaplains, rather than the commanding officer of the unit to which the chaplain is assigned. Nevertheless, the chaplain is required to closely cooperate with the unit commander [Zarządzenie Ministra Obrony Narodowej nr 72/MON z dnia 6 kwietnia 1994 r.]. These facts underscore the unique nature of the Polish Field Ordinariate as an ecclesiastical-military institution.

## **5. Determinants of Improving Military Chaplains' Competencies - Discussion**

The statement attributed to the Ephesian philosopher Heraclitus, “the only constant is change”, is increasingly relevant, especially in the context of human capital management. Cultural and generational differences, along with the ever-evolving reality, do not permit passive waiting. A conscious ‘choice’ of change and an understanding of the multifaceted nature of the world—both within the organization and its external environment—will become increasingly crucial in building a competitive advantage for organizations of the future [D. Muszkiet, *Wyzwania dla zarządzania kapitałem ludzkim w organizacji przyszłości*, available online <https://zalaris.pl/insights/artykuly/wyzwania-dla-zarzadzania-kapitałem-ludzkim-w-organizacji-przyszłości/>, (06.06.2024)]. In 1978, the year Karol Wojtyła was elected pope, the number of priests in Poland was 14,972. By 1993, this number had increased to 24,444. By 2010, the number of clergy had risen to 30,343 [29]. However, in the last decade, a downward trend has dominated, and by 2020, the number of priests in Poland had decreased to 24,208 [*Annuario*

*Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia*, Warszawa, 2021, 4.]. The ongoing decline in priestly vocations in Poland, and consequently a smaller number of ordained clergy, poses a significant challenge for acquiring the appropriate human capital necessary for the effective functioning of field pastoral care within the Polish Armed Forces. Figure 2. illustrates the number of priest and military chaplains in Poland in selected years.

The planned expansion of the Polish Armed Forces to 300,000 soldiers will necessitate an increase in chaplaincy positions. The decline in priestly vocations in Poland will not only affect the recruitment of clergy for the Field Ordinariate but also impact the quality of pastoral care provided to soldiers both within Poland and during international missions, given the rising number of soldiers and the limited number of chaplains. Additionally, there is a contemporary crisis in the patriotic education of the youth in Poland. This crisis is influenced by several factors, including: the dynamics of systemic changes, a crisis of values, moral authority and political elites, a crisis in education, social destabilization, and the breakdown of national and personal security. These phenomena lead to weakened connections between youth and the legacy of previous generations, as well as to changes in social awareness and modifications in the content and forms of patriotism [30]. Despite the decline in priestly vocations, it can be anticipated that some contemporary youth will choose this path of fulfilling their life vocation, including serving in military chaplaincy, where the values of “God, Honor, Homeland” are paramount, and promoting patriotic values is an integral part of a military chaplain’s duties.



**Figure 2.** Number of priest and military chaplains in Poland in the years 1993, 2010, 2020, source: [*Schematyzm Ordynariatu Polowego 1993*, Warszawa, 1993; *Schematyzm Ordynariatu Polowego 2010*, Warszawa, 2010; *Schematyzm Ordynariatu Polowego 2020*, Warszawa, 2020]

Additionally, it is worth noting that on January 1, 2017, the Territorial Defense Forces were established as the fifth branch of the Polish Armed Forces. The primary tasks of this branch include participating in disaster relief, asset protection, search and rescue operations, safeguarding or protecting health and life, and engaging in crisis management activities [Ustawa z dnia 16 listopada 2016 r. o zmianie ustawy o powszechnym obowiązku obrony Rzeczypospolitej

Polskiej oraz niektórych innych ustaw]. The creation of new brigades and battalions across various districts will also entail a continuous need for appointing new chaplains.

The range of tasks required of a military chaplain is broad, necessitating thorough preparation and ongoing education. The European Network for Health Care Chaplains (ENHCC), which encompasses representatives from professional and religious associations, has outlined four key requirements for the continuous education of chaplains, particularly those working in clinical settings:

- Deepening knowledge in pastoral care and theological reflection
- Understanding various aspects of health
- Clinical supervision
- Spiritual guidance

These guidelines provide a general framework for the professional development of clinical chaplains across Europe. However, educational and continuous training requirements for chaplains vary between European countries [31]. Research conducted by W. Cadge, G. Tien, and T. Haythorn [W. Cadge, G. Tien and T. Haythorn, *What Are Chaplains Learning? Perspectives on the Supply Side*, 2002, 47, available online <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Cadge-et-al-What-are-chaplains-learning-2022.pdf>] highlights a clear need for the standardization of training and educational programs for chaplains. Currently, most professional military chaplains receive training at theological seminaries and through specialized programs and courses. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on the specific skills and competencies required for chaplains to effectively perform their duties. Following the example of the United States Army, it would be beneficial to consider adopting structured educational programs, including clearly defined learning objectives and competency groups according to military rank. Such educational programs should focus on three professional educational goals: spiritual integration in practice, professional development in religious support and leadership. Table 2. provides a detailed description of the various competencies that chaplains should develop.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the educational objectives of military chaplains; source: [W. Cadge, G. Tien and T. Haythorn, *What Are Chaplains Learning? Perspectives on the Supply Side*, 2002, 47, available online <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Cadge-et-al-What-are-chaplains-learning-2022.pdf>]

Spiritual Integration in Practice	This pertains specifically to how human factors are integrated and implemented within programs, religious support operations, and <b>organizational considerations</b>
Professional Development in Religious Support	Career-Focused Professional Goals: spiritual formation and professional development of religious support professionals along the career path
Leadership in Religious Support	Professional goals focused on personal leadership abilities and influence skills, including communication and collaboration skills, that contribute to the development of spiritually healthy communities

The armed forces in every country form a community with very specific needs and issues. Military service involves unique life circumstances that complicate the provision and receipt of ordinary pastoral care. Hence, it is

understandable that military chaplaincy has played a specialized role for centuries [26, p. 28]. Not all chaplains will possess the same competencies; therefore, the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other traits necessary for performing duties on international missions can vary. The role of a chaplain must be carried out with significant sensitivity, being attuned not only to spiritual issues but also to those of a social nature. Military chaplains are tasked with addressing a range of challenges that soldiers face, which are often distinct from those encountered in civilian life. This specialization requires chaplains to adapt their approach to meet the specific needs of military personnel, who may be dealing with a variety of stressors related to their service, including deployment, combat, and separation from family. In summary, the role of military chaplains is crucial and complex, demanding a deep understanding of both spiritual and social dimensions of soldiers' lives. Their training and continuous development must reflect this complexity to effectively support those serving in the armed forces [7].

## **6. Conclusions**

The presented material indicates that the successful execution of projects within companies or institutions is significantly influenced by human capital, particularly its effective management. A key factor in this process is the continuous training of employees. However, to achieve the desired outcomes, it is crucial to properly motivate employees and foster their desire for ongoing enhancement of their skills and professional qualifications.

The Military Ordinariate, as a unique ecclesiastical and military institution, also relies on human capital, and its placement within existing military and ecclesiastical regulations underscores its distinct nature. Operating at the interface of two different structures, spiritual and military, the Military Ordinariate plays a key role in providing spiritual care to soldiers and other members of the armed forces, adapting its activities to the specific requirements of military service, while respecting the norms and principles of the Catholic Church.

Ongoing development in human capital management will need to address future challenges. The most significant challenges for the Military Ordinariate will include recruiting new personnel and ensuring high-quality pastoral care for soldiers. This is particularly pressing given the anticipated decrease in the number of clergy and the projected increase in military positions. Thus, the acquisition of key competences by military chaplains, both in the pastoral field and in the knowledge of the specifics of service in the army, is necessary for the effective performance of their mission. These competencies range from interpersonal skills, theological knowledge, and familiarity with military procedures, which allows them to function at a high level in both of these spheres.

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