Gradus Vol 13, No 2 (2026)
ISSN 2064-8014
Article no. 2026.2.ART.011

Leadership Development and Conflict Management in Hungarian Law Enforcement: A Theoretical Framework for Mediation-Oriented Police Governance

Hossain MD Shakhawoat [1*]

[1] Faculty of Public Governance and International Studies, Doctoral School of Public Administration Sciences, National University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3593-6561

https://doi.org/10.47833/2026.2.ART.011

Keywords:
Leadership development,
Conflict management,
Mediation,
Police governance,
Organizational learning,
Institutional legitimacy,
Hungarian law enforcement.

Article history:
Received 24 June 2026
Revised 11 October 2026
Accepted 15 October 2026

Abstract

Contemporary law-enforcement organizations must combine operational effectiveness and lawful authority with professional communication, organizational learning, accountability, and public confidence. These demands raise a theoretical question: through what mechanisms can leadership development support conflict management and mediation-oriented police governance, and under what conditions are these mechanisms likely to operate? This article develops a conceptual framework integrating Neo-Weberian governance, leadership-development study, police-learning research, and procedural-justice and legitimacy perspectives. The study is conceptual and uses no empirical sample or participant-sampling technique. It employs a qualitative narrative literature review and theoretical synthesis, drawing on relevant research in public administration, police leadership, conflict training, organizational learning, and police legitimacy, together with the Hungarian legal-institutional context. The synthesis proposes that leadership development can strengthen communication, negotiation, ethical judgment, and conflict-diagnosis competencies; these competencies may improve conflict-management capacity, while mediation is one context-dependent response rather than an inevitable next stage. Organizational learning is treated as a cross-cutting mechanism that can support transfer from training to practice and feed operational experience back into future development. Organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy are distinguished as related but non-equivalent outcomes: performance alone does not guarantee legitimacy, and perceived legitimacy may in turn facilitate cooperation. The article contributes an integrated, conditional framework for studying mediation-oriented leadership in Hungarian law enforcement and identifies propositions for future empirical testing. It also discusses legal and operational limits, implementation challenges, and implications for leadership education and evaluation.

1 Introduction

Public organizations operate under simultaneous demands for legality, professionalism, effective service delivery, responsiveness, and accountability. These demands are especially visible in law enforcement, where officers exercise public authority in situations that may involve uncertainty, disagreement, heightened emotion, and immediate risks. Leadership in such settings cannot be reduced to command and control alone. Leaders must preserve lawful operational capacity while developing personnel who can communicate clearly, diagnose conflict, make proportionate

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: hossain.md_.shakhawoat@stud.uni-nke.hu

decisions, learn from experience, and maintain professional relationships with colleagues and the public [1], [2].

The Neo-Weberian State (NWS) offers a useful starting point because it retains the importance of a capable, professional state and rule-bound administration while recognizing service quality, performance, and citizen orientation as significant features of contemporary governance [1]. In policing, these principles are not interchangeable. Legal authority and operational readiness remain indispensable, but their exercise is also judged through organizational performance, procedural fairness, and the way police personnel treat people. The Hungarian Police Act, Act XXXIV of 1994, establishes the statutory basis for police responsibilities and includes duties concerning the protection of human dignity and rights, as well as cooperation with public bodies and communities [2]. These statutory commitments make leadership development relevant not only to internal management but also to the quality and legitimacy of police-public interactions.

Existing research offers important but often separate insights into public-sector leadership, police learning, conflict-training pedagogy, and police legitimacy. Research on police training emphasizes the persistent challenge of transferring learning from formal instruction to operational practice [3], [4]. Research on procedural justice, meanwhile, explains why respectful treatment, neutrality, opportunities for voice, and trustworthy motives can shape public perceptions of police authority and willingness to cooperate [5], [6]. These strands are related, but they do not by themselves specify how leadership-development processes, conflict-management competencies, context-appropriate mediation, organizational learning, and governance outcomes should be connected within a single explanatory framework.

The theoretical gap addressed here is therefore not an absence of research on any one concept. It is the limited integration of (a) leadership development as an organizational intervention, (b) conflict management as a broad set of capacities, (c) mediation as a conditional rather than universal conflict response, (d) organizational learning as a mechanism affecting training transfer, and (e) effectiveness and legitimacy as distinct governance outcomes. The Hungarian context matters because the proposed framework must be interpreted within a legally constituted, hierarchical police organization whose duties combine public safety, law enforcement, rights protection, and cooperation with communities [2]. International findings can inform this analysis, but they cannot be assumed to transfer unchanged to Hungarian institutional conditions.

The central proposition is that leadership development may contribute to mediation-oriented police governance when it builds relevant leadership competencies, those competencies are supported by organizational learning and institutional conditions, and leaders select conflict responses appropriate to the legal and operational situation. Mediation is not proposed as a substitute for lawful command, investigation, enforcement, or immediate protective action. Rather, it is one possible method for suitable disputes, alongside de-escalation, negotiation, formal procedures, and other lawful responses.

The article addresses three research questions:

RQ1: Through what theoretical mechanisms can leadership development strengthen conflict-management capacity in law-enforcement organizations?

RQ2: Under what organizational and operational conditions can mediation-oriented leadership contribute to organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy?

RQ3: How do the legal, institutional, and organizational characteristics of Hungarian law enforcement shape the applicability and limits of mediation-oriented leadership?

The article makes three contributions. First, it integrates public-governance, police-training, organizational-learning, and procedural-justice perspectives in a conditional explanatory framework.

Second, it distinguishes general conflict-management capacity from the narrower competence to use mediation, and separates organizational effectiveness from institutional legitimacy rather than assuming a linear causal chain. Third, it derives theoretical propositions and practice-oriented recommendations for Hungarian law enforcement while identifying the need for empirical validation. Section 2 explains the conceptual methodology; Section 3 critically reviews the theoretical foundations; Section 4 develops the framework and propositions; Section 5 discusses implications, counterarguments, and limits; Section 6 presents prioritized recommendations; and Section 7 concludes.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research design and rationale

This article uses a qualitative conceptual research design based on a narrative literature review and theoretical synthesis. The purpose is to clarify concepts, compare theoretical explanations, identify gaps between research strands, and develop propositions about relationships that future empirical studies can examine. A narrative approach is appropriate because the article brings together heterogeneous sources such as public-administration theory, police-training studies, organizational-learning research, legitimacy research, and legal-institutional materials that do not share a single outcome measure or a common empirical design. The objective is explanatory integration rather than estimating an overall intervention effect.

The article is not a systematic review, meta-analysis, or empirical evaluation. No officers, police leaders, trainers, or members of the public were recruited, and no primary data were collected. Accordingly, no empirical sample, participant-sampling technique, or statistical analysis applies. The proposed relationships are theoretical propositions derived from literature and institutional analysis, not empirically established causal effects.

2.2 Search Strategy and Source Selection

The literature searches were conducted between 20 June and 3 October 2026 using Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and the official Hungarian National Legislation Database. The search strategy was organized around five concept clusters: (1) Neo-Weberian governance and public administration; (2) leadership development and public-sector performance; (3) police leadership and organizational learning; (4) police conflict-management training, de-escalation, and mediation; and (5) procedural justice, police legitimacy, public trust, and cooperation.

Representative search terms included “Neo-Weberian State,” “public-sector leadership development,” “police leadership,” “police learning,” “police conflict training,” “conflict management,” “mediation,” “procedural justice,” “police legitimacy,” and “Hungarian Police Act.” These terms were combined iteratively to identify literature addressing the principal relationships examined in the framework, including combinations such as “police leadership” AND “conflict management,” “police training” AND mediation, “procedural justice” AND “police legitimacy,” and “Hungarian Police Act” AND “police training.”

The search primarily focused on recent literature published from 2020 onward, while earlier foundational studies were retained where necessary to establish key theoretical concepts concerning police legitimacy, procedural justice, organizational learning, leadership development, and public administration. The scholarly search was conducted primarily in English, while Hungarian-language legal and institutional sources were included where necessary to establish the national law-enforcement context. The Hungarian National Legislation Database was used to verify relevant legal provisions governing police duties, cooperation, impartiality, and proportionality.

Sources were selected according to their conceptual relevance to the research questions, scholarly or methodological credibility, contribution to the theoretical relationships examined in the framework, and relevance to Hungarian law-enforcement practice where contextual evidence was required. Peer-reviewed literature identified through Scopus and Web of Science was prioritized for multidisciplinary scholarly evidence, while ScienceDirect and SpringerLink were used to identify relevant disciplinary publications. Google Scholar served as a supplementary search source and supported backward reference-list searching. Official Hungarian legal and institutional sources were treated as contextual and normative evidence rather than as substitutes for peer-reviewed research.

The selected literature was not intended to constitute an exhaustive systematic review. Rather, the study employed a qualitative narrative literature review and theoretical synthesis to identify recurring concepts, explanatory mechanisms, boundary conditions, and relationships relevant to the proposed framework. Literature was retained where it contributed directly to understanding one or more of the framework's principal relationships, particularly the links between leadership development and conflict-management competencies, competencies and mediation capacity, organizational learning and transfer, and conflict-management practices and organizational effectiveness or legitimacy. This approach enabled the study to connect established findings from related strands of literature while distinguishing relationships supported by previous research from propositions advanced theoretically by the present study.

2.3 Eligibility and source assessment

Sources were considered relevant when they met at least one of the following criteria: they developed or applied a theory used in the framework; examined leadership or learning in public organizations or policing; addressed police conflict-management or training transfer; investigated procedural justice, police legitimacy, or public cooperation; or established relevant Hungarian legal and institutional responsibilities. Sources were not used as direct support for a proposition when they addressed a materially different context without a clear theoretical connection.

Sources were excluded from the core synthesis when their relevance to the research questions was peripheral, when the available record did not permit the claim attributed to them to be checked, or when they duplicated a more authoritative source without adding analytical value. Source appraisal was interpretive rather than a formal risk-of-bias scoring exercise. Greater weight was given to peer-reviewed studies and review articles for claims about research evidence, to primary legal sources for statutory responsibilities, and to theoretical works for conceptual definitions. Because the source types and questions are heterogeneous, a numerical quality score would imply a level of comparability that this conceptual study does not possess.

2.4 Synthesis procedure and limitations

The synthesis proceeded in four analytical steps. First, the concepts central to the research questions were defined and distinguished, especially conflict management versus mediation, organizational effectiveness versus legitimacy, and training provision versus transfer into practice. Second, the sources were compared across the five concept clusters to identify convergences, tensions, and missing links. Third, candidate relationships were examined for plausible mechanisms, alternative explanations, contextual conditions, and potential feedback effects. Fourth, the resulting relationships were translated into propositions and represented in the conceptual framework. Organizational learning was treated as a cross-cutting process affecting the translation of training into practice and the feedback of operational experience into future development, rather than being labelled a moderator without a specified relationship.

This method has limitations. Narrative source selection involves researcher judgment and may omit relevant studies; it does not provide the reproducibility or coverage estimates of a systematic review. The synthesis is also limited by uneven evidence across national contexts, and findings from countries with different legal and organizational arrangements cannot automatically be generalized

to Hungary. Most importantly, the framework has not been empirically validated in Hungarian law enforcement. The propositions should therefore be treated as theoretically reasoned expectations for future research, not as confirmed causal findings.

3 Theoretical foundations and critical literature review

3.1 Neo-Weberian governance and the Hungarian institutional context

The Neo-Weberian State perspective combines the continuing importance of a professional, legally constituted state with an emphasis on service quality, performance, and responsiveness [1]. For law enforcement, the relevance of this perspective lies in the need to reconcile two requirements: police organizations must retain the capacity to make lawful and timely decisions, while their internal practices and public-facing conduct must remain accountable and responsive. Mediation-oriented leadership should therefore be understood as a complement to lawful authority, not as a replacement for it.

Hungarian law enforcement operates within a statutory framework that defines police responsibilities, organization, and powers. Act XXXIV of 1994 identifies the police as an armed law-enforcement body and establishes duties that include protecting life, physical integrity, property, human dignity, and rights, as well as cooperating with state and local-government bodies, civil organizations, businesses, citizens, and communities [2]. These provisions do not establish that mediation is appropriate in every police encounter. Instead, they provide a legal-institutional reason to examine how leadership training can help personnel distinguish situations requiring formal enforcement from situations in which communication, de-escalation, or facilitated problem-solving may be appropriate.

This distinction is important for the Hungarian case. A general argument for collaborative leadership is insufficient unless it recognizes the legal obligations and command responsibilities of police organizations. The framework developed here consequently treats legality, professional standards, operational risk, and organizational culture as contextual conditions that shape whether and how mediation-oriented practices can be used.

3.2 Leadership development and the transfer of learning

Leadership development is more than attendance at a training course. It includes the development of knowledge, skills, judgment, and habits through instruction, mentoring, feedback, practice, and reflection. In public organizations, leadership can affect how goals are communicated, how employees coordinate, how conflicts are interpreted, and whether lessons from experience lead to changed routines. However, participation in training does not guarantee behavioral change. The transfer of competencies depends on opportunities to practise, supervisory support, alignment with operational expectations, and reinforcement in the workplace.

Police-training research highlights the difficulty of preparing personnel for dynamic, context-dependent encounters through instruction alone. Koerner and Staller argue that conflict training should be designed around the demands of operational practice and that the transfer of competence from training to deployment is a central challenge [3]. Research on police learning similarly emphasizes that learning may be supported or inhibited by organizational routines, professional culture, and the way experience is interpreted [4]. A systematic review of police leadership research likewise shows that contemporary police leaders are expected to perform a broad range of leadership actions and competencies in complex organizational environments, reinforcing the need to understand leadership development as an ongoing process rather than a one-time training intervention [8]. These insights support a distinction between leadership development as an input and demonstrated leadership behavior as an intermediate mechanism.

For the present framework, leadership development is expected to contribute to conflict-management capacity when it improves competencies relevant to actual situations and when

organizational conditions allow those competencies to be applied. This is a conditional proposition: training may have limited effect if supervisors discourage reflective practice, workloads prevent follow-up, or informal norms reward escalation over constructive problem-solving.

3.3 Conflict management and mediation are related but distinct

Conflict management is a broad capacity to identify, prevent, contain, de-escalate, and resolve disagreements. It can involve communication, negotiation, boundary-setting, referral, formal investigation, disciplinary procedures, enforcement, or mediation. Mediation is a narrower process in which an impartial third party facilitates communication between parties so that they can explore issues and, where possible, develop a mutually acceptable resolution. It ordinarily depends on the suitability of the dispute, the safety of participants, the parties' willingness to engage, and the mediator's role and competence.

It follows that mediation does not necessarily come after conflict-management capacity, as if every conflict should progress through a fixed sequence. Rather, conflict-management capacity includes the ability to select a response appropriate to the situation. A police leader may use mediation for a suitable workplace disagreement, negotiation or facilitated discussion for an inter-unit dispute, and formal command or legal intervention when immediate safety, evidence preservation, coercive powers, or statutory duties require it. In cases involving coercion, intimidation, serious power imbalance, ongoing violence, or criminal investigation, mediation may be inappropriate or require referral to an independent process.

Police conflict-training research underscores the need to prepare personnel for context-sensitive decisions rather than relying on a universal response [3], [7]. This article therefore treats mediation competence as one specialized capability within a broader conflict-management repertoire. The theoretical contribution lies partly in making this distinction explicit and in placing response selection, not mediation alone, at the center of the model.

3.4 Organizational learning as a cross-cutting mechanism

Organizational learning concerns how experience is interpreted, shared, retained, and translated into changed practice. In police organizations, operational encounters can generate valuable knowledge, but that knowledge contributes to improvement only when there are mechanisms for reflection, feedback, supervision, and adjustment. Staller and Koerner's framework for understanding police learning draws attention to both learning and non-learning processes in policing organizations [4]. This suggests that the value of leadership development depends partly on whether the organization enables personnel to apply, discuss, and refine what they have learned.

Organizational learning is not treated here as a generic moderator attached to every relationship. It operates in two specified ways. First, it supports the transfer of leadership competencies into practice by creating opportunities for feedback, mentoring, scenario-based rehearsal, and reflection. Second, it creates a feedback loop: experiences with conflict management and mediation can inform revisions to curricula, supervisory practice, and organizational procedures. This makes the framework dynamic rather than strictly linear.

The strength of these learning processes is likely to vary with leadership support, time, resources, psychological safety, and organizational incentives. Where reporting mistakes is punished indiscriminately or where performance systems reward only immediate operational outputs, personnel may be less willing to reflect on unsuccessful interactions. Organizational learning is thus both a process and a set of conditions that may facilitate or inhibit improvement.

3.5 Organizational effectiveness, procedural justice, and legitimacy

Organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy should not be collapsed into a single outcome. Effectiveness concerns an organization's ability to fulfil its tasks, coordinate personnel, use resources, and achieve relevant operational and service objectives. Legitimacy concerns whether the institution's authority is regarded as appropriate or rightful. Procedural-justice research highlights the importance of voice, neutrality, dignity and respect, and trustworthy motives in shaping how people assess police encounters [5], [6]. These dimensions offer a plausible explanation for why communication and conflict-management practices may matter beyond immediate dispute resolution.

Nevertheless, better operational performance does not automatically produce legitimacy. An organization may meet a short-term target while using procedures perceived as unfair, and citizens may evaluate the way authority is exercised separately from the outcome of an encounter. Conversely, perceived legitimacy can support cooperation with police and thereby contribute to operational effectiveness. A recent meta-analysis of 123 studies found a significant relationship between procedural justice and police legitimacy and highlighted the relevance of social identity and context [6]. The direction and strength of these relationships can vary, so the framework proposes reciprocal influence as a theoretical possibility rather than assuming a simple causal chain.

For Hungarian law enforcement, the implication is not that mediation alone creates public trust. Legitimacy is shaped by legal compliance, consistency, fairness, accountability, institutional performance, and wider social and historical contexts. Mediation-oriented leadership may contribute where it supports respectful communication and fair processes, but it cannot substitute for lawful decision-making or remedy broader institutional problems by itself.

3.6 Comparison with Existing Models and Theoretical Contribution

The proposed framework builds on several established strands of research but differs from existing models in the way their relationships are specified. Research on police leadership has primarily examined the characteristics, behaviours, and functions associated with effective police leaders. The systematic review by de Moura et al. demonstrates the breadth of this literature and identifies a range of leadership characteristics and expected leadership actions, while also emphasizing the need for continuous improvement in police organizations [8]. Similarly, Filstad, Karp, and Glomseth's study of Norwegian police leaders demonstrates that leadership learning is strongly connected to experience and everyday practice within the police culture [10]. These contributions establish the importance of leadership development and experiential learning, but they do not specifically explain how leadership development is translated into conflict-management capacity and mediation-oriented responses.

A second relevant strand concerns police learning. Staller and Koerner's framework for understanding police learning conceptualizes learning as a multidimensional process occurring within and outside formal training and at both individual and organizational levels [4]. This perspective is particularly important for the present study because it demonstrates why formal instruction alone cannot be assumed to produce professional competence. The present framework extends this insight by specifying a more focused transfer pathway: leadership development is expected to strengthen relevant competencies, these competencies shape conflict-management and mediation capacity, and operational experience, reflection, feedback, and supervision can subsequently feed organizational learning and inform future leadership development. Thus, organizational learning is not treated only as a general condition of professionalization but as a mechanism connecting leadership development, operational practice, and subsequent organizational adaptation.

A third strand concerns police conflict management. Recent evidence indicates that police conflict-management research remains fragmented, with substantial attention given to use-of-force issues and comparatively less consistent conceptualization of effective conflict-management strategies and training [11]. The present framework responds to this gap by positioning conflict-

management capacity as an intermediate mechanism rather than treating conflict management simply as an isolated training outcome. It distinguishes general conflict-management capacity from mediation competence and recognizes that mediation is appropriate only where the nature, risks, legal requirements, and operational circumstances of a conflict permit such an approach. This distinction is important in law enforcement because conflict resolution cannot be separated from statutory authority, proportionality, operational safety, and the specific responsibilities of police officers.

The fourth strand concerns procedural fairness and institutional legitimacy. Existing research provides substantial theoretical and empirical support for the relationship between respectful and fair police-citizen interactions, perceptions of legitimacy, and public cooperation [5], [6]. The present framework does not replace these established approaches. Instead, it connects them to the preceding leadership and learning mechanisms by proposing that leadership development and conflict-management competencies may shape the quality of police interactions and thereby contribute to procedural fairness and legitimacy. At the same time, the framework maintains a conceptual distinction between procedural fairness, public trust, and institutional legitimacy. These concepts are therefore not treated as interchangeable outcomes. Procedural fairness concerns perceptions of the fairness of police procedures and interactions, trust concerns expectations regarding the police's competence, reliability, and appropriate conduct, and institutional legitimacy concerns the perceived appropriateness and rightful authority of the police institution. This distinction is consistent with research examining trust and legitimacy as related but analytically distinguishable constructs [12], [13].

The principal theoretical contribution of the proposed framework therefore lies not in claiming that leadership development, police learning, conflict management, or legitimacy are individually new concepts. Rather, it specifies **how these established domains may be connected through a conditional explanatory pathway relevant to law enforcement**. The framework identifies leadership development as an upstream organizational intervention; leadership competencies and conflict-management capacity as intermediate mechanisms; mediation competence as a context-dependent response capability; organizational learning as a transfer and feedback mechanism; and organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy as distinct governance-related outcomes. It also identifies legal and organizational conditions as boundary conditions that may strengthen, constrain, or interrupt these relationships.

The framework further introduces a feedback perspective that is less explicit in models focused primarily on leadership characteristics, police learning, or conflict-management interventions. Operational experience and the consequences of conflict-management practices may generate reflection, feedback, and organizational learning, which can subsequently inform leadership development, training priorities, and organizational procedures. In this sense, the proposed framework is not a simple linear training-to-outcome model. It conceptualizes leadership development as part of a continuing cycle in which training, practice, operational experience, reflection, organizational learning, and renewed leadership development can interact over time.

Finally, the framework distinguishes **organizational effectiveness** from **institutional legitimacy** rather than assuming that one automatically produces the other. Effective coordination and conflict management may contribute to organizational effectiveness, while fair and respectful interactions may contribute to legitimacy. A potential reciprocal relationship between effectiveness and legitimacy is recognized theoretically, because institutional legitimacy may facilitate cooperation and thereby support organizational effectiveness, while effective institutional performance may also influence public evaluations of the police. However, this reciprocal relationship is presented as a theoretical possibility rather than as an empirically established causal relationship in the present conceptual study.

Accordingly, the additional explanatory value of the framework is its specification of a **conditional and feedback-oriented architecture** connecting leadership development to conflict-

management practice and, ultimately, to two distinct governance outcomes. It identifies where transfer from training to practice may occur, where organizational learning may reinforce or interrupt that transfer, where mediation is subject to legal and operational conditions, and where effectiveness and legitimacy should be analytically distinguished. The framework therefore provides a basis for future empirical research to test the proposed relationships in Hungarian law enforcement rather than presenting those relationships as empirically established findings.

3.7 Hungarian Law-Enforcement Context

The proposed framework is situated within the specific legal, institutional, and professional environment of Hungarian law enforcement. The Hungarian context is important because police leadership and conflict-management practices operate within a statutory framework that simultaneously requires effective intervention and respect for individual rights. The Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police establishes the legal foundations of police activity and provides a relevant boundary condition for the framework. In particular, Section 2 requires the Police to protect life, physical integrity, and property and to respect and protect human dignity and human rights. The Act also establishes cooperation with relevant public institutions, organizations, citizens, and communities. These provisions provide a legal basis for considering both organizational effectiveness and the quality of police interaction as relevant dimensions of police governance [2].

The legal framework further constrains how police officers respond to conflict. Section 13 of the Police Act establishes an obligation to act when circumstances threatening public security, public order, or the order of the state border are identified or reported, while Section 13(2) requires police action to comply with the law and to be impartial [2]. Section 15 establishes the requirement of proportionality, requiring that police measures remain proportionate to their lawful purpose and that, where several suitable measures are available, the measure involving the least restriction, injury, or damage to the person concerned should be selected while ensuring effectiveness [2]. These provisions are directly relevant to the proposed framework because they demonstrate that conflict-management competence and mediation-oriented skills cannot be understood as unrestricted discretion. Rather, the selection of responses is embedded within legal and operational constraints.

The Hungarian institutional environment also provides established structures for police education, training, and organizational development. The Police Education and Training Centre (Rendőrségi Oktatási és Kiképző Központ, ROKK) includes units responsible for training and course organization, police education, examinations, organizational development, and training organization. Its institutional responsibilities therefore provide an important organizational setting for considering the relationship between leadership development, professional training, organizational learning, and transfer to practice. The existence of dedicated organizational-development and training functions supports the relevance of treating learning as an organizational process rather than solely as an individual training outcome [14].

Leadership development is also an identifiable component of contemporary Hungarian police practice. The Police's Vezetői Utánpótlás Program (VUP) provides a particularly relevant institutional example. The first VUP programme involved 14 young police officers selected for a one-year leadership-development course, with intensive monthly sessions and participation by trainers, external educators, and other supporting professionals. The programme was designed for officers interested in future leadership positions and therefore illustrates an institutional approach to developing a future leadership pool within the Police [15]. Although the programme does not empirically validate the present conceptual framework, its structure demonstrates that leadership development, intensive practice-oriented learning, and external instructional support are already recognizable elements of Hungarian police practice.

Hungarian law-enforcement higher education provides an additional institutional foundation for leadership development. Kovács describes the Faculty of Law Enforcement at the Ludovika University of Public Service as an important provider of police-managerial education through

bachelor's and master's programmes in law enforcement and law enforcement management [16]. This institutional setting is relevant to the proposed framework because it connects formal professional education with the development of future police managers and leadership competencies. Earlier work on Hungarian law-enforcement higher education similarly identifies the continuing development of university-level law-enforcement education as an important component of the professionalization of police training [17].

Taken together, these legal and institutional features distinguish the Hungarian context from a generic model of policing. The framework therefore does not assume that international evidence on police leadership, conflict management, or procedural justice can be transferred directly to Hungarian law enforcement without contextual qualification. Instead, the Hungarian Police Act establishes legal boundaries for police decision-making, ROKK provides an institutional setting for training and organizational development, police leadership programmes provide a practical context for leadership development, and Ludovika's law-enforcement education provides an academic and professional pathway for developing police managers. These conditions support the use of the proposed framework as a context-sensitive theoretical model for examining how leadership development and conflict-management capabilities may operate within Hungarian law enforcement.

At the same time, the available institutional evidence should not be interpreted as evidence that the relationships proposed in the framework have already been demonstrated in Hungarian police practice. The present study remains conceptual and does not evaluate the effectiveness of the VUP, ROKK programmes, or police leadership education empirically. These institutional examples are therefore used to establish contextual relevance and identify settings in which the framework could subsequently be tested.

4 Proposed theoretical framework and research propositions

4.1 Logic of the framework

The proposed framework links leadership development to governance outcomes through several conditional mechanisms. Leadership development is the organizational input. Leadership competencies including communication, active listening, emotional regulation, negotiation, ethical judgment, and conflict diagnosis are the proximal outcomes expected to emerge from relevant learning opportunities. Conflict-management capacity refers to the ability to recognize and select among appropriate responses. Mediation competence is a specialized capability that may be used when the dispute, parties, risks, and legal context make it suitable.

The framework does not assume that every stage follows automatically from the previous one. Training may fail to change behavior; competence may be blocked by organizational norms; conflict management may require formal rather than mediated intervention; and successful conflict resolution may not generate broader organizational improvement unless the experience is retained and shared. Organizational learning connects the stages by supporting transfer and feeding experience back into future development.

The framework also distinguishes two principal outcome pathways. An internal pathway concerns coordination, employee cooperation, workplace trust, and organizational effectiveness. An external pathway concerns the fairness and quality of police-public interactions, citizen confidence, and perceived legitimacy. These pathways may reinforce one another, but neither is a guaranteed consequence of mediation. Legal compliance, accountability, resource availability, organizational culture, conflict severity, and community context condition the proposed relationships.

4.2 Research propositions

Proposition 1 (development and competencies): Leadership-development activities that combine relevant instruction with practice, feedback, mentoring, and reflection are more likely to strengthen conflict-relevant leadership competencies than instruction alone.

Proposition 2 (competencies and conflict management): Stronger communication, negotiation, emotional-regulation, and conflict-diagnosis competencies are expected to improve leaders' capacity to identify and select proportionate conflict responses, subject to legal duties and operational constraints.

Proposition 3 (mediation as a conditional capability): Mediation competence may improve resolution of suitable interpersonal or organizational disputes when participation is appropriate, parties can engage safely, and the process does not conflict with statutory responsibilities or immediate operational needs.

Proposition 4 (organizational learning and transfer): Reflective supervision, mentoring, feedback, and structured review of operational experience are expected to strengthen the transfer of leadership-development outcomes into routine practice.

Proposition 5 (internal organizational outcomes): More effective conflict management, supported by organizational learning, may improve workplace cooperation and coordination and thereby contribute to organizational effectiveness. The relationship is likely to be weaker where staffing, workload, resources, or organizational incentives prevent application.

Proposition 6 (fair process and legitimacy): Where mediation-oriented leadership promotes respectful, impartial, and transparent interaction, it may support perceived procedural fairness, which may contribute to public trust and institutional legitimacy. This relationship depends on the wider quality and consistency of police conduct and cannot be inferred from training participation alone.

Proposition 7 (feedback and adaptation): Experience with conflict-management practices and their consequences may inform future training and organizational procedures, creating a feedback relationship between operational practice, organizational learning, and leadership development.

These propositions are intended to guide future empirical inquiry. They are not claims of verified causal effects. Testing them would require suitable indicators, multiple data sources, and attention to contextual variation within and beyond Hungary.

4.3 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 specifies the proposed relationships among leadership development, leadership competencies, conflict-management capacity, mediation competence, organizational learning, organizational effectiveness, and institutional legitimacy. The framework is designed as a conditional rather than deterministic model. It does not assume that participation in leadership development automatically produces improved organizational outcomes. Instead, it proposes that the effects of leadership development depend on the development and transfer of relevant competencies, opportunities for practice and reflection, organizational learning processes, and the legal and organizational conditions within which police officers operate.

The framework begins with leadership development as the principal upstream intervention. Leadership development is understood broadly to include formal instruction, practical exercises, feedback, mentoring, supervision, and reflective learning. These activities are expected to contribute to the development of leadership competencies, particularly competencies relevant to communication, decision-making, emotional regulation, conflict recognition, and adaptive responses. Consistent with Proposition 1, the framework therefore places greater theoretical emphasis on

development approaches that combine instruction with practice and feedback than on instruction considered in isolation.

Leadership competencies are subsequently expected to contribute to conflict-management capacity. This relationship reflects the proposition that leaders who can recognize conflict dynamics, communicate appropriately, regulate responses, and select proportionate interventions are better positioned to manage interpersonal and organizational conflict. However, the framework treats this relationship as conditional on legal authority, organizational procedures, operational circumstances, and available resources. Conflict-management capacity should therefore not be interpreted as unrestricted discretion.

A distinct pathway connects conflict-management capacity with mediation competence. Mediation is treated as a specialized and context-dependent capability rather than as a universally appropriate police response. Where the circumstances of a dispute, safety considerations, statutory requirements, and operational responsibilities permit, mediation-oriented competencies may support constructive dispute resolution. Where those conditions are absent, other lawful conflict-management or enforcement responses may be more appropriate. This distinction is particularly important in law enforcement, where conflict resolution must remain consistent with legal duties and proportionality requirements.

Organizational learning operates as a cross-cutting mechanism within the framework. Training and development are expected to influence practice only when knowledge and competencies can be transferred to operational settings. Practice generates operational experience, while supervision, feedback, reflection, and evaluation can transform that experience into organizational learning. The framework therefore incorporates a feedback pathway from operational experience to organizational learning and subsequently to renewed leadership development. This pathway reflects the possibility that lessons arising from practice may inform future training priorities, supervisory practices, and organizational procedures.

The framework proposes two analytically distinct outcome pathways. First, effective conflict management and organizational learning may contribute to organizational effectiveness, particularly through improved coordination, cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. Second, leadership and conflict-management practices that support respectful, impartial, and transparent interactions may contribute to procedural fairness, which may in turn influence public trust and institutional legitimacy. These constructs are distinguished conceptually: procedural fairness concerns perceptions of the fairness of procedures and interactions, trust concerns expectations regarding police reliability and appropriate conduct, and legitimacy concerns the perceived rightful authority and appropriateness of the police institution.

The framework also recognizes a potential reciprocal relationship between organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy. Legitimacy may facilitate public cooperation and thereby support organizational effectiveness, while effective institutional performance may influence public evaluations of police institutions. However, this relationship is presented as a theoretical possibility rather than as an empirically established causal relationship. The present conceptual study does not determine the direction, strength, or conditions of this relationship.

Finally, legal and organizational context functions as a boundary condition across the framework. In Hungarian law enforcement, police responsibilities are defined by statutory duties concerning public security, the protection of persons and property, cooperation, impartiality, and proportionality. Accordingly, leadership development and conflict-management competencies cannot be separated from the institutional and legal environment in which police officers exercise their responsibilities. The framework therefore treats these contextual conditions as factors that may enable, constrain, strengthen, or interrupt the proposed relationships.

Taken together, the framework represents leadership development as part of a continuing learning cycle rather than as a one-directional training intervention. It specifies how leadership development may contribute to conflict-management capability, how mediation competence may emerge as a context-dependent response capability, how operational experience may generate organizational learning, and how these processes may contribute to organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy through distinct pathways.

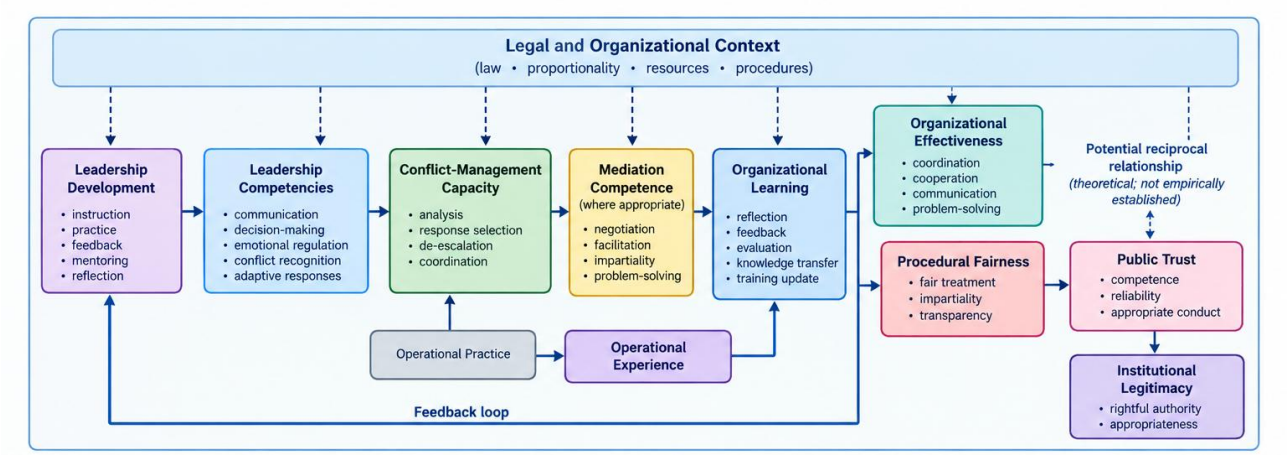


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking leadership development, conflict-management capacity, organizational learning, effectiveness, and institutional legitimacy in Hungarian law enforcement.

Figure description. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationships among the key components of the conceptual framework. Leadership development, incorporating instruction, practice, feedback, mentoring, and reflection, is expected to strengthen leadership competencies, including communication, decision-making, emotional regulation, conflict recognition, and adaptive responses. These competencies contribute to conflict-management capacity, which may support mediation competence when the circumstances and legal and operational conditions permit. Operational practice and experience provide a basis for organizational learning through reflection, feedback, evaluation, and knowledge transfer. Organizational learning can subsequently inform and update leadership development through a continuous feedback loop. Conflict-management and leadership practices may contribute to organizational effectiveness through improved coordination, cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. Respectful, impartial, and transparent interactions may support procedural fairness, which may contribute to public trust and institutional legitimacy. The framework also recognizes a potential reciprocal relationship between organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy; however, this relationship is presented as a theoretical possibility rather than an empirically established causal relationship. Legal and organizational context—including law, proportionality, resources, and organizational procedures—functions as a boundary condition that may enable, constrain, strengthen, or interrupt the proposed relationships.

Table 1. Components and theoretical relationships in the proposed framework

Component	Theoretical role	Relationship or condition
Leadership development	Organizational input	Builds competencies when learning is relevant and supported by practice and feedback.
Leadership competencies	Proximal mechanism	Support conflict diagnosis, communication, negotiation, and ethical judgment.
Conflict-management capacity	Response-selection capability	Encompasses prevention, de-escalation, negotiation, formal referral, and mediation where appropriate.
Mediation competence	Specialized capability	Applicable only when the dispute, safety conditions, consent, and legal context make mediation suitable.
Organizational learning	Cross-cutting process and feedback mechanism	Supports training transfer and converts experience into revised routines and future development.
Organizational effectiveness	Internal organizational outcome	May improve through coordination and cooperation; depends on resources and implementation.
Procedural fairness, public trust, and institutional legitimacy	External relational/institutional outcome	May be supported by fair and respectful practice; trust and legitimacy are not guaranteed by operational performance.
Legal and organizational context	Boundary conditions	Shapes which responses are lawful, feasible, proportionate, and institutionally supported.

5 Findings and critical discussion

5.1 Findings of the conceptual synthesis

The synthesis yields four principal findings. First, leadership development is best understood as a potential governance mechanism rather than as a training input that automatically produces organizational change. Its contribution depends on the relevance of competencies developed and the conditions under which they can be applied. Second, conflict management is broader than mediation. A competent leader must be able to distinguish when dialogue or mediation is appropriate from situations requiring formal procedures, command decisions, or immediate protective action. Third, organizational learning provides the bridge between individual development and organizational adaptation by supporting transfer, reflection, and feedback. Fourth, effectiveness and legitimacy are related but distinct outcomes; the framework therefore proposes separate internal and external pathways and allows for reciprocal influence.

Mini-case 1: Experiential learning and police leadership

Evidence from Norwegian policing illustrates the importance of operational experience in the development of police leadership. Filstad, Karp, and Glomseth examined 27 Norwegian police leaders through shadowing and interviews and found that leaders learned primarily through practising leadership in everyday police work and within the organizational culture of policing [10]. This finding provides empirical support for the framework's feedback pathway between operational experience, organizational learning, and leadership development. Importantly, the case does not demonstrate that experiential learning automatically produces effective leadership. Rather, it indicates that leadership development extends beyond formal instruction and is embedded in the practical environment in which police leaders exercise responsibility. For the present framework, this supports the proposition that training and leadership development should be connected to opportunities for practice, reflection, feedback, and organizational learning.

Mini-case 2: Transfer and design of police training

A German case study provides a complementary example concerning the transfer of police training into operational competence. Staller et al. examined the structure and delivery of police use-of-force training through systematic observation of a police training programme and found limited alignment between training objectives, learning tasks, and operational requirements, together with relatively limited engagement in representative problem-solving activities [9]. The authors consequently emphasized the importance of aligning police training with field requirements, including conflict-resolution skills. This case is relevant to the present framework because it demonstrates why formal participation in training should not be treated as equivalent to competency development or successful transfer to practice. It also supports the framework's emphasis on practice-oriented learning, organizational reflection, and the conditions required for leadership and conflict-management competencies to become operational capabilities.

These cases should be interpreted as **supporting evidence for particular mechanisms rather than as direct validation of the proposed framework**. The Norwegian case primarily supports the experiential-learning and leadership-development relationship, whereas the German case highlights the importance of training design, practice, and transfer. Neither study concerns Hungarian law enforcement, and their findings should therefore not be treated as evidence of how the proposed relationships operate in the Hungarian Police. Instead, they provide comparative evidence from other law-enforcement settings that strengthens the theoretical plausibility of the mechanisms proposed in this study. The Hungarian-specific institutional and legal conditions are addressed separately in Section 3.7.

5.2 Counterarguments and boundary conditions

A first counterargument is that mediation-oriented leadership may be impractical in high-stakes policing. Police leaders cannot defer urgent action when there is an immediate threat to life, a need to secure a scene, a risk of evidence loss, or a statutory duty to act. This objection is valid if mediation is treated as a universal method. The framework rejects that interpretation. Mediation is one option within a broader conflict-management repertoire and is subject to legal authority, operational safety, suitability, and voluntary participation. Training should therefore strengthen response selection and professional judgment rather than promote mediation regardless of context.

A second concern is that hierarchy and organizational culture may constrain the application of collaborative competencies. Leaders may learn communication and mediation techniques but be discouraged from using them by time pressure, staffing shortages, rigid performance expectations, or norms that interpret dialogue as weakness. These conditions can interrupt the pathway between competence and practice. Leadership-development programmes should consequently be accompanied by supervisory support, scenario-based practice, feedback, and organizational policies that clarify where collaborative responses are appropriate.

A third concern is the risk of circular reasoning: if effective leadership is defined as leadership that improves effectiveness and legitimacy, the framework would merely restate its outcomes. To avoid this, the constructs should be operationalized separately in future research. Leadership competencies should be assessed through observable behaviors or validated measures; conflict-management capacity through response selection and handling of scenarios; organizational effectiveness through specified internal indicators; and legitimacy through perceptions of fairness, trust, or rightful authority. The model remains a set of propositions until those constructs and relationships are tested independently.

The framework also distinguishes organizational effectiveness from institutional legitimacy while recognizing a potential reciprocal relationship between them. Conflict-management capacity and organizational learning may contribute to organizational effectiveness through improved coordination, cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. Separately, respectful, impartial, and transparent interactions may support procedural fairness and public trust, which can contribute

to institutional legitimacy. Legitimacy may subsequently facilitate cooperation with the police and thereby support organizational effectiveness. Conversely, sustained organizational effectiveness may influence public evaluations of institutional performance and legitimacy. This reciprocal relationship is presented as a theoretical possibility rather than an empirically established causal pathway and therefore requires future empirical testing. The distinction is analytically important because organizational effectiveness concerns the capacity of the police organization to perform its functions and achieve operational objectives, whereas institutional legitimacy concerns perceptions that police authority is appropriate, rightful, and exercised in an acceptable manner. The two outcomes may therefore be related without being treated as equivalent.

Finally, the model may not apply equally across all police functions or jurisdictions. Workplace disputes, community interactions, public-order operations, and criminal investigations differ in their legal requirements, risks, and scope for voluntary dialogue. Hungarian law enforcement itself is not necessarily uniform across units, ranks, or operational environments. The model should therefore be used as a framework for differentiated inquiry, not as a claim that a single leadership-development programme will produce identical outcomes throughout the institution.

5.3 Contribution and generalizability

The framework contributes by integrating four analytical levels: individual leadership competencies, organizational conflict-management processes, organizational learning, and institutional outcomes. It adds two distinctions that are important for theory development: mediation is a conditional subset of conflict management, and organizational effectiveness is not equivalent to legitimacy. It also specifies organizational learning as a process connecting training and practice and generating feedback, rather than leaving it as an undefined moderator.

The Hungarian context is central to the framework's boundary conditions because police responsibilities are legally defined and include both law-enforcement functions and duties concerning human rights and cooperation [2]. At the same time, the model may be relevant to other Central and Eastern European or international law-enforcement systems that face comparable tensions between hierarchical authority, professionalization, operational performance, and public accountability. Such transfer should be assessed rather than presumed. Comparative research should examine differences in legal mandates, training systems, organizational culture, and public expectations before drawing general conclusions.

6 Recommendations for Hungarian law enforcement

The recommendations below are prioritized as proposals derived from the conceptual synthesis, not as findings from an evaluation of current Hungarian police training. Their adoption should be aligned with applicable law, existing training structures, available resources, and institutional responsibilities.

6.1 Priority 1: Integrate conflict-management competencies into leadership development

Leadership-development curricula should explicitly address conflict diagnosis, active listening, communication under pressure, negotiation, emotional regulation, de-escalation, ethical judgment, and decision-making about when mediation is and is not appropriate. These competencies should be taught alongside legal knowledge, command responsibilities, operational planning, and accountability, not as substitutes for them. Implementation should begin with a mapping of existing curricula to identify duplication and gaps, followed by pilot modules and review by police educators and operational leaders.

Expected outcomes include clearer response selection, improved communication, and more consistent leadership behavior in suitable situations. Implementation considerations include instructor preparation, protected training time, operational coverage, and alignment with existing legal and professional standards.

6.2 Priority 2: Improve transfer from training to operational practice

Training should combine short theoretical inputs with realistic scenarios, coached practice, structured feedback, and follow-up reflection. Supervisors should have a defined role in reinforcing competencies after formal training. Where feasible, training evaluation should distinguish participant satisfaction from learning, observed behavior, and workplace application. A staged pilot could compare pre-training scenario performance with post-training and follow-up assessments without assuming that a single short-term measure captures long-term effectiveness.

Expected outcomes include stronger retention and application of competencies. Implementation risks include staffing constraints, limited instructor capacity, and the possibility that workplace norms undermine training. These risks should be monitored rather than treated as peripheral issues.

6.3 Priority 3: Establish clear criteria for mediation suitability and referral

Police leadership guidance should distinguish mediation from general conflict management and clarify the types of disputes for which facilitated dialogue may be appropriate. Guidance should address voluntariness, impartiality, safety, power imbalance, confidentiality limits, record-keeping, referral routes, and situations in which legal or operational duties require formal action. No guidance should imply that mediation is appropriate in every police encounter or that it can replace criminal investigation, statutory enforcement, or immediate protection.

Expected outcomes include more consistent and defensible response selection. Implementation requires legal review, clear role definitions, safeguards for participants, and access to qualified mediators or appropriate referral services where necessary.

6.4 Priority 4: Institutionalize organizational learning and feedback

Leadership units and training providers should consider structured after-action reviews, mentoring, peer learning, and anonymized analysis of conflict scenarios. The purpose should be to identify learning opportunities and improve practice, while preserving accountability for misconduct and serious errors. Lessons from workplace disputes and relevant public interactions should inform revisions to training content and supervisory guidance.

Expected outcomes include improved knowledge sharing and adaptive capacity. Implementation considerations include confidentiality, staff trust, adequate time, and safeguards against using reflective learning processes to evade accountability.

6.5 Priority 5: Evaluate organizational and legitimacy outcomes separately

Any pilot or later evaluation should define indicators before implementation. Potential internal indicators include scenario-based competency scores, staff perceptions of supervisory support, resolution of workplace disputes, and evidence of training transfer. Potential external indicators, where ethically and practically feasible, include perceptions of respectful treatment, procedural fairness, and confidence in police interactions. Indicators should be interpreted cautiously and should not treat public trust as a direct proxy for operational effectiveness or vice versa.

Evaluation should combine quantitative measures with qualitative interviews, focus groups, document analysis, or case studies where access and ethics approval permit. Comparisons across units or time periods could help identify contextual differences, but causal claims would require an appropriate research design and consideration of selection effects and other explanations.

6.6 Priority 6: Build an evidence base for context-sensitive implementation

A phased approach is preferable to immediate system-wide adoption. An initial pilot could involve selected training settings or organizational units, followed by a transparent review of feasibility, staff experience, behavioral indicators, and unintended consequences. Any later expansion should be based on documented results and consultation with relevant legal, training, operational, and oversight stakeholders. Comparative research with other European law-enforcement systems may be useful, provided that legal and organizational differences are explicitly analyzed.

Table 2. Prioritized recommendations and implementation considerations

Priority area	Recommended action	Expected outcome	Implementation considerations
1. Leadership curriculum	Integrate communication, negotiation, conflict diagnosis, de-escalation, and mediation suitability into leadership education.	Improved response selection and leadership competencies.	Map current curricula; align with law and operational requirements; prepare instructors.
2. Training transfer	Use realistic scenarios, coached practice, feedback, and follow-up review.	Greater application and retention of learning.	Provide training time, supervisor support, and follow-up measures.
3. Mediation safeguards	Define eligibility, consent, safety, referral, and exclusion criteria.	More appropriate and consistent use of mediation.	Legal review; role clarity; safeguards for power imbalance and serious incidents.
4. Organizational learning	Introduce structured reviews, mentoring, and knowledge-sharing practices.	Improved learning from experience and adaptation.	Protect confidentiality while maintaining accountability; allocate staff time.
5. Evaluation	Measure competencies, workplace application, organizational outcomes, and legitimacy separately.	More credible evidence on programme value and limits.	Use multiple methods; avoid unsupported causal claims; protect data and participants.
6. Phased implementation	Pilot, review, revise, and consider comparative research before broader adoption.	Context-sensitive implementation and stronger evidence.	Engage training, operational, legal, and oversight stakeholders.

7 Conclusion

This conceptual study developed a theoretical framework for explaining how leadership development may contribute to conflict-management and mediation-oriented police governance in Hungarian law enforcement. Drawing on a qualitative narrative literature review and theoretical synthesis of scholarly, legal, and institutional sources, the study connected leadership development, leadership competencies, conflict-management capacity, mediation competence, organizational learning, organizational effectiveness, procedural fairness, public trust, and institutional legitimacy within a single conditional framework. The study does not empirically test these relationships; rather, it specifies theoretically grounded relationships and propositions that can be examined through future research.

In response to **RQ1**, the framework proposes that leadership development may contribute to mediation-oriented conflict management through the development of conflict-relevant leadership competencies, including communication, decision-making, emotional regulation, conflict recognition, and adaptive response. These competencies are expected to strengthen leaders' capacity to diagnose conflict and select appropriate responses. However, this relationship is conditional rather than automatic. The transfer of leadership development into operational competence depends on the relevance and design of training, opportunities for practice and reflection, feedback and supervision, organizational support, and the legal and operational environment in which police leaders exercise their responsibilities.

In response to **RQ2**, the framework proposes that mediation competence may contribute to constructive conflict management and, under appropriate conditions, to organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy. Mediation is treated as a context-dependent capability rather than a universal police response. Its relevance depends on the nature of the dispute, legal requirements, operational safety, proportionality, and the responsibilities of the police in a particular situation. The framework further distinguishes organizational effectiveness from procedural fairness, public trust, and institutional legitimacy. Conflict-management practices and organizational learning may contribute to effectiveness through improved coordination, communication, cooperation, and problem-solving, while fair, respectful, impartial, and transparent interactions may contribute to procedural fairness, public trust, and legitimacy. These outcomes may be interconnected, but they should not be treated as equivalent or automatically produced by mediation-oriented practices.

In response to **RQ3**, the study demonstrates theoretically that the Hungarian legal, institutional, and professional context shapes both the possibilities and the limits of mediation-oriented leadership. The Hungarian Police Act establishes important requirements concerning police duties, impartiality, proportionality, and the protection of human dignity and rights. Institutional structures for police training, leadership development, organizational development, and law-enforcement higher education further provide relevant settings for developing and transferring leadership competencies. These conditions distinguish Hungarian law enforcement from a generic model of policing. At the same time, the existence of these legal and institutional arrangements does not demonstrate that the relationships proposed in the framework have already been empirically established in Hungarian police practice.

The article's principal theoretical contribution lies in integrating established strands of research into a **conditional and feedback-oriented model rather than a linear training-to-outcome model**. Leadership development is positioned as an upstream intervention, leadership competencies and conflict-management capacity as intermediate mechanisms, mediation competence as a context-dependent capability, organizational learning as a transfer and feedback mechanism, and organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy as distinct outcome domains. A central feature of the framework is the feedback pathway from operational practice and experience to organizational learning and subsequently to renewed leadership development. This emphasizes that professional development does not end when formal training is completed; rather, operational experience, reflection, feedback, supervision, and evaluation may generate learning that informs subsequent development and organizational adaptation.

The framework also recognizes that the proposed relationships may be strengthened, weakened, or interrupted by legal obligations, operational risks, organizational procedures, organizational culture, and resource constraints. It therefore avoids assuming that leadership development or mediation training will automatically generate improved police performance or legitimacy. Similarly, the potential reciprocal relationship between organizational effectiveness and institutional legitimacy is presented as a theoretical possibility rather than an empirically established causal relationship. This conditional structure represents the principal additional explanatory value of the framework: it identifies the mechanisms, transfer points, feedback processes, and boundary conditions through which leadership development may become relevant to conflict-management practice and governance outcomes.

The study has several limitations. First, it is conceptual and does not contain primary empirical data from the Hungarian Police. The proposed relationships and propositions should therefore not be interpreted as empirically validated findings. Second, the study employs a qualitative narrative literature review rather than a systematic review and does not claim exhaustive coverage of the available literature. Third, some supporting evidence is drawn from police organizations outside Hungary. Such comparative evidence strengthens the theoretical plausibility of the proposed mechanisms but cannot establish that the same relationships operate identically within Hungarian law enforcement. Finally, the framework requires empirical testing to determine the strength, direction, and conditions of the proposed relationships.

Future research should therefore test the propositions through empirical studies involving police leaders, officers, trainers, and relevant institutional actors. Interviews, focus groups, training-document analysis, scenario-based assessment, surveys, case studies, and carefully designed evaluations of leadership-development initiatives could be combined to examine the development and transfer of conflict-management competencies. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for investigating the proposed feedback pathway from operational experience to organizational learning and subsequent leadership development. Comparative research could also assess the transferability of the framework to other Central and Eastern European law-enforcement systems while accounting for differences in legal frameworks, organizational arrangements, policing cultures, and public expectations.

For policymakers and police leaders, the immediate implication is that conflict-management development should be treated as both a professional-development and governance responsibility while preserving the primacy of legality, operational safety, proportionality, and accountability. Leadership-development initiatives should therefore begin with clearly defined competencies, appropriate practice-oriented training, opportunities for feedback and reflection, supervisory support, safeguards for context-appropriate mediation, and mechanisms for evaluating transfer into operational practice. A mediation-oriented approach is most defensible not when it seeks to replace lawful police authority, but when it enables police leaders to exercise that authority competently, proportionately, fairly, and with an informed understanding of when mediation is—and is not—appropriate.

Overall, the framework provides a theoretically grounded and context-sensitive basis for future empirical research on leadership development and conflict management in Hungarian law enforcement. Its central proposition is that leadership development should be understood not simply as the delivery of training, but as a continuing organizational process in which competencies are developed, applied in practice, evaluated through operational experience, and incorporated into organizational learning. This perspective provides a foundation for examining how mediation-oriented capabilities can contribute to effective and legitimate policing while remaining firmly embedded within the legal and institutional responsibilities of the Hungarian Police.

References

[1] G. Bouckaert, "The Neo-Weberian State: From Ideal Type Model to Reality?," UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, IIPP Working Paper No. 2022/10, London, U.K., 2022.

[2] Hungary, Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police *(1994. évi XXXIV. törvény a Rendőrségről), National Legislation Database, 1994.*

[3] S. Koerner and M. S. Staller, "Police Training Revisited—Meeting the Demands of Conflict Training in Police with an Alternative Pedagogical Approach," Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 927–938, 2021, doi: 10.1093/police/paaa080.*

[4] M. S. Staller and S. Koerner, "(Non-)Learning to Police: A Framework for Understanding Police Learning," Frontiers in Education*, vol. 7, Art. 730789, 2022, doi: 10.3389/feduc.2022.730789.*

[5] L. Mazerolle, S. Bennett, J. Davis, E. Sargeant, and M. Manning, "Legitimacy in Policing: A Systematic Review," Campbell Systematic Reviews*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. i–147, 2013, doi: 10.4073/csr.2013.1.*

[6] A. Chan, B. Bradford, and C. Stott, "A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Procedural Justice and Legitimacy in Policing: The Effect of Social Identity and Social Contexts," Journal of Experimental Criminology*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 349–406, 2025, doi: 10.1007/s11292-023-09595-5.*

[7] M. S. Staller, S. Koerner, and B. Zaiser, Eds., Police Conflict Management, Volume II: Training and Education*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-41100-7.*

[8] R. C. de Moura, A. Borges, S. Morgado, and N. Ramalho, "Police Leadership 2.0.: A Comprehensive Systematic Review of the Literature," Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, vol. 17, Art. paac068, 2023, doi: 10.1093/police/paac068.*

[9] M. S. Staller, S. Koerner, V. Heil, I. Klemmer, A. Abraham, and J. Poolton, "The Structure and Delivery of Police Use of Force Training: A German Case Study," European Journal for Security Research*, vol. 7, pp. 87–112, 2022, doi: 10.1007/s41125-021-00073-5.*

[10] C. Filstad, T. Karp, and R. Glomseth, "How Police Leaders Learn to Lead," Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 601–615, 2020, doi: 10.1093/police/pay043.*

[11] M. Emsing, M. Ghazinour, and J. Sundqvist, "Police Conflict Management: A Scoping Review," Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, vol. 39, pp. 499–508, 2024, doi: 10.1007/s11896-024-09687-6.*

[12] M. Hough, J. Jackson, B. Bradford, A. Myhill, and P. Quinton, "Procedural Justice, Trust, and Institutional Legitimacy," Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 203–210, 2010, doi: 10.1093/police/paq027.*

[13] J. M. Gau, "The Convergent and Discriminant Validity of Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy: An Empirical Test of Core Theoretical Propositions," Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 39, no. 6, pp. 489–498, 2011, doi: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2011.09.004.*

[14] Hungarian Police, "Rendőrségi Oktatási és Kiképző Központ (ROKK)," Police.hu*, Hungarian Police, Budapest, Hungary, 2026. [Online]. Available: Official Hungarian Police website.*

[15] Hungarian Police, "Újszerű vezetőképzés" [Innovative Leadership Training], Zsaru Magazin*, Police.hu, Dec. 19, 2025. [Online]. Available: Official Hungarian Police website.*

[16] G. Kovács, "The Present and Future of Leadership Training in Police Officer Education at the Faculty of Law Enforcement," in I. Ludovika International Law Enforcement Research Symposium: Conference Proceedings*, Budapest, Hungary: Hungarian Association of Police Science, 2023, pp. 76–84.*

[17] L. Christián, Z. Hautzinger, and G. Kovács, "The Present and Future of Hungarian Law Enforcement Higher Education," Hungarian Law Enforcement*, vol. 21, special issue, pp. 53–72, 2021, doi: 10.32577/mr.2021.1.ksz.4.*