

DOI 10.31558/2519-2949.2018.1.12

УДК 323:35.01:65.012.1:51

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## COOPERATIVE AFFILIATION IN THE AREA OF COOPERATIVE COMPETENCE OF PUBLIC OFFICERS ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE NEAR-ODER BORDER GUARDS DEPARTMENT

*The academic world underlines that greater attention should be paid to the development of concepts that emphasize the high competences of the public sector, the exceptional status of the public service, and a high organizational culture based on public values. Contemporarily, is necessary to create a public organizations, whose nucleus based on synergies, and hence, cooperative competencies and distinctive cooperation of workers. Participant should be aware of the need to build a network of interpersonal contacts and realize common good through joint action. An example of such an organizations are Border Guards, which have an important role in Poland's security system, protecting its borders. The most important competences of all participants in public institutions are the cooperative competencies identified for research, meaningfully cooperative affiliation. The research covered 30% of the officers of the Near-Oder Border Guards Unit, performing service in twelve organizational units, in three voivodships: lubuskie, wielkopolskie and dolnośląskie. A quasi-benchmarking method was applied in which research techniques were used: questionnaires, document analyzes, interviews, and case studies. Distinguished cooperative competencies exist basically in every social area of the organization's functioning. The degree of their universality depends on many socio-demographic characteristics. The intensity of cooperative affiliation increases with the transfer of officers through successive stages of the socialization process. There is quite clear competition in this field that should be treated by management as a constructive element. In a sense, institutional collectivism is present in the groups of border guards and should be taken into account in the management of (security) practice.*

**Key words:** cooperative competence, cooperation, affiliation, security, public officers.

### COOPERATIVE COMPETENCE OF PUBLIC OFFICERS

A review of the definitions used for the competency characteristics indicates that many aspects connected with human behavior are included in the definition. Therefore, competence should be understood as a concept, cementing different behaviors, but belonging to a specific area of professional activity. Their ownership and level can therefore be inferred from behavior (actions). Similarly, one can make conclusions on cooperative competences on the basis of behavior in the process and in the background of cooperation.

The cooperative competences of officials of public officers (groups of competencies), such that strengthen the organization's ability to cooperate and thus the process of cooperation (Kožuch, 2011), are related to the following categories (among all Kożuch, 2011; Itrich-Drabarek, 2016; Kulesza & Niziołek, 2010; Rostkowski, 2012; Gawroński, Hryszkiewicz & Truchan, 2015, Piwowarski, 2016):

- qualification, understood as formal authority to serve,
- knowledge – sharing knowledge, synergy of knowledge,
- social skills – ability to cooperate with people and influence them, understand their motives and needs, solve conflicts, etc.,
- conceptual skills, high tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to make right decisions, analyzing and solving problems, anticipating future events, "embracing", balancing the risk which is associated with achieving goals, hierarchizing the importance of problems, etc.,
- ways of communicating – exchange of information on the tasks performed,
- self-image – self-esteem, self-awareness, awareness of the value of own work in the chain of activities carried out in the whole organization,
- thinking style – understanding the meaning and value of the work done, positive attitude to the tasks performed,
- motivation – own commitment, focus on common elements,
- attitude – pride of belonging to a specific professional group and sense of dignity,
- ethical values related to among all the protection of human and civil rights, the principle of legality, the rule of law and the deepening of citizens' confidence in the state organs,

- moral qualities – among all conscientiousness understood as the ability to assume responsibilities for tasks and their performance, mutual respect, impartial execution of duties, disinterestedness, integrity,
- emotional intelligence – self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy – translating into social skills,
- personality type – the direction of interest, the way of acquiring and using information, the style of adaptation to the outside world.

By discussing the matter of cooperative competence of officials of public institutions, it is impossible to ignore the mentioned phenomenon of the ethos of service, that is, the sum of values and norms referring not to individuals, but to groups reflecting the specificity of the state and its institutions. (Bąk, 2007). Categories of behavior of officers in this area include (Jabłonowska, 2009, p. 40):

1. Understanding the meaning and value of the service performed.
2. A positive attitude of the officer towards the performed tasks and organization.
3. Awareness of the value of self-employment in the whole chain of activities performed in an organization.
4. Knowledge of professional roots and stages of the career path.
5. Interest in the performed profession.
6. Knowledge of the mission of the organization and identification of own goals and aspirations with it.
7. Pride of belonging to a particular professional group and sense of professional dignity.

It is worth noting that the types of behavior included in the ethos of service include simultaneously categories regarding cooperative competence. For example, these are: social skills, self-image, pride of belonging to a professional group, a positive attitude of an officer to the tasks and organization performed, awareness of the value of own work in the whole chain of activities performed in an organization. There is therefore a relationship between these two categories: cooperative competencies and professional ethos. Both overlap, join, penetrate and complement each other.

For the functioning of a public organization, all of the above components of the ethos of service and cooperative competence appear to be important, but from the perspective of current deliberations, the most important one should be considered to be: striving to combine individual goals of operation with the mission of the organization and focus on common elements. Intermediary elements between particular individuals and the organization is a group (Zbiegień-Maciąg, 1996). The need to pay attention to it results from the fact that it integrates the organization around a common goal while at the same time satisfying the needs and aspirations of individuals.

A special example of public service organizations is the Border Guard. It constitutes an important role in the security system of the Republic of Poland. In the field of cooperation, it creates relationships with various elements (organizations) belonging to the security management system, which is the sum of the activities of public administration, specialized intervention units, prosecutors, police, courts and other services, non-governmental organizations, private and public, individual citizens. The existing premises for inter-organizational cooperation are closely linked to the need for cooperation within the organization itself. It seems that, as the complexity of processes in the environment increases, internal, group and intergroup cooperation is becoming more and more important, based on building on the relationships that are necessary to respond appropriately to unexpected opportunities and threats (Kozuch & Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek 2013; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek 2015; Kozusznik, 2014).

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE SELECTION, CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFICERS AND ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS SUBJECT TO INVESTIGATION

The Border Guard was set up by the Border Guard Act of 12 October 1990 (Act, 1990) (hereinafter referred to as the SG Act), and began functioning on 16 May 1991 along with the dissolution of the Military Border Guard. This organization is also the heir of the institutions of the interwar period – the Border Defense Corp and Border Guard. The Border Guard (hereinafter referred to as: SG) is a unified uniformed and armed formation intended for the protection of the state border on land and at sea and border traffic control as part of the special state administration (Act, 1990, Article 1.1).

In 2016, the tasks entrusted by the Border Guard legislator carried out nine branches (figure 1):

1. Warmińsko-Mazurski Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Kętrzyn.
2. Podlaski Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Białystok.
3. Bieszczadzki Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Przemyśl.
4. Śląsko-Małopolski Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Racibórz.
5. Near-Oder Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Krosno Odrzańskie.
6. Sea Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Gdańsk.

7. Nadwiślański Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Warsaw.
8. Nadbużański Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Chełm.
9. Karpacki Department of Border Guards with headquarters in Nowy Sącz.



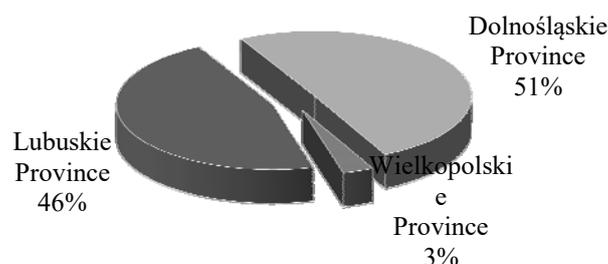
**Figure 1. Border Guards Departments**

Source: own elaboration based on: (Map of corruption threats, 2015).

The research was carried out in 2016, in all twelve organizational units of the Near-order Border Guard Unit, including five in the Lubuskie Province (four border guards – including the Polish-German border crossing in Świecko and the branch office), two from the Wielkopolska Province (at the airport of Poznań – Ławica) and five from the Dolnośląskie Voivodship (including Zgorzelec – on the section protecting the border section of the Polish-Czech and Polish-German state border and Wrocław – Strachowice Airport).

The study covered three hundred and ninety officers\*, according to the selection of the sample. The empirical analysis of the social category comes from the different social backgrounds of the three voivodships mentioned. They are combined by common service in border guards, but the specificity of the organizational unit is different: the number of officers employed in the unit, the number of people in the unit, and the characteristics of the officers, among others: degree in the corps, service internship, total seniority, education, gender, place of residence. The respondents were not surveyed in terms of the specificity of the departments in which they serve, assuming, as a common denominator, the category "officer".

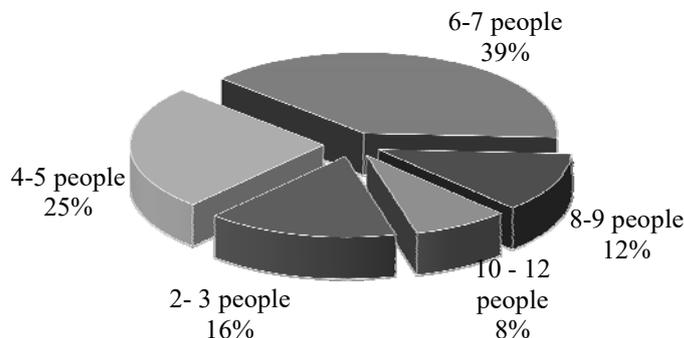
Targeted groups of employees were selected according to the number of officers in the organizational unit. The study covered 30% of the officers of the entire unit. The percentage distribution of respondents in individual organizational units ranges from 1% to 21.9%. The study was conducted in structures employing a different number of officers. This is conditional on the location of the units and the scope of their responsibilities. At the branch offices, there are a dozen to about one hundred eighty people working. The exception is the branch office in Krosno Odrzańskie, employing the highest number of officers. The distribution of respondents surveyed by province is shown in figure 2.



**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of respondents with division into voivodships**

Source: Own elaboration based on research results.

Depending on the size of organizational units, empirical analysis covered the employee groups of officers from a few to a dozen or so people. The largest researched number were six-person and seven-person teams – most often found in NoSG organizational units (figure 3).



**Figure 3. The size of the research groups tested**

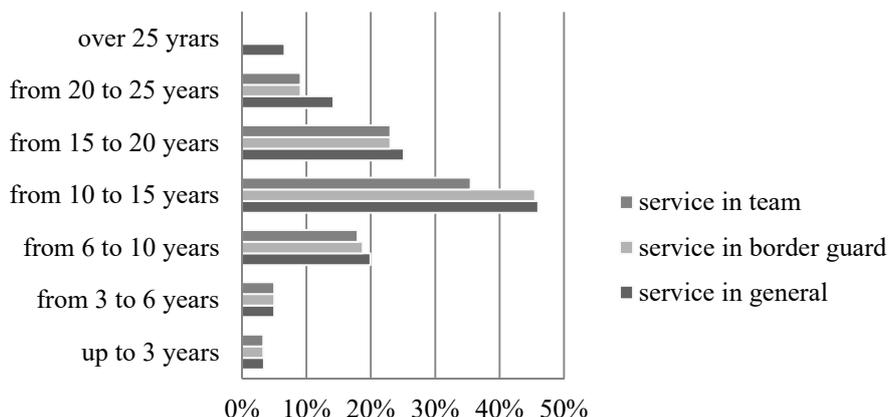
Source: own elaboration based on research results.

The study covered three hundred and ninety respondents, including 32.5% of women and 67.3% of men:

- from 30 years old – 3,8%,
- from 31 to 35 years old – 26,1%,
- from 36 to 40 years old – 43,1%,
- from 41 to 45 years old – 18,0%,
- from 46 to 50 years old – 9%.

The majority – 67.7% of respondents – have higher education and every third of them – 32.3% – a secondary level of education.

Seniority of individual respondents is as follows (figure 4):



**Figure 4. Respondent's seniority**

Source: own elaboration based on research results.

The highest number of respondents (about 40%) are officers with ten to fifteen years of seniority, with the majority (38.4%) for whom being a border guards is the first job. The greatest internal fluctuation is seen among the surveyed serving in the formation from 10 to 15 years. Every fourth person has already acquired pension rights and does not serve more than 25 years. New staff resources have arrived at the border guards from six to ten years ago and today represent almost 15% of all officers.

Another element characteristic of the examined population is the degree in the corps (table 1).

Table 1

## Degree in the corps

Category	N	%
Privates	3	0,8
Non-commissioned officers	117	30,0
Ensign	178	45,6
Officers	92	23,6
Total	390	100,0

Source: own elaboration based on research results.

The most numerous group, nearly half, is the corps of officers (junior officers, officers, senior officers, staff officers, senior staff officers). Nearly every third officer is a non-commissioned officer (corporal, platoon, sergeant, senior sergeant, staff sergeant), one in five – an officer (excluding generals – second-lieutenant, lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant colonel, colonel). Only one officer per hundred (1%) is a "private". Taking into account the age of the respondents, the persons with service between the tenth and thirteenth year are the most numerous of the ensign corps. Therefore, it can be concluded that the officers care about the maintenance of work and promotion. Almost all surveyed officers (99%) participate in various types of training – advanced and specialized, and mandatory for promotion – in the scope of primary, non-commissioned, ensign and officer schools. Border guard education is a very important element of its development. "It is one of the goals of the professionalization process in carrying out tasks, influencing the personal as well as the whole formation image" (Gawroński et al., 2015, p.138).

Another element of the characteristics of the study of the congregation is the place of residence. The results related to it are as follows: five per hundred officers live in a voivodship city (the survey includes three voivodships with four voivodship cities: Wrocław, Poznań, Zielona Góra and Gorzów Wielkopolski), 65% are urban citizens (not voivodship) and less than 1/3 inhabits villages in the voivodships: lubuskie, wielkopolskie and dolnoslaskie (figure 5).

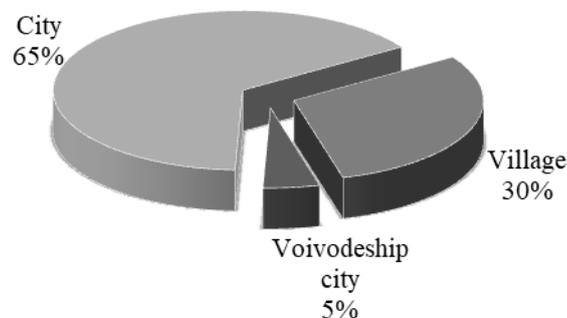


Figure 5. Respondents' place of residence

Source: own elaboration based on research results.

In summary, the surveyed officers of the Near-Oder Border Guard Unit are, for the most part, men (although there appears to be an increase in the number of women in service), to a large extent mature people (43% respondents from thirty-six to forty years old), which undoubtedly determines many characteristics of the analyzed community. Officials are learning and advancing. They get professional degrees – almost half belong to the ensign corps. They mostly live in cities. The service is performed in a number of small, medium and large structures employing between a dozen and a hundred and eighty officers, with the exception of the branch command (several hundred). In the branches, the most numerous are six- and seven-person teams in which fluctuation is low and probably affects the durability of relationships and joint realization of tasks.

Formulating research problems, based on the literature of the subject (Herman & Oleksyn & Stańczyk, 2016; Kożuch, 2011; Kożuch & Sułkowski, 2015; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2015; Rostkowski, 2012; Sidor-Rządkowska, 2013; Sikorski, 2012, 2014; Sułkowski, 2012a, 2012b; et al.) a choice of variables was made

that may be present in the border guard organizational units in the area of cooperative competencies, including those listed:

- ability to interact understood as perceiving the need and necessity for cooperation,
- willingness to cooperate,
- self-fulfillment through interaction through individual activity for the benefit of the group through honest and diligent cooperation in the group, and caring for a good opinion about the group,
- satisfaction with group work understood as commitment to work for a group and identifying with it,
- cooperative affiliation, manifested by the approval of the individual in the group realized through mutual action and mutual help,

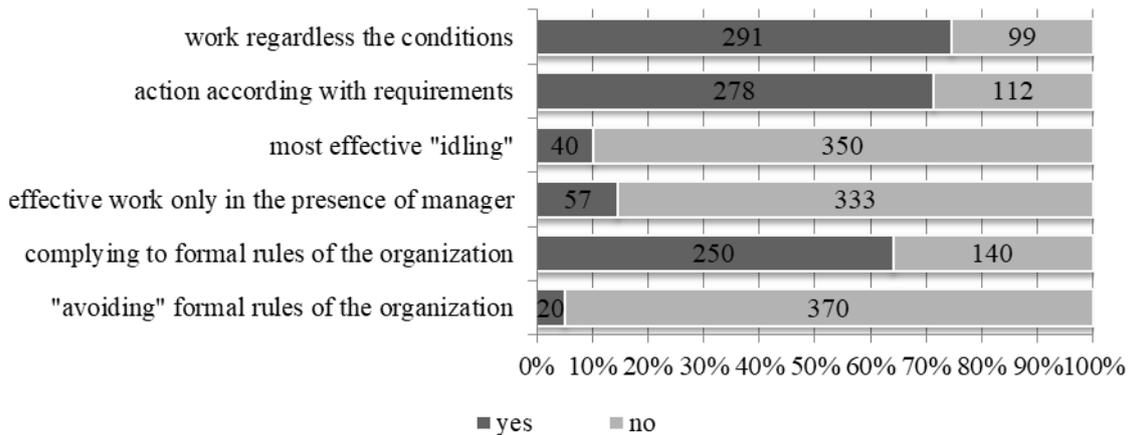
The analysis, for the purposes of the article, will be the last one.

**COOPERATIVE AFFILIATION OF OFFICERS – RESEARCH RESULTS**

Another component, necessary to build a culture of cooperation in border guards, is cooperative affiliation, manifested by the approval of the individual in the group through shared action and mutual assistance. Its acquisition or "inclusion in the family" consists, among others of:

- effective work regardless of its conditions (74,5%),
- action in compliance with management requirements (71,2%),
- respect for formal rules of the organization (64,2%),
- but it is not based on:
- effective work only in the presence of the manager (85,4%),
- the opinion that formal rules of the organization should be avoided as a principle (94,8%),
- the most effective "hanging about" (89,6%).

Figure 6 shows the results of the study, including the variables mentioned.



**Figure 6. Approval in the group and behavior of the officers**

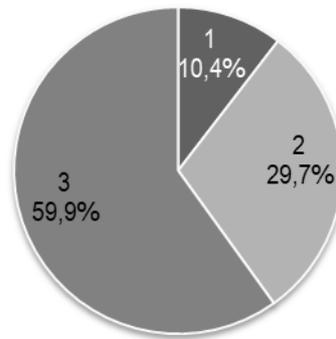
Source: own elaboration based on research results.

The highest approval in the group (from 90% to 100%) is achieved by persons serving in small institutions (structures employing from 40 to 70 people working in several teams). In departments employing more than seventy officers, the respondents are approved in the group to an average degree. These results correspond to the concept of primary and secondary groups (Cooley, 1962; Newcomb, 1962; Hare, 1992), due to the increasing number of members in the group. When more and more people are involved in a given relationship, it is increasingly difficult to know each other. This confirms the principle that in less numerous groups where it is easier to enter into direct interactions, the individual feels more endorsed than in more numerous groups.

It is worth pointing out that the approval of the surveyed border guard groups is more a result of what rules should not be followed (higher attendance) than what is required. Teams have predominant, not prescriptive. The subordination of individuals to group norms is not determined solely by the sanctions a group may apply to a "disobedient" member. The results indicate a high level of self-control in the groups through the first type of norms. It confirms the assumption that officers stay in a team long enough to assimilate to its norms and begin to believe that they are "the only legitimate ones" or that obedience to

these norms becomes a habit. There was no relationship between the approval of the individual in the group and the age or seniority in service. It follows that norms are internalized internally fairly quickly. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the need to influence the behavior of group members through prescriptive standards and a system of rewards.

Collaborative affiliation also includes a joint action based on the possibility of self-reliance and mutual help. Among other things, one of its indicators is the attitude towards a new officer. The results are similar to other indicators in this category (figure 7).



*Legend:*

1 – natural behavior, just like the rest, kindly and culturally, it depends on how he behaves (every tenth officer),

2 – patiently and with kindness, tolerance, approval and acceptance, forbearance, clearly determine tasks, familiarity with the specifics of teamwork (almost every third officer),

3 – friendly with acceptance, openness, care, help with completion of tasks, help in every field of service, support, dialogue, teach, increase difficulty of tasks, share experiences, emphasize competences and expertise, support – so he is not afraid of responsibility (nearly 60% of respondents).

**Figure 7. Cooperative affiliation and a newly appointed officer**

Source: own elaboration based on research results.

The officers want to help new, of which nearly 60% believe that it should be treated. There is a strong link between cooperation and gender. Women feel more affiliated through joint action – help (92%). Maybe this, as Moir and Jessel (1993) write, is due to the stronger need for acceptance in women.

## CONCLUSIONS

The investigated groups of officers are characterized by the fact that:

- they have a common purpose, object of action,
- they interact with each other,
- they know the membership criteria and are able to identify members of the group,
- they perceive themselves as team members.

The mentioned characteristics require the introduction of these observations and the conclusions of the individual objectives and the interdependence of team members in pursuit of their realization. By analyzing the cooperative competitive (not only cooperative affiliation), on the one hand – the organizational capacity was checked and, on the other, the awareness and the conditions of the fulfillment of the needs of the officers. In the case in question, as well as in others, the link between individual identity (Sikorski, 2014) and a service life of fifteen to twenty years is the most noticeable. Very many of those surveyed understand this developmental identity. The last, highest degree on the scale of the phenomena studied, is mostly left by the officers to those who are "outstanding", they treat it as an unattainable, perfect goal, that is, they can always work better and get more involved.

In border guards, one of the four dimensions of cultural background differences is distinguished, as defined by Hofstede (2000) with the name: collectivism vs. individualism, although it should be taken into account that the scale of the second of them – the so-called IDV – reflects the cultural status of the electronic mail or cell phone era, which significantly disturbed the mentioned division. The Americanization of different areas of life in Poland does not, however, change its collectivist central culture of the Middle States (Boski, 2009, p. 98). On the basis of the research of Globe (House, Hanges, Jovidan,

Dorfman & Gupta, 2004), reflecting Hofstede's research, institutional collectivism is mentioned which is measured by indicators that emphasize group interests at the "expense" of individual achievements and benefits. The operationalization of this notion is independent of psychological functioning, corresponding to the private or public level of reconciling relationships with people. Institutional collectivism practices are associated with organizational efficiency understood as: performance level, future orientation and avoiding uncertainty. (Sikorski 2014). It can therefore be said that, in the case of border guards, institutional collectivity is, in a sense, institutionalized and should be taken into account in management practice rather than treating the mentioned phenomenon as a negatively correlated variable with group identity but as an important element of cooperative behavior – which the results of the performed research are indicating at.

**Notes:**

\* The study covered both women and men. In the analysis of the test results, only for simplicity, the term "officer" is used.

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**Млодзік Л. Здатність до співробітництва в сфері кооперативної компетенції публічних посадових осіб на прикладі офіцерів Прикордонного загону на Одері (Республіка Польща)**

Академічний світ підкреслює, що більшої уваги слід приділяти розробці концепції, які акцентують високі компетенції публічного сектору, винятковий статус державної служби та високу організаційну культуру, засновану на суспільних цінностях. Нагальним є створення публічних організацій, які базуються в своїй діяльності на синергії, а отже, на компетенції кооперації та відмінній співпраці працівників. Члени таких організацій повинні усвідомлювати необхідність побудови мережі міжособистісних контактів та забезпечення суспільного блага шляхом спільних дій. Прикладом таких організацій є прикордонна служба, яка відіграє важливу роль у системі безпеки Польщі, захищаючи її кордони. Найбільш важливими компетенціями всіх учасників державних установ є кооперативні компетенції, визначені для дослідження, значною налаштованістю на співпрацю. Дослідження охопило 30% офіцерів Прикордонного загону на Одері, які виконують службу в 12 організаційних підрозділах, у трьох воєводствах: Любуське, Великопольське та Нижньосілезьке. Був застосований метод квазі-бенчмаркінгового аналізу, в якому використовувались методи дослідження: анкети, аналіз документів, інтерв'ю та тематичні дослідження. Визначні кооперативні компетенції існують в основному в кожній соціальній сфері функціонування організацій. Ступінь їх універсальності залежить від багатьох соціально-демографічних характеристик. Інтенсивність налаштованості на кооперацію зростає з проходженням офіцерами послідовних етапів процесу соціалізації. У цій галузі є чітка конкуренція, яка повинна розглядатися керівництвом як конструктивний елемент. У певному сенсі інституційний колективізм присутній у групах прикордонників, і його слід враховувати в процесах управління.

**Ключові слова:** кооперативна компетентність, співпраця, приналежність, безпека, посадові особи.