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PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC LEADERS: A BASELINE STUDY BASED ON A DIAGNOSTIC SURVEY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ЕФЕКТИВНИХ ДЕРЖАВНИХ УПРАВЛІНЦІВ: ЕМПІРИЧНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ НА ОСНОВІ ДІАГНОСТИЧНОГО ОПИТУВАННЯ ФАХІВЦІВ У СФЕРІ ПУБЛІЧНОГО УПРАВЛІННЯ

This article presents an empirical investigation into the psychological characteristics that define effective leadership in the public administration sector of Ukraine. In the context of rapid socio-political transformations and ongoing digitalisation, public leaders are increasingly expected to demonstrate not only strategic thinking and policy expertise, but also emotional intelligence, stress resilience, and cognitive flexibility. The study aims to establish a psychological profile of effective public leaders and assess their readiness to navigate the challenges of institutional transformation and digital governance. To achieve this, a mixed-method diagnostic survey was administered online to a sample of 338 civil servants from mid- and lower-level positions across various sectors of governance. The questionnaire, originally developed in Ukrainian, included both quantitative and qualitative components and underwent a validation process to ensure content reliability and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82). Descriptive statistics revealed that emotional intelligence, stress resilience, communication skills, and strategic thinking were perceived as the most essential traits for effective leadership. Correlation analysis further indicated strong interrelations among these psychological competencies, underscoring their synergistic nature. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses highlighted the critical role of social learning, feedback mechanisms, institutional adaptation, and digital transformation in shaping leadership behaviours. The findings suggest that leadership development is not only an individual psychological process but also a social and organisational one, heavily influenced by political context, bureaucratic constraints, and organisational culture. Building on the findings, the study introduces a structural-functional integrated model that offers a holistic synthesis of psychological, social, and institutional dimensions of leadership development. This model serves as a comprehensive framework for designing future training programs and policy reforms. The research contributes to the evolving discourse on public leadership by bridging theoretical constructs with practical insights. Future studies should focus on the design and empirical testing of the proposed model using longitudinal methods and comparative data to enhance its applicability and impact.

Key words: public leadership, emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, strategic thinking, stress resilience, public administration, leadership development.

У цій статті представлено знахідки емпіричного дослідження психологічних характеристик, що визначають ефективне лідерство у сфері публічного управління в Україні. В умовах стрімких соціально-політичних трансформацій і триваючої цифровізації від публічних лідерів очікується не лише стратегічне мислення та політична обізнаність, а й емоційний інтелект, стресостійкість і когнітивна гнучкість. Метою дослідження є формування психологічного портрета ефективних публічних лідерів та оцінка їхньої готовності долати виклики інституційної трансформації й цифрового врядування. З цією метою було проведено онлайн-опитування з використанням змішаного методу діагностики, в якому взяли участь 338 державних службовців середньої та нижчої ланки з різних секторів управління. Анкета, спочатку розроблена українською мовою, включала як кількісні, так і якісні компоненти й пройшла валідацію для забезпечення надійності змісту та внутрішньої узгодженості (коефіцієнт Кронбаха = 0,82). Описова статистика показала, що емоційний інтелект, стресостійкість, комунікативні навички та стратегічне мислення сприймаються як найважливіші риси ефективного лідера. Кореляційний аналіз засвідчив тісний взаємозв'язок між цими психологічними компетентностями, що підкреслює їхню синергійну природу. Тематичний аналіз відкритих відповідей акцентував ключову роль соціального навчання, механізмів зворотного зв'язку, інституційної адаптації та цифрової трансформації у формуванні лідерської поведінки. Результати дослідження свідчать, що розвиток лідерства є не лише індивідуальним психологічним процесом, але й соціальним та організаційним явищем, на яке суттєво впливають політичний контекст, бюрократичні обмеження та організаційна культура. Спираючись на отримані результати, у дослідженні представлено структурно-функціональну інтегровану модель, що пропонує цілісний синтез психологічних, соціальних

та інституційних вимірів розвитку лідерства. Ця модель слугує всеохопною основою для проєктування майбутніх програм підготовки кадрів та реформ у політиці. Дослідження робить внесок у розвиток наукового дискурсу щодо публічного лідерства, поєднуючи теоретичні конструкти з практичними висновками. Перспективним напрямом для подальших досліджень є розробка та емпірична перевірка запропонованої моделі з використанням лонгітюдних методів та порівняльних даних з метою підвищення її прикладної цінності та впливовості.

Ключові слова: *публічне лідерство, емоційний інтелект, когнітивна гнучкість, стратегічне мислення, стресостійкість, публічне управління, розвиток лідерства.*

The twenty-first century has seen significant sociopolitical shifts and fast pace digitalisation, radically changing the expectations put on public-sector leadership. In the settings of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), public leaders are expected not only manage resources and implement policies but also demonstrate psychological capability and emotional intelligence in handling complex social challenges [9; 14]. Leadership in public administration increasingly relies on a combination of strategic foresight, emotional self-regulation, and cognitive flexibility to successfully cope with dynamic environments and build resilient institutions [6; 12]. Unlike corporate leadership, public sector leadership is governed by the principles of accountability, transparency, and public service, making its psychological dimension particularly salient [2; 16]. In this regard, the investigation aimed to establish a psychological profile of effective public leaders and assess the readiness of current leadership to meet the evolving demands of digital governance and institutional transformation seems relevant.

Contemporary psychological research highlights the importance of the connection between emotional intelligence, stress resilience, and adaptive capacity in shaping leadership effectiveness in public administration [11, 17]. These psychological qualities significantly affect the ability of a leader to inspire teams, cope with crises, and facilitate innovation – particularly in settings marked by political uncertainty, rising public expectations, and the challenges of digital transformation [5; 15]. The trait theory [13], behavioural approaches [3], and adaptive leadership models [6; 7] provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for this article in terms of conceptualising leadership as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, cognitive, strategic, and behavioural components. The recent developments in psycho-biological and neuroleadership paradigms also provide theoretical background for the study as these consider the integration of emotional intelligence, stress resilience, and cognitive adaptability as critical leadership traits in public governance [4; 10].

Despite growing scholarly interest in transformational and digital leadership models [1; 8], empirical studies focused on the psychological characteristics of effective public leaders remain limited, especially in the Ukrainian context. A critical gap exists in systematically identifying which psychological competencies are prioritised by public sector professionals themselves and how these traits correlate with leadership effectiveness. This study addresses that gap through a diagnostic survey that serves as a foundational assessment of current psychological leadership attributes within public administration.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to establish a psychological profile of effective public leaders and assess the readiness of current leadership to meet the evolving demands of digital governance and institutional transformation. This study's research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What psychological attributes are deemed necessary for effective leadership in public administration in the era of digital governance and institutional transformation?

RQ2: How well do perceived psychological qualities correspond with markers of leadership preparation, such as self-assessed preparedness for digital governance and adaptation to institutional change?

The methodology of this study relied on a mixed-method, survey-based design aimed at collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The diagnostic survey entitled "Assessment of Psychological Characteristics of Effective Leaders in Public Administration" was designed, validated and administered in Ukrainian language. The questionnaire included sections on demographic information of the respondents, on their perceptions of the importance and development of psychological traits, and open-ended questions to gather their feedback. The questionnaire was administered online via Google forms and distributed randomly via the link to a total of 338 civil servants participated in the survey being the sample consisted of representatives from mid- and lower-level public administration positions, working across various sectors such as local government, central governmental executive bodies, and public agencies. The survey instrument comprised 27 close-ended items with the blocks such as "Demographic data" consisting of 7 close-ended questions, Block I: Importance of Psychological Traits with 1 multiple-choice question to select up to 5 traits, Block II: Influence

on Leadership Effectiveness with 1 multiple-choice question to select up to 5 traits; Block III: Competency Assessment consisting of 16 trait-based Likert scale items, Block IV: Self-assessment and Development with 2 close-ended questions (1 rated on a Likert scale, and 1 multiple-choice with up to 3 selections) to assess perceived importance and development of psychological competencies, and multiple-choice questions capturing which traits were considered most critical for leadership. The key psychological attributes included emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, strategic thinking, stress resilience, and communication skills, among others. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in psychology and public administration. Items were refined based on expert feedback to align with theoretical constructs and practical relevance. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with the main scales achieving acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$). For the categorical items where inter-rater agreement was relevant, Fleiss's Kappa was calculated, yielding a moderate agreement coefficient ($k = 0.58$), supporting the reliability of categorical judgments of the psychology experts and public administration civil servants.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics analysis to explore frequencies and averages, and correlation analysis was performed using *Jamovi* statistical software (can be accessed via: https://www.jamovi.org/) to identify the relationships between perceived psychological traits and indicators of leadership readiness. This analytical approach was especially relevant to address the second research question. Additionally, qualitative data drawn from open-ended responses were examined using thematic analysis. This allowed the researchers to identify the perceived barriers to competency development and suggestions for improving training programmes.

The key findings of this study are presented in accordance with the research questions outlined above.

RQ1. Key Psychological Competencies for Effective Public Sector Leadership: A Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive statistics underscore that stress resilience (81.61%), communication skills (78.24%), strategic thinking (75.36%), and emotional intelligence (72.52%) emerged as the most frequently cited competencies. These findings suggest that the respondents prioritise psychological attributes that enable stability under pressure, clarity in communication, and long-term vision in navigating complex institutional environments. Table 1 summarises the average importance ratings and critical

selection frequency for each core trait. Notably, all traits received mean ratings above 4.3 on a 5-point scale, indicating a uniformly high valuation of these competencies.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Traits

#	Psychological trait	Most frequent response, (%)	Mean importance rating (M)	SD
1	Stress resilience	81.61	4.83	0.52
2	Communication skills	78.24	4.71	0.58
3	Strategic thinking (strategic cognitive capacity)	75.36	4.58	0.55
4	Emotional Intelligence	72.52	4.47	0.59

RQ2. Correlation Between Perceived Psychological Traits and Indicators of Leadership Readiness in Public Administration

The correlation analysis, illustrated in the heatmap below (see Figure 1), reveals strong interrelationships among the key psychological traits. Emotional intelligence demonstrated high positive correlations with stress resilience ($r = 0.74$), strategic thinking ($r = 0.69$), and communication skills ($r = 0.71$). These patterns suggest that psychological competencies in public administration tend to develop synergistically, reinforcing each other in effective leadership behavior. Such findings validate the assumption that multidimensional leadership qualities are integral rather than isolated traits.
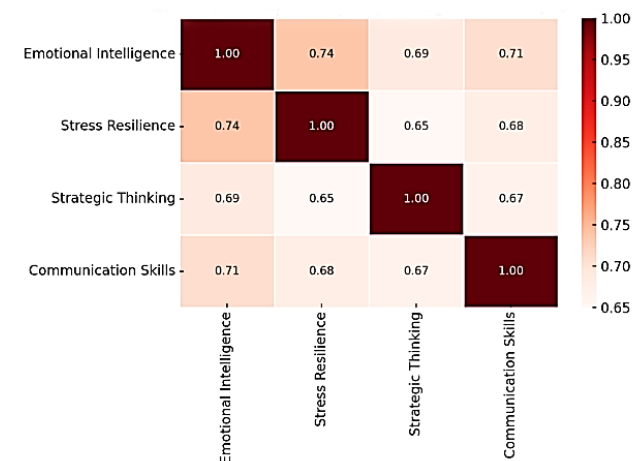

Fig. 1. Correlation Heatmap of Key Psychological Traits

Note: Darker reds indicate stronger positive correlations, while lighter shades represent weaker relationships.

The thematic analysis of open-ended responses (see Table 2) supports the hypothesis that leadership competencies evolve through dynamic social

interactions. Key themes include the influence of social learning, role models, group dynamics, and feedback mechanisms. Respondents emphasised how leadership qualities are shaped not only by individual dispositions but also by institutional environments, organisational culture, and political constraints. This suggests that effective public leaders are forged through experiential learning, adaptation to systemic demands, and continuous social engagement.

Table 2

Thematic Analysis of Leadership Development Factors

#	Theme	Illustrative response (translated and edited)
1	Social learning and role models	*I learned leadership by observing senior colleagues in crisis situations*
2	Feedback mechanisms	*Our team constantly improves based on feedback from peers and supervisors*
3	Organisational adaptation	*Managing tasks required adaptation to new workflows and institutional norms*
4	Impact of Political and Bureaucratic Context	*Sometimes political pressures and red tape hinder proactive leadership*
5	Digital transformation effects	*Remote team management and digital tools changed how I communicate decisions*
6	Psychological traits and self-assessment	*I realised emotional intelligence and stress resilience are vital for leading under pressure.*
7	Barriers to competency development	*There are few training opportunities and little mentoring support in our institution*
8	Proposals for leadership training reform	*Interactive workshops and mentorships would help more than just lectures*

As can be implied from Table 2, leadership development in public administration is deeply embedded in social and organisational contexts that extend beyond formal instruction. Respondents identified social learning and role modelling as primary pathways through which leadership competencies are acquired, underscoring the importance of observing experienced colleagues and engaging in reflective practice. Feedback mechanisms and organisational adaptation demonstrate that leadership evolves through iterative learning within institutional structures. Psychological self-awareness, including emotional intelligence and stress resilience, has emerged as critical to self-assessed leadership effectiveness, particularly in high-stakes scenarios. Notably, the table identifies structural barriers to competency development, such as restricted access to training, bureaucratic slowness,

and a lack of mentorship, revealing a disconnect between leadership expectations and institutional support. Participants responded by advocating for more dynamic, experience-based approaches of leadership training, such as workshops, simulations, and coaching. Generally, these themes point to the necessity of an integrated approach that combines individual psychological traits, group dynamics, and institutional reforms to foster effective leadership in the public sector.

Overall, the study's findings provide useful insights into the psychological foundations of effective leadership in public administration, emphasising both individual attributes and organisational factors. Emotional intelligence, stress resilience, communication skills, and strategic thinking were identified by the civil servants as important characteristics, consistent with previous research that relate these traits to adaptive leadership and organisational effectiveness in public sectors [6; 12]. The high inter-correlations among these attributes indicate that leadership efficacy in governance settings is dependent on a dynamic interaction of emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal skills, which supports models such as Van Wart's [16] competency-based leadership paradigm. One of this study's unique contributions is the inclusion of digital transformation as a crucial contextual component impacting leadership development. The emphasis on digital communication, remote team management, and technology-assisted decision-making is consistent with previous findings in e-leadership research [1; 8], yet this study situates these features within a Ukrainian governance framework, offering context-specific empirical grounding. The findings further support the concept that leadership growth is not exclusively trait-based but modified by social learning, group dynamics, and adaptability to bureaucratic and political restrictions, as highlighted in the theme analysis. This aligns with broader findings in public sector leadership literature emphasising the role of environmental and institutional factors in shaping leader behavior [2; 5]. The above findings lay the basics for our proposed structural-functional integrated model which represents a synthesis of psychological, social, and organisational dimensions, offering a holistic approach to leadership development. Unlike linear or trait-based models, our model recognises the joint importance of personal talents, social dynamics, and institutional environment which is a viewpoint gaining momentum in modern leadership thought.

The implications of this study are twofold. First, it suggests that both in-service and leadership

development programmes be redesigned to include mentorship, experiential learning, and institutional support in addition to psychological skill training. Second, it puts forward legislative actions to reduce or eliminate bureaucratic hurdles and foster organisational cultures that promote creativity and emotional resilience. These findings are especially significant for Ukraine experiencing administrative reform and digital transformation. However, the research has drawbacks which are as follows: 1) the dependence on self-reported data may induce bias, while the cross-sectional approach limits causal inference and 2) while the sample was varied across governance levels, future research might benefit from integrating senior leadership viewpoints and comparable international data.

To conclude, this study builds a basic psychological profile of effective public leaders based on empirical data obtained from Ukrainian civil officials at various administrative levels. The findings confirm that emotional intelligence, stress resilience, strategic thinking, and communication skills are regarded as critical psychological attributes for effective leadership in public administration. These competencies are not isolated, but rather interrelated, providing a dynamic matrix that promotes adaptive and resilient leadership, especially in the face of political complexity, institutional rigidity, and technological development. Importantly, the study found that leadership qualities are developed via constant social interaction, institutional adaptability, and reflective practice, rather than being intrinsic features. The influence of organisational culture, bureaucratic constraints, and political environments seem to have emerged as both enabling and limiting factors in leadership development. At the same time, the rapid advancement of digital governance was shown to demand new skill sets in digital communication, remote team management, and strategic IT-enabled decision-making. The study contributes new insights to the literature by contextualising psychological leadership competencies within the Ukrainian public sector, while also aligning with global findings on adaptive and digital leadership. It emphasises the urgent need for reform in leadership training programs- moving beyond traditional instruction toward mentorship, experiential learning, and context-aware development pathways. Despite its strengths, the research has limitations, including the use of self-reported data and a cross-sectional design, which constrain causal inference. Further research should focus on the design, operationalisation, and empirical testing of the structural-functional integrated model of leadership development, including longitudinal studies and experimental interventions to evaluate its effectiveness across different administrative contexts and governance levels.

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