

# The Essence of Effective Leadership

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**Abstract:** Leadership is more than a position or a title—it is a responsibility that requires vision, resilience, and the ability to inspire and influence others. Great leaders shape the success of organizations, foster positive workplace cultures, and drive meaningful change. But what makes a truly effective leader? Leadership in public administration is an essential factor for the efficiency, transparency and accountability of government institutions. In a context characterized by complex challenges, public leaders must adopt innovative strategies, promote good administrative practices and maintain a balance between political demands and citizens' needs. This article explores leadership models applicable in the public sector, highlights specific challenges and proposes solutions to improve institutional performance. Through a theoretical analysis and relevant case studies, we emphasize the importance of adaptive, ethical and results-oriented leadership in modern public administration.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Public Administration, Leadership Theories, E-Leadership, Digital Communication

## 1. Introduction

In a society in constant change, public administration must respond to complex challenges through effective management and a strategic overall vision. Leadership plays a critical role in this process, being a determining factor in the success or failure of government initiatives. An effective leader in public administration performs several functions, including making informed decisions, managing human and material resources, and promoting an organizational climate based on ethics and accountability.

Public administration is currently facing a number of contemporary challenges, including excessive bureaucracy, political pressures, rising citizen expectations and the need to digitize administrative processes. In this context, a high-performing leadership can contribute to optimizing decision-making processes, increasing the efficiency of public services and increasing the population's trust in state institutions. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the leadership models applicable in the public sector, to identify the characteristics of a successful leader and to propose solutions to improve administrative performance.

The concept of leadership has been extensively studied in specialized literature, but its applicability in public administration presents particularities resulting from the specifics of the activity. Unlike private sector leadership, which is primarily oriented towards profit and competitiveness, public leadership emphasizes the common good, social equity and adherence to democratic norms. In this sense, public administration leaders must adopt a leadership style based on transparency, participation and accountability to citizens.

A fundamental aspect of leadership in public administration is the ability of leaders to manage diverse teams and collaborate effectively with different stakeholders, including government authorities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. By adopting participatory and inclusive leadership practices, public leaders can stimulate innovation, improve decision-making and ensure effective implementation of public policies.

Furthermore, ethics and integrity are defining elements of successful leadership in public administration. In an environment where corruption and lack of transparency can undermine citizens' trust in institutions, it is essential that public leaders demonstrate impeccable ethical behavior and promote an organizational culture based on fairness and professionalism. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the main leadership models used in public administration, highlight the challenges faced by leaders in this sector and provide recommendations for developing effective and adaptive leadership. We will explore the different theories of leadership applicable in public administration, analyze examples of good practice and identify some future directions for improving leadership in this field. Finally, the conclusions of this study will highlight the importance of effective leadership for increasing administrative performance and for strengthening citizens' trust in public institutions.

## **2. Research methods and tools**

To carry out the study on leadership in public administration, several research methods and tools were used that can be derived from the discussions and observations presented in the text. Thus, through documentary analysis, specialized literature, relevant legislation and official reports on public administration reform and leadership models from a theoretical perspective were examined. Sources used include academic papers, case studies and government documents. This type of analysis helps identify emerging trends.

The comparative analysis was used to evaluate Romania's position in the European context and, subsequently, a comparison was made between the leadership models from public administrations in other states, highlighting good practices and aspects that can be improved.

The case studies on digital leadership in Estonia and Singapore offer concrete examples related to how technology is applied in the leadership process and give the opportunity to highlight the strengths but also the limitations of such models implemented in different countries.

Participatory observation of the analysis of how civil servants and public administration leaders interact with emerging technologies in different work environments provided me with data on current practices and trends in the field. The methods and tools used in the scientific approach allowed me a comprehensive understanding of the transformations in the field of public administration, leading me to formulate some relevant conclusions for the future.

## **3. Theoretical research of leadership in public administration**

The research approach analyzes three major leadership theories that have profoundly influenced public administration: transformational leadership, servant leadership and bureaucratic leadership. The study is based on the specialized literature, on the works of established authors and on the examples of practical application of these theories in different administrative systems. To begin with, let's explore the different theories of leadership applicable in public administration, then complemented by examples of good practices to highlight the importance of effective leadership for increasing administrative performance and for strengthening citizens' trust in public institutions.

*Transformational Leadership:* James MacGregor Burns, in his work *Leadership* (1978), introduced the concept of transformational leadership, which emphasizes a leader's ability to inspire and motivate teams to achieve significant change. The main directions of transformational leadership include: developing a clear vision for the public institution; mobilizing employees and citizens to support this vision; creating an organizational climate based on innovation and change and promoting transparency and accountability in administration. This theory has been applied in numerous government reforms, including the modernization of the Swedish public administration (Administrare.Info, 2023), where political and administrative leaders implemented innovative strategies to improve public services.

*Servant Leadership:* Robert K. Greenleaf developed the theory of servant leadership in the 1970s, highlighting the importance of the leader as a servant of the community. The main

directions of this theory include: prioritizing the needs of citizens and employees; creating an administrative environment based on collaboration and active involvement; empowering local communities in decision-making and promoting equity and access to quality public services. This approach has been successfully implemented in the Netherlands (Administrare.Info, 2019), where local administrations have developed participatory social programs, where citizens have an active role in formulating public policies.

*Bureaucratic Leadership:* Max Weber formulated the theory of bureaucratic leadership in his works on administrative structures. The essential characteristics of this model are: the application of clear rules and procedures for the management of public institutions; maintaining an impersonal and structured administrative system; using a rigid hierarchy for decision-making and avoiding personal influences in the act of governance. This model was widely used in Germany, as outlined in Max Weber's *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, where bureaucratic structures were maintained to ensure the stability and efficiency of government institutions.

From the analysis of the three theories, it follows that leadership in public administration can take various forms, each with specific advantages and limits. Transformational leadership is suitable for times of reform and change, servant leadership is ideal for administrations that prioritize citizens, and bureaucratic leadership is effective in maintaining order and administrative compliance. In the future, the combination of these models could provide a more balanced and adaptable approach for modern public administrations. In this sense, let's look at the theory applied in the public administrations of Singapore and Estonia, where advanced digitization has enabled the efficiency of public services, the reduction of bureaucracy and the increase of government transparency with a digital leadership based on artificial intelligence.

Avolio and Kahai (2003) developed the theory of digital leadership based on artificial intelligence, highlighting the role of technology in public administration. In their paper "Adding the 'E' to E-Leadership," the authors analyze how leaders use digital tools to improve decision-making processes and organizational relationships. The main directions of digital leadership include: the use of artificial intelligence to optimize the decision-making process; implementing digital platforms for better communication and transparency; creating a collaborative virtual work environment and rapid adaptability to new technologies and continuous innovation.

Through innovative strategies and the implementation of advanced technologies, *Estonia* (Preda & Antson, 2022) has become a global leader in government digitization. It is a successful example of applying digital leadership in public administration. The strong points of the implemented model are embodied, to begin with, in a complete digitization of public services, which allows citizens to quickly and efficiently access official documents, tax returns and social services.

Also, the Electronic Identity System (e-ID) and blockchain technology ensure data protection and transparency in the administrative process, and digitization has significantly reduced operational costs and the time required to carry out administrative procedures, which has led to efficiency and saving resources.

If we analyze this theory from the perspective of limitations, we bring to attention the major dependence on the digital infrastructure as a result of which any cyber attack or technological failure can affect the entire administrative system. We add here the digital exclusion confirmed in society, considering that people without technological skills experience difficulties in using digital services and also privacy issues.

*Digital Leadership in Singapore.* Singapore is an outstanding example of digital leadership in public administration, being recognized for implementing advanced technologies and making governance more efficient through digitization (Alita Sharon, Singapore's Strategic Approach to Innovation).

The strengths of this model are found in advanced electronic governance, implemented through an integrated e-government system that allows quick access to administrative services

using a unified digital platform. Also, innovation and investment in artificial intelligence to improve government decision-making and develop effective public policies are in turn materialized through initiatives such as “Smart Nation” - Singapore, a program that uses AI and big data. Of course, digital systems are protected by advanced security measures, minimizing the risks of cyber attacks and ensuring robust cyber security.

The limitations of this model consist in high costs of implementation, development and maintenance of digital infrastructure, in ensuring intensive digital surveillance, oriented towards the privacy and protection of citizens' data, and in the need to develop technological skills, because adaptation to new systems requires continuous training of civil servants and of citizens.

The analysis of the implementation of modern theories in the two states highlights the fact that each form of leadership in public administration has specific advantages and limits.

Why should we care about e-leadership? The old adage “information is power” should provide some clues as to why the introduction of this type of technology is unlike any other technology that has entered organizations in the past 50 years. It is different because it changes the patterns of how information is acquired, stored, interpreted and disseminated.

The public administration in Romania has gone through numerous stages of development and transformation, influenced by political, economic and social changes. Leadership in this field plays an essential role in adapting public institutions to new realities and promoting efficient and transparent governance. Let us briefly analyze the main stages of the evolution of the Romanian public administration, identify the leadership models specific to each period and highlight the current challenges of public sector leadership. In this sense, the specialized literature offers several perspectives on the evolution of public administration in Romania. According to the works of Lucica Matei (2006) *Public administration* and Cristina Maria Mirea (2011) *Reform models in public administration*, this evolution can be divided into four major stages:

- The pre-modern period (19th - early 20th centuries) when state administration was centralized and strongly influenced by the French model (Constitution of 1866), leadership was bureaucratic, based on hierarchy and formal authority, a period in which civil servants were selected based on criteria of loyalty and not competence;
- The interwar and communist period (1918–1989), a period in which the administration experienced a process of professionalization, but remained under political influence; after the establishment of the communist regime, the administrative system became centralized, with strict party control over decisions. Leadership was authoritarian, based on conformity and obedience to higher structures;
- The post-communist transition (1990–2007), a period in which public administration reform became a priority, under the influence of the European integration process. The principle of New Public Management (NPM), promoted by authors such as Christopher Hood (1991) and Osborne & Gaebler (1992), was introduced and leadership began to focus on efficiency, transparency and citizen orientation. The main stages of development are two: the post-communist period (1990-2000) when the transition from a centralized system to a democratic one imposed administrative reforms and decentralization and the stage of European integration (2000-2007) a period characterized by the adoption of European legislation and the development administrative capacity for managing EU funds;
- The post-accession period to the EU, digital modernization (2007–present) is the period in which the public administration continued the modernization process through e-government, digitalization of public services and decentralization. A collaborative governance model was outlined, based on the involvement of actors from the private sector and civil society. Modern leadership requires advanced skills in change management and data-driven decision making.

Depending on the historical stages, several leadership styles were manifested in the public administration in Romania: authoritarian leadership, dominant in the communist period, based on

hierarchical power and centralized control, and influenced by Frederick Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911); bureaucratic leadership, characterized by strict rules and rigid administrative procedures that we find in the Weberian model of public administration (Weber, 1922); and participative and transformational leadership, specific to post-communist reform and European integration, shaped by the models of Burns (*Leadership*, 1978) and Bass (*Transformational Leadership*, 1985).

However, leadership in public administration faces several internal challenges such as resistance to change in public institutions, the lack of meritocracy, there are still recruitment practices based on political influences, the major need for digitization, to reduce bureaucracy and increase transparency as well as the need for much better-grounded crisis management, especially in the current context of pandemic, energy crisis and economic instability. In Romania, leadership in public administration has evolved from a bureaucratic and authoritarian model to one increasingly focused on efficiency and collaboration. Nevertheless, for a real modernization of the public sector, continuous reform is needed, based on principles of open governance and the use of new technologies.

## **5. Current challenges of leadership in Public Administration**

The leaders of the public administration in Romania and other European states face an extremely complex and dynamic environment, influenced by geopolitical, economic and social factors. In this context, their ability to manage changes and adopt effective strategies is essential for the stability and performance of public institutions.

Viewed from the perspective of geopolitical challenges, public administration has to manage the aftermath of the war in Ukraine and the volatility of regional security. The leaders had to manage the flow of refugees (Romania received a significant number of refugees from Ukraine, which put pressure on social services and the assistance system), the increase in border tensions requires the public administration to collaborate more effectively with NATO structures and EU and ensuring economic stability requires quick and effective measures from the administration (given the energy crisis and supply chain disruptions).

From the perspective of relations with the European Union, the absorption of European funds remains a major challenge, because the bureaucracy and the lack of administrative capacity make it difficult to implement projects. Also, the adaptation to the new European policies such as the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) requires rapid reforms in the field of administration, but the lack of effective leadership can delay their application.

Another category of challenges is economic in nature. These include inflation and the global economic crisis, which place pressure on public administration budgets and force institutions to find solutions to protect the vulnerable population through effective social policies. Moreover, a major challenge remains digitalization and economic transformation, with poor infrastructure and resistance to change from civil servants.

Social challenges join the other categories. Thus, the decrease in trust in public institutions due to corruption and lack of administrative transparency has led to a significant erosion of citizens' trust in the government and local administration. Also, demographic changes and the workforce crisis, challenges materialized in the exodus of specialists from the public sector to the private sector or in other countries and by the aging of the population, require the adaptation of public services, especially in the field of health and social assistance.

Added to these are the increase in citizens' expectations; the population is increasingly demanding about public services, demanding more digitization, efficiency and accessibility, and the leaders in the administration must combine structural reforms with effective communication and citizen-oriented management. Under these conditions, the future of administrative leadership will depend on the ability of leaders to adopt innovative models and create high-performing, citizen-oriented public institutions.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

In order for public administration leadership to be effective in the current geopolitical, economic and social context, some concrete measures are necessary and I recommend the orientation towards the adoption of an adaptive and innovative leadership model, the development of transformational leadership skills, the increase of transparency and the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process to which I add the acceleration of digitization and the optimization of administrative processes.

These transformations and adaptations are essential for the modernization of the public administration in Romania and for the consolidation of an efficient and responsible leadership. I hope that in these times, despite the tension and conflicts, more “natural servants” in the public administration try to clearly see the world, as it is, and can discern the measures that will bring efficiency in this field.

We see a fresh, critical look at issues of power and authority with people relating in less coercive and more creative ways. A new moral principle thus emerges, according to which the only authority worthy of one's loyalty is that which is given to the leader freely, knowingly, as a proportional response to the obvious position of the leader who has demonstrated trust and devotion to administrative matters. Truly viable and effective institutions will be those that are predominantly led by leaders with credibility, who bring with them innovation and who find solutions to the general challenges of society.

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