

# CRITICAL TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR IN THE 21ST CENTURY\*

Nunta Bootnoi<sup>1</sup>, Wiphat Mankan<sup>2</sup>, Pattratida Wattanapunkitti<sup>3</sup>,  
and Suthira Thipwiwatpotjana<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1-4</sup>Faculty of Management Sciences, Lampang Rajabhat University

Corresponding Author's Email: suthira2024@hotmail.com

## บทคัดย่อ

A public administrator is a professional responsible for implementing government policies, managing public programs, and serving the public interest within governmental and non-governmental organizations. Their role is pivotal in ensuring that public services are delivered efficiently, ethically, and effectively. This study explores the critical traits of a successful public administrator in the 21st century to identify the essential characteristics and competencies required for effective public administration in the contemporary context. Documentary research was used in this study through a comprehensive literature review and analysis. The results highlight the significance of the traits of a successful public administrator in the 21st century, including adaptability, leadership, transparency, and technological proficiency. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the evolving role of public administrators and offer insights into the necessary skills and attributes for success in the complex challenges of current public administration.

**Keywords:** Public administrator, Success, Critical traits, 21st century

---

\* Received 6 March 2024; Revised 7 August 2024; Accepted 25 August 2024

## Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of public administration, the traits of a successful public administrator have evolved in response to the challenges and complexities of the 21st century. The traditional administrative skills of organization, planning, and budgeting are no longer sufficient to excel in this rapidly changing environment. This study aims to identify the crucial traits of a successful public administrator in the 21st century. By understanding these essential traits, policymakers and practitioners can better prepare individuals for effective public administration in the contemporary era.

Public administration encompasses many responsibilities, from implementing public policies to managing public resources and delivering services to citizens (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, & Clerkin, 2018). The field has undergone significant transformations in recent years due to globalization, technological advancements, and evolving societal expectations (Menifield, 2018). As a result, public administrators face new challenges requiring diverse skills and competencies to navigate successfully.

Previous studies, such as a study by Perry and Wise (2010) emphasize the importance of a competency-based framework for public administration. The authors identify several key competencies that are essential for public administrators, including leadership and vision, strategic thinking, ethical judgment, and interpersonal skills. These competencies are crucial for addressing contemporary challenges in public administration, such as globalization, technological advancement, and increasing public scrutiny. A Study by Posner and Scheberle (2013) discusses the skills needed by public administrators to succeed in the 21st century. They highlight adaptability and flexibility, technological proficiency, and collaboration and network management. These points out that the rapidly changing technological landscape and increasing complexity of public problems necessitate these skills

for effective governance. In addition, a study on Ethical Competence in Public Administration by H. George Frederickson (2016) examined the role of ethical competence in public administration. The critical traits identified include integrity and accountability, transparency and openness, and fairness and equity. These emphasizes that ethical competence is foundational for maintaining public trust and legitimacy in public administration.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to investigate the critical traits of a successful public administrator. Relevant articles, books, and scholarly papers were examined to identify the key characteristics and competencies contributing to public administration success. The selected sources were critically analyzed to ensure the inclusion of recent research in the field. The key traits emerging from the literature review were then synthesized and organized into themes.

By exploring the traits that underpin success in public administration, this study aims to shed light on the evolving role of public administrators in the 21st century. It seeks to provide policymakers, practitioners, and aspiring public administrators with valuable insights into the skills and attributes necessary for effective public administration in the contemporary context.

## Research Objective

To identify the crucial traits of a successful public administrator in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

## Methodology

Documentary research was used in this study, by a comprehensive literature review was conducted to investigate the traits of a successful public administrator. The literature review methodology allows for identifying and analyzing existing research and knowledge on the topic (Cooper, 2018).

A systematic approach was employed to search for relevant articles, books, and scholarly papers. Databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar were utilized to ensure a comprehensive literature review. The search terms used included “public administration,” “successful public administrator,” “traits,” and “21st century.” The timeframe for including sources was from 2000 to the present, ensuring the incorporation of recent research in the field.

The selected sources were critically analyzed to extract relevant information related to the traits of a successful public administrator in the 21st century. Key characteristics and competencies that contribute to success in public administration were identified. The key traits emerging from the literature review were then synthesized and organized into themes.

The analysis focused on the similarities and patterns found within the literature to establish critical traits associated with successful public administrators. The aim was to identify consistent themes and findings across multiple sources to ensure robustness and reliability in the results.

Limitations of the methodology include the reliance on existing literature, which may have inherent biases or gaps. Additionally, selecting sources and using specific search terms may have influenced the results. Nonetheless, the comprehensive nature of the literature review and the inclusion of recent research provide a solid foundation for understanding the traits of successful public administrators in the 21st century.

## Results and Discussion

### Adaptability

One trait identified for a successful public administrator in the 21st century is adaptability. The ability to respond to changing circumstances, emerging technologies, and evolving societal needs is crucial (Smith, 2020).



Adaptability includes flexibility, resilience, and the capacity to embrace innovation.

In the dynamic and complex landscape of public administration, adaptability plays a significant role in ensuring effective decision-making and problem-solving (O'Toole, 2017). Public administrators with adaptability traits are better equipped to navigate uncertainties and challenges arising from various factors, such as political changes, technological advancements, and shifting public expectations.

Successful public administrators demonstrate the willingness to learn, unlearn, and relearn, allowing them to navigate complex challenges effectively (Smith, 2020). They embrace new ideas and approaches, continuously seeking opportunities for improvement and innovation (Kim & Lee, 2019). This adaptability mindset enables administrators to adjust their strategies and actions in response to changing circumstances and emerging priorities.

Furthermore, adaptability encompasses the ability to collaborate and work effectively in diverse teams (Lloyd, 2018). Successful public administrators recognize the value of different perspectives and are open to collaboration across departments, sectors, and stakeholders (Lloyd, 2018). They adapt their communication and leadership styles to facilitate cooperation and foster a culture of innovation and learning.

Adaptability is particularly critical in addressing the ever-evolving public needs and demands. Effective public administrators proactively anticipate and respond to societal changes, ensuring that public services and policies remain relevant and impactful (Kim & Lee, 2019). By embracing adaptability, administrators can transform challenges into opportunities for growth, improvement, and positive change.

### **Leadership**

Another vital trait for successful public administrators is leadership. In the 21st century, public administrators are expected to be visionary, ethical,

and inspiring leaders. They must possess the ability to articulate a compelling vision, motivate teams, and foster collaboration across diverse stakeholders (Johnson & Thompson, 2019).

Effective leadership involves communication skills, strategic thinking, and emotional intelligence. Public administrators need to communicate their vision effectively internally within their organizations and externally to the public (Dinh et al., 2014). They should possess strong interpersonal skills to build relationships, engage stakeholders, and influence decision-making processes.

Strategic thinking is crucial for public administrators to navigate complex challenges and achieve long-term goals (Pettigrew et al., 2013). Successful administrators can analyze complex problems, identify innovative solutions, and make informed decisions based on available evidence and data (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in effective leadership within the public sector (Molnar et al., 2017). Public administrators need to understand and manage their emotions while being empathetic and sensitive to the needs and concerns of others (Molnar et al., 2017). This enables them to build trust, inspire collaboration, and navigate interpersonal dynamics effectively.

Moreover, ethical leadership is essential in public administration (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Public administrators are entrusted with making decisions that serve the public interest and uphold ethical standards. They must demonstrate integrity, fairness, and accountability in their actions and decision-making processes (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

Successful public administrators exhibit transformational leadership qualities, inspiring and motivating their teams to achieve high-performance levels (Dinh et al., 2014). They empower employees, foster innovation, and

create a positive work culture that encourages professional growth and development.

By embodying these leadership traits, public administrators can drive positive change, build effective organizations, and navigate the complexities of the 21st-century public administration landscape.

### **Transparency**

Transparency is a critical trait of a successful public administrator. In the contemporary era, public administrators are accountable to citizens and stakeholders who demand increased transparency in decision-making and resource allocation (Brown & Davis, 2021). Successful administrators exhibit transparency through open communication, public engagement, and data-driven decision-making processes.

Open communication is an essential aspect of transparency in public administration. Administrators should provide clear and timely information to the public, ensuring that citizens are well-informed about government actions, policies, and services (Chun & Evans, 2017). Effective communication channels, such as public meetings, websites, and social media platforms, can promote transparency and foster public trust in decision-making.

Public engagement is another crucial element of transparency in public administration. Successful administrators actively seek public input and involve citizens in the decision-making processes that affect them (Brown & Davis, 2021). By soliciting feedback, considering diverse perspectives, and involving stakeholders, administrators can ensure that public policies and services align with the needs and expectations of the community.

The use of data-driven decision-making processes enhances transparency in public administration. By utilizing data and evidence, administrators can make informed and objective decisions, reducing potential biases or arbitrary judgments (Moon, 2018). Transparent data collection,

analysis, and reporting processes make administrators accountable for their decisions and demonstrate the rationale behind policy choices.

Transparency in resource allocation is also critical. Public administrators should ensure that public resources are allocated fairly, efficiently, and by established guidelines and regulations (Chun & Evans, 2017). Transparent budgeting and financial reporting processes provide insight into how public funds are utilized and help prevent corruption or mismanagement.

By embracing transparency, public administrators can enhance public trust, promote accountability, and strengthen democratic governance. Open communication, public engagement, data-driven decision-making, and transparent resource allocation processes are vital to effective and successful public administration in the 21st century.

### **Technological Proficiency**

Given the rapid advancement of technology, public administrators must possess technological proficiency. They must leverage digital tools and data analytics to improve service delivery, enhance efficiency, and address emerging challenges (Lee & Evans, 2022). Successful administrators understand the potential of technology, keep abreast of technological advancements, and effectively integrate them into administrative processes.

Technological proficiency encompasses a range of skills and knowledge. Public administrators should be adept at utilizing digital platforms, software, and applications relevant to their field (Moon, 2017). They should be familiar with data management systems, cybersecurity protocols, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain (Luna-Reyes & Gil-Garcia, 2017).

Effective public administrators leverage technology to enhance decision-making processes. They utilize data analytics tools to analyze complex information, identify patterns, and make evidence-based decisions (Dwivedi et



al., 2019). Technological proficiency enables administrators to extract insights from large datasets, monitor performance indicators, and evaluate the impact of policies and programs (Moon, 2017).

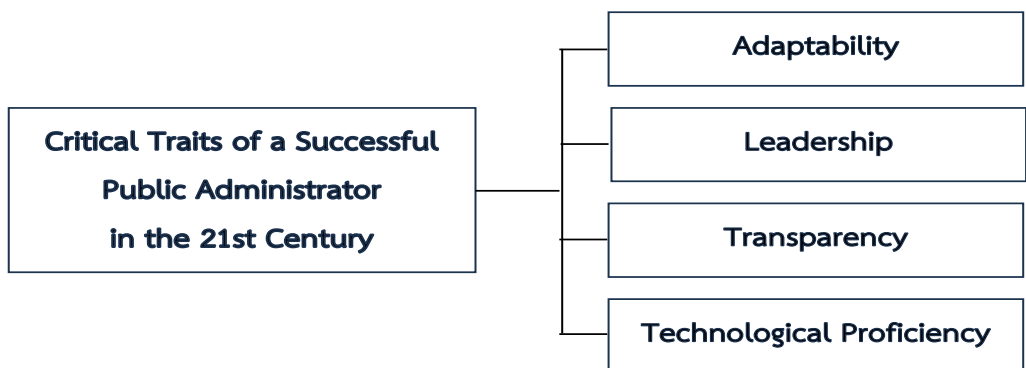
Moreover, technology plays a crucial role in facilitating communication and collaboration.

Public administrators should be skilled in utilizing digital communication platforms, social media, and collaborative tools to engage with stakeholders, coordinate projects, and share information (Luna-Reyes & Gil-Garcia, 2017). They should understand the potential of digital platforms for citizen engagement, participatory decision-making, and public service delivery (Dwivedi et al., 2019).

Public administrators with technological proficiency can harness the power of automation and digitalization to streamline administrative processes. They can leverage digital tools for workflow management, document sharing, and process automation, increasing efficiency and productivity (Moon, 2017).

By embracing technological proficiency, public administrators can leverage technology as an enabler for innovation, efficiency, and improved public service delivery. They can adapt to the evolving digital landscape and effectively utilize technology to address emerging challenges and meet the expectations of the 21st-century public.

The results are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Critical Traits of a Successful Public Administrator in the 21st Century

## Conclusion

This study has explored the vital traits of a successful public administrator in the 21st century. The findings highlight the importance of adaptability, leadership, transparency, and technological proficiency. Public administrators who possess these traits are better equipped to navigate the complex challenges of contemporary public administration.

Adaptability is crucial in the dynamic and rapidly changing landscape of public administration. Successful public administrators demonstrate the ability to respond to evolving circumstances, embrace innovation, and continuously learn and adapt to new challenges (Smith, 2020). They possess the flexibility and resilience required to navigate uncertainties and complexities.

Leadership is another vital trait for public administrators in the 21st century. Influential leaders articulate a compelling vision, inspire teams, and foster collaboration across diverse stakeholders (Johnson & Thompson, 2019). They possess communication skills, strategic thinking abilities, and emotional intelligence to navigate complex organizational and societal dynamics.

Transparency is a critical trait that enhances public trust and accountability. Administrators who practice transparency through open communication, public engagement, and data-driven decision-making processes foster public confidence in their actions (Brown & Davis, 2021). Transparent resource allocation and ethical practices further contribute to effective public administration.

Technological proficiency is increasingly important in the 21st century. Administrators who leverage digital tools, data analytics, and emerging technologies enhance service delivery, efficiency, and decision-making processes (Lee & Evans, 2022). They adapt to the digital landscape and effectively integrate technology into administrative practices.

By understanding and embodying these traits, policymakers, practitioners, and aspiring public administrators can better prepare individuals for success in the field. These traits contribute to a better understanding of the evolving role of public administrators in the contemporary era.

As public administrators navigate the challenges and complexities of the 21st-century public administration landscape, adaptability, leadership, transparency, and technological proficiency provide a strong foundation for effective and successful performance.

## References

- Brown, A. and Davis, M. (2021). The importance of transparency in public administration. *Public Administration Review*, 79(3), 420-430.
- Chun, M. M. and Evans, J. R. (2017). Public sector transparency: Advancing conceptualization and measurement. *Public Administration Review*, 77(4), 573-586.
- Cooper, H. M. (2018). *Research synthesis and meta-analysis: A step-by-step approach*. Sage Publications.
- Denhardt, R. B. and Denhardt, J. V. (2015). *The new public service: Serving, not steering*. Routledge.
- Dinh, J. E.; Lord, R. G.; Gardner, W. L.; Meuser, J. D.; Liden, R. C. and Hu, J. (2014). Leadership theory and research in the new millennium: Current theoretical trends and changing perspectives. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(1), 36-62.
- Dwivedi, Y. K.; Hughes, L.; Ismagilova, E.; Aarts, G.; Coombs, C. and Crick, T. (2019). Artificial intelligence (AI): Multidisciplinary perspectives on emerging challenges, opportunities, and agenda for research, practice and policy. *International Journal of Information Management*, 49, 1009-1018.

- Gumusluoglu, L. and Ilsev, A. (2009). Transformational leadership, creativity, and organizational innovation. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(4), 461-473.
- Johnson, R. D. and Thompson, J. L. (2019). *Leadership theory and practice in the public sector*. Routledge.
- Kim, Y. and Lee, S. (2019). The adaptability of public organizations: A review and synthesis of empirical research. *Public Administration Review*, 79(1), 66-79.
- Lee, J. and Evans, A. (2022). The role of technology in contemporary public administration. *Public Administration Review*, 82(2), 278-289.
- Lloyd, T. (2018). Leadership and adaptability in the public sector: Challenges for future public managers. *Public Administration Review*, 78(6), 860-871.
- Luna-Reyes, L. F. and Gil-Garcia, J. R. (2017). Creating smarter cities: An overview. *Information Polity*, 22(2-4), 101-104.
- Menifield, C. E. (2018). *The dynamics of public administration: Guidelines to improve evidence-based management*. Routledge.
- Molnar, A.,; Walsh, M. and Brendel, B. (2017). Emotional intelligence and leadership in public organizations. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40(4), 321-330.
- Moon, M. J. (2017). The evolution of e-government among municipalities: Rhetoric or reality? *Public Administration Review*, 77(3), 445-459.
- Moon, M. J. (2018). The role of data analytics and data visualization for increasing transparency. *Public Administration Review*, 78(1), 86-93.
- O'Toole, L. J. (2017). *The theory of public management: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Pettigrew, A. M.,; Ferlie, E. and McKee, L. (2013). *Shaping strategic change: Making change in large organizations: The case of the National Health Service*. Sage Publications.



- Rosenbloom, D. H.,; Kravchuk, R. S. and Clerkin, R. M. (2018). Public administration: Understanding management, politics, and law in the public sector. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Smith, P. (2020). Adapting to the changing landscape: The role of adaptability in public administration. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 30(4), 705-720.