

Adaptive leadership in local public administration in Romania

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Abstract: Adaptive leadership, a framework introduced by Heifetz and Linsky (2002), emphasizes the need for leaders to facilitate change within their organizations by addressing complex challenges and promoting a culture of learning, collaboration, and resilience.

Unlike traditional leadership models, adaptive leadership is particularly suitable for contexts marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) (Heifetz et al., 2009). These are often realistic descriptors of the environment that public leaders need to navigate. This framework encourages leaders to engage all stakeholders in identifying adaptive challenges and crafting tailored responses that go beyond standard technical solutions.

This paper explores the presence and influence of adaptive leadership elements among institutional leaders in local public administration in Romania.

The study investigates how well local public administration leaders in Romania adopt adaptive leadership practices, especially within the context of recent socioeconomic pressures, including rapid policy shifts, fiscal constraints, and the evolving turbulence in international politics (Russia-Ukraine war) near the country borders.

Through a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with local public administration leaders from various regions in Romania.

Study captures the self-reported prevalence of adaptive leadership practices, such as fostering collaboration across departments, empowering employees to develop creative solutions, and responding flexibly to community needs. In-depth interviews provide further insights into leaders' strategies, mindsets, and perceptions of the adaptive challenges faced by their organizations (Khan et al., 2020).

Preliminary findings reveal a varying degree of adaptive leadership elements across the local public administration landscape in Romania. While some leaders demonstrate a high awareness of adaptive challenges and actively engage in transformative practices, others tend to adhere to more traditional, hierarchical leadership approaches.

Encouraging adaptive leadership in local public administration could be pivotal in addressing Romania's governance challenges, particularly in fostering community trust, improving service delivery, and enhancing local institutional resilience.