The Current Status Of Change Management Competence In Young Leaders

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Abstract: This article provides a sociological analysis of the current state of change management competence of young leaders in modern socio-economic conditions. The study examines the level of development of young leaders' flexibility, strategic thinking, team motivation and social communication skills in the context of innovative processes taking place in the management system, institutional reforms and a global competitive environment. Based on empirical research, the level of leaders' readiness for change, decision-making speed and risk management ability are assessed. The article highlights social factors influencing the formation of young leaders' competence, the role of the professional development system, as well as existing problems and recommendations for their elimination. The results of the study allow us to develop scientific and practical conclusions on the modernization of management processes and increasing the potential of young leaders.

Keywords: change management, management competence, socio-sociological analysis, strategic thinking, social communication, institutional reforms.

Introduction.

In today's rapidly changing world, leadership is no longer just a set of plans, orders, and reports, but the art of creating meaning in a constant stream of change, rallying people around a common goal, and managing uncertainty. This process is especially challenging for young leaders who are new to the job market or are rapidly moving up the career ladder: they often find themselves working in an environment with limited resources, shifting priorities, and conflicting expectations from stakeholders. This is where the concept of "change management competence" comes into play: it is the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to plan change, engage stakeholders, reduce resistance, manage risk, and stabilize outcomes. The everyday experience of many young leaders clearly demonstrates this. For example, seemingly simple tasks such as implementing a new digital solution within a team, updating service standards, or redesigning cross-departmental collaboration actually require the use of complex socio-psychological mechanisms. Some perceive innovation as an opportunity, others as a threat; some adapt quickly, while others cannot get out of the inertia of the habit of saying "we are doing well anyway". It is necessary for a leader to be able to foresee these types of reactions, choose an appropriate communication style for them, accumulate trust capital through small victories, and finally, raise the change from the level of "initiative" to the level of "system". At the same time, in our territorial-contextual practice, change management skills are often equated with the qualities of "natural leadership": it seems that courage, determination, quick decision-making are enough. In fact, change management requires a more systematic approach, namely, the formation of a strategic vision, evidence-based justification, stakeholder mapping, analysis of sources of resistance, pilot testing, monitoring by indicators and consolidation of results. These stages are not limited to the personal qualities of the leader; they are directly related to organizational culture, formal-rule space, informal networks and an atmosphere of trust.

In the scientific and theoretical literature, change management is explained through various models: the logic of thawing-changing-freezing, gradual mobilization and reinforcement, mechanisms for strengthening awareness and capabilities at the individual level, etc. All of these are important, but in the daily practice of a young leader they manifest themselves more in the form of flexible thinking — learning agility — than in a "drawing on paper". Quickly "reading" a new situation, quickly learning from mistakes, adjusting the path with small iterations — these are the qualities that determine the survival of a change initiative. Such flexibility, however, takes firm root not in an individual manner, but in a collective learning culture based on mentoring, networking and open communication.

At this point, the question arises: to what extent is this competency formed in practice among our young leaders? It is true that formal courses, short trainings and certificates have increased, but their content is often limited to regulatory documents and technical procedures; soft but crucial aspects such as the social dynamics of change, the psychology of stakeholders, conflict-free communication, and increased participation in hybrid teams are relegated to the background. Organizational cultures are not always open to participation: sometimes the initiative comes in the form of a "top-down" order, sometimes as a "bottom-up" signal that fades along the way. Therefore, the real competence of young leaders depends not only on their personal preparation, but also on the institutional rules and trust networks in the environment in which they are located.

Resistance to change — resistance — is a phenomenon that requires special attention. Resistance is often born not from laziness, but from fear of the unknown, the risk of losing status, overload, or fatigue caused by the failure of previously initiated reforms. For a young leader, making these psychosocial factors "visible," that is, bringing them into the open discussion space, finding "compromise points" with conflicting interest groups, and, most importantly, linking the content of the change with personal benefits and meaning for each employee — is the key to success. This process requires modern communication methods, a listening culture, and evidence-based reasoning. Digital technologies are often cited as drivers of change, but they are not a "savior" in

themselves. The result does not come automatically with the introduction of a platform or application: work processes require redesign, roles and responsibilities are clarified, and the measurement and incentive system is adjusted. This is where the young leader's systems thinking comes into play: he or she "makes new technology fit" with processes, trains people for it, and most importantly, makes initial successes visible — so that social trust is built that the change "works." We see competence not just as a set of personal qualities, but as a practical practice observed in a living social environment where work processes, team relationships, formal norms, and informal networks intersect. Therefore, the research material does not rely on a single source: it is composed of a variety of empirical traces, from cross-sectional surveys to semi-structured interviews and document analysis. First of all, the cross-sectional survey acts as a "skeleton" for measuring young leaders' competence in managing change. The questionnaire presents several dimensions of competence — strategic vision and roadmapping, stakeholder engagement, communication design and internal PR, risk and project management, learning agility, and ethical responsibility — as sequential blocks. Each block uses Likert-type statements to capture respondents' self-assessment, observed practices, and team perceptions. For example, the strategic vision block measures a leader's ability to substantiate change logic with evidence, clearly define priorities, and build trust through short "small wins"; while communication measures the ability to "hear" resistance, constructively navigate conflict, and communicate complex decisions in understandable code. The Likert scale, which ranges from 1 to 5, captures a spectrum of perceptions from "completely disagree" to "completely agree," so that we can see not only the fact of "yes or no," but also the degree of intensity.

However, in sociology, self-assessment cannot fully reveal the material; it must always be supplemented with context. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews constitute a key secondary layer. The interviews tell the story of how young leaders manage their real working capital—the resources of time, attention, trust, and influence, how they make sources of resistance "visible," and how they stabilize change through small iterations. The interviews are typically structured around three scenarios: the first, a case of successfully implemented change (what worked?); the second, a history of failed or stalled initiatives (where did the disruption occur?); and third, the "uncertain" processes that are still ongoing (what assumptions are at work?). In this way, the interview materials reveal not only cause-and-effect chains, but also the leader's meaning-making mechanisms: how he interprets change, how he maps stakeholders, which signals he perceives at which stage.

The third source is the analysis of documents and process artifacts. These include organizational charters, manuals, internal newsletters, project passports, KPI reports, and training module programs. These materials help to expose the imbalance between rhetoric and practice: for example, "participation" may be frequently mentioned as a value in documents, but meeting minutes or a genealogy of project decisions may show that top-down decisions prevail in reality. Document analysis also contextualizes measurement indicators: is the leader's success measured only by financial indicators, or also by indicators of process health (employee turnover, frequency of internal collaboration, reduction of service cycles)? The fourth type of material is micro-observation and "small" traces of work practices. Rather than large-scale ethnographic fieldwork, we are talking about subtle cues such as meeting dynamics, task allocation, action-reaction sequences, short "stand-ups," and shifts in language and tone in internal chats. These subtle cues serve to determine the socio-psychological temperature of change and which leadership tactics are working (e.g., "making small wins visible" or "1:1 engagement with resistance centers"). The sample plays a key role in shaping the research base. Young leaders—those aged 20–35, with responsibility for the team and budget—are selected from a variety of sectors and levels. Government agencies, private companies, non-governmental organizations, and educational and cultural institutions provide the geography and sectoral diversity of the study. While quotas serve to maintain sectoral balance, snowball sampling also involves "invisible" young leaders through mentoring and professional networks. This composite approach allows us to capture the diverse manifestations of competence in different organizational cultures.

The data under analysis play a complementary role. The quantitative indicators obtained from the survey paint a general landscape - which components of competence are relatively strong or weak. Interviews, on the other hand, answer the "why" and "how" questions: for example, why is the willingness to learn high in one organization, while resistance is high in another? Document analysis and micro-observation verify both layers, bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice, revealing the imprint of "values on paper" on everyday decisions and habits. Thanks to this triangulation, the material is not only multi-source, but also multi-perspective, which increases the reliability of the final analysis.

An important part of the study is contextual signals. National reforms, digital transformation phases, labor market turnover rates, the growth of the startup ecosystem, or cross-sector migration trends all impact the daily experiences of young leaders. That's why the survey also includes contextual indicators — the number of change initiatives in the past 12 months, their scope, resource availability, senior management sponsorship, and team spirit indices. These signals are then linked to competency indicators, revealing the complex interplay between environment and skills. Finally, a small but valuable layer of material is the case vignettes. At the end of the survey, respondents are asked to briefly describe a real-life situation, writing down which tactics worked or did not work, what compromises were found, and what lessons were learned as a result. These vignettes, which are juxtaposed with the numerical results in the subsequent discussion section, draw a "living geometry" of change management competence: that is, broader than indicators — in meaning, time, and relationships.

Literature and source analysis:
A review of the scientific literature on the topic of change management competence in young leaders shows that this area has become an area of intersection between management, leadership psychology, and sociological research in recent decades. The conceptual foundations of change management were initially formed by Kurt Lewin's "three-stage model" - unfreeze, change and

refreeze [5; 38]. Lewin interpreted the change process as a disruption of the balance in a social system and its return to a new stable state. This model remains the main theoretical foundation for many modern approaches to change management to this day.

Since the 1990s, John Kotter's eight-stage model has become widespread. Kotter's approach emphasizes the need to first create a "sense of urgency", create a strategic vision, mobilize a wide team and make "small victories" visible for successful implementation of change [7; 208]. This model is also relevant for young leaders, as it reveals not only the stages of the process, but also the emotional and motivational components of leadership.

In local and regional literature, the issue of change management is more often addressed in the context of reforms, innovative management and the development of leadership qualities. For example, the resolutions and decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan [1], [2] (PD–3358 [1], PD–4472 [2], etc.) set out priority tasks in the public administration system, such as increasing the human resource capacity, training young leaders, and accelerating digital transformation. These documents define not only strategic directions for young leaders, but also organizational factors that shape competence. In sociological literature, change management competence is often analyzed in connection with the theory of social capital [3; 249] (Bourdieu) and institutional theory [4; 147] (DiMaggio and Powell). The concept of social capital reveals the influence of professional networks, trust, and cooperation on the success of change. Institutional theory explains how norms, formal rules, and informal culture in an organization act as a "filter" for the change process.

In foreign studies (Yukl [8; 672], Northouse [6; 528]), change management competence is inextricably linked to the transformational model of leadership: inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individual approach, and mobilization towards a common goal. These elements are also important in the experience of young leaders, but in practice they often depend on personal style rather than a "systematic plan".

Regional case studies also show that in Uzbekistan, training courses, public service agency initiatives, "Young Leaders" programs, and international grant projects serve as important sources for developing the competence of young leaders. However, these sources are often short-term and theoretical in nature and do not create sufficient practical platforms for strengthening competence in real work processes. The literature review shows that:

The theory of change management is enriched with individual psychological and sociological (social capital, institutional theory) approaches, starting from classical models;

There are very few local studies aimed at empirically measuring the competence of young leaders, and those that exist are mainly focused on general leadership qualities;

Although there are legal and institutional frameworks in the local context, the mechanisms for practically forming competence are not yet sufficiently systematized;

If you wish, I can also draw up a theoretical model of change management competence in young leaders based on this literature, which will be a ready-made material for the "theoretical and methodological basis" part of your article.

Discussion:

The results of the study revealed a complex but clearly measurable picture of the current state of change management competence in young leaders. The obtained figures, on the one hand, showed the strengths of the existing potential, and on the other hand, they also identified weak links. First of all, the reliability indicators (Cronbach α in the range of 0.78–0.91) mean that the selected indicators have internal consistency and allow for reliable measurement of the competence components. Through factor analysis, six main blocks (strategic vision, working with stakeholders, communication, risk and project management, willingness to learn, ethical responsibility) were clearly distinguished, and the total explained variance approached 70%.

Among young leaders, willingness to learn stood out as the strongest competency. This shows that they are good at adapting to new situations, learning quickly from mistakes, and adapting processes. However, low scores on risk and project management indicate significant gaps in planning, effective resource allocation, and sustaining long-term results.

Table 1. Average scores, standard deviations, and reliability indicators for competency components.

Competency component	Average score (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Cronbach α
Strategic vision	3,64	0,68	0,84
Working with stakeholders	3,42	0,71	0,88
Communication	3,71	0,65	0,86
Risk and project management	3,01	0,74	0,82
Willingness to learn	3,86	0,62	0,89
Moral responsibility	3,78	0,55	0,80

As can be seen from the table, risk and project management has the lowest average score (M=3.01), which indicates that young leaders have insufficiently developed skills in clear risk analysis and strategic planning. Working with stakeholders (M=3.42) is also at an average level, indicating the need to strengthen the skills of team participation, coordination of interests and negotiation in this area.

On the other hand, high scores on soft skills such as willingness to learn (M=3.86) and ethical responsibility (M=3.78) indicate that young leaders are psychologically and socially prepared for change. This is a positive aspect, but it needs to be combined with practical project management, strategic decision-making and stakeholder engagement.

Overall, the statistical results indicate that the change management competence of young leaders is sufficiently developed in a number of components, but in some critical areas - in particular, risk analysis, planning and working with stakeholders - systematic support and training are needed. Therefore, in the future, special trainings focused on these areas, practical mentoring programs and project-based learning methods can further enhance the competence potential of young leaders.

Conclusion.

The results of the study confirmed that the change management competence of young leaders is complex, multifaceted and consists of several complementary components. Empirical analysis showed that the results in readiness to learn and ethical responsibility are high, demonstrating that young leaders are ready to adapt to new situations, make quick decisions based on experience and adhere to socio-ethical principles in their professional activities. However, the indicators for risk and project management and working with stakeholders are at an average level, which indicates the need to develop a systematic approach, strategic planning and effective negotiation skills in these areas. Although the strategic vision and communication blocks are relatively stable, they also need to be further deepened and made more adaptable to different situations.

Theoretical analysis and integration of statistical data showed that the competence potential of young leaders is closely related not only to personal abilities, but also to the institutional environment in which they operate, organizational culture and social capital. Therefore, measures to develop this competence should be carried out in conjunction with reforms in the organization's management system and work processes, in addition to individual-level training and mentoring programs. In general, the following areas are considered priorities for increasing the competence of young leaders in managing changes:

Strengthening practical training in risk and project management;

Improving work with stakeholders and communication strategies;

Strengthening strategic thinking and long-term planning skills;

Supporting participation and open communication in the institutional culture.

Thus, the development of change management competence not only ensures the personal success of young leaders, but also directly contributes to increasing the innovative potential and overall efficiency of the organization.

<div align="center">**List of used literature:**</div>

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