

Using Design Thinking to Overcome Challenges in the Civil Servant COVID-19

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Abstract: Design thinking is an approach that enables civil servants to collaborate effectively in the face of challenges posed by COVID-19. The article examines how the application of this method can increase the productivity and effectiveness of public sector employees, as well as help mitigate the negative pandemic consequences for the civil service. The study focuses on how design thinking contributes to the creation of new public administration strategies in times of crisis. Particular attention is paid to the impact of this method on the development of personal and professional competencies of civil servants, which is an integral part of effective governance. This article explains the main design thinking components, their key features, and their significance for work in the public sector. It also provides recommendations for the adaptation of civil servants to the new conditions posed by the pandemic, and considers the possibility of implementing the Stanford Design Thinking methodology in Ukrainian state institutions, which will contribute to increasing their flexibility and modernization. Applying this approach helps to increase staff productivity, effectively manage risks arising from the pandemic, and improve teamwork and leadership. Design thinking also supports the adoption of more informed management decisions and contributes to the improvement of the management of public institutions. The article also explains that design thinking can significantly reduce the negative consequences of the pandemic, improve the efficiency of the management of public institutions, and the civil service. The results of the study will improve the design thinking perception and provide an opportunity to use it after the pandemic.

Keywords: design thinking, civil service, COVID-19, managers professional competences

Introduction

To solve modern problems and challenges in public administration during the pandemic, design thinking can be a good method that provides new opportunities for various organizations. The sector of public needs to constantly improve and accelerate the work of its administration, especially in times of global changes. In order to make public administration more effective, it is important to constantly use new methods. Specialists in the public sector are the link that makes important decisions. To do this, they need a sufficient level of knowledge and skills. Therefore, the use of design thinking can be a very important attribute in this case, which would help them work more effectively.

The positive experience of other countries using design thinking is vitally important for Ukraine. This experience is based on clear steps and algorithms that improve corporate service. This encourages new employees to constantly find new solutions. Special attention is paid to the communication of intelligence and empathy. This helps to create a positive atmosphere in the public administration. The coronavirus pandemic has become an unexpected moment in

history, and it has an impact even today on public administration. This indicates that threat mitigation and provision use human resources. Public servants play an important role in management and effective decision-making.

Literature review

Design thinking is an extremely important method for solving complex problems and developing new strategies. It shows significant potential for creating mechanisms that reduce the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic [1]. In developed European countries, design thinking is a very effective tool for improving and enhancing public administration [2].

It is emphasized that design thinking is one of the holistic and innovative principles that allow finding practical solutions to new challenges such as Covid 19. plays a major role in management, making these management processes increasingly effective and efficient [3]. The flexibility and practicality of this approach have found wide application in public administration and in the private sector to increase the efficiency of public institutions in different countries. International experience in using design thinking can be very useful in Ukraine. This approach stimulates creativity, intelligence, and managerial competencies, which helps public managers make more effective decisions [4].

Design thinking that supports both personal and professional development rethinks traditional approaches to training civil servants. Modern government agencies have integrated this concept into professional training and professional development of specialists. This helps to increase the efficiency of public administration and acquire better practical skills [5].

Design thinking also improves, good work promotes collaboration and creates a positive organizational culture, which is confirmed in many studies. Design thinking also allows specialists to focus on important issues, and the development of innovative practices can also be improved by this approach. It can be used in both public administration and business [6].

To increase the potential of management employees, it is necessary to use effective training systems, continuous professional development, and self-education. For this, the use of design thinking will contribute to the improvement of work processes and create conditions for better justified logical management decisions [7].

To respond to new risks and challenges that have arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected the activities of public institutions in society, it is necessary to change employee codes [8]. Scientists point out that design thinking plays an extremely important and key role in shaping social systems and mechanisms that help overcome the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. But in order to improve understanding and increase the effectiveness of the method, further research is needed [9].

The study aimed to study the application of design thinking and impact research in the assistance and planning of measures aimed at reducing the negative impact of COVID-19 on the public administration system.

Materials and methods

This study used the thinking method to create a mechanism in public administration that will mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activities of public administration.

The methods used for synthesis and analysis allowed many scientific and practical publications to work in which design thinking is investigated in the difficult conditions of work of public administration institutions. The results were formed using a systems analysis that provided practical recommendations for the design thinking used in changes to the approach in public administration.

A search method was also used, which helped to identify the main design thinking elements for improving management processes. This approach helps to reduce the negative external factors' impact and helps civil servants better prepare for possible challenges by developing effective response strategies.

Two models were considered for comparison – Stanford and 4W. The study showed that the first model is more effective for adapting the concept of design thinking to Ukrainian society development processes. In addition, an assessment of the civil servants' professional competencies level was carried out, in particular, the development of their soft and hard skills in various organizational structures.

The abstract heuristic method analysis used made it possible to identify the main problems that negatively affect the civil servants' efficiency. Such difficulties can be overcome by applying design thinking according to the “Stanford Method”, which involves not only overcoming the pandemic consequences but also developing the necessary infrastructure, professional competencies, skills, knowledge, and employees' emotional intelligence.

The survey generated proposals and recommendations for using design thinking to improve the public administration system to ensure the stable and effective functioning of public services.

Results

Design thinking can have great prospects for management decisions, increasing effectiveness and developing approaches to achieving strategic goals, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19. The method is based on the integrity of the methodology, which can combine techniques and various tools to form an adaptive, flexible, and systematic style in the heads of public institutions [10].

It is important for civil servants to master managerial competencies for the effective performance of their functions, especially considering modern developments. In this case, thinking takes on special importance. Thinking includes a broad understanding of thinking as a process, creative and unconventional solutions, and critical thinking, which leads to high motivation and a desire for personal growth [11].

The design thinking introduction contributes to improving the efficiency of the management of state bodies and institutions, which has a positive chemical stability impact on the entire country [12]. Given this, the design thinking and the development concept's practical implementation are one of the government institution's priority tasks. Currently, the most common models of this approach are the 4W concept and the Stanford Design Thinking model. The first of them is highly effective due to several key components.

The main stages include:

- Focusing is a special working method for a problem that requires comprehensive analysis.
- Empathy is a communication process that develops emotional intelligence and helps to better understand the needs.
- Prototyping is the non-functional model or creation of a product to obtain feedback from potential users, which allows for assessing its benefits.
- Testing – checking and adjusting solutions, reassessing results, and searching for alternatives [13].

An alternative is the 4W model, which is implemented through a sequence of questions: “What is the result?”, “What is this?”, “What will happen if...?”, and “What works?”. The problem is identified, ways to solve it, implementation mechanisms, and the choice of the most optimal option. The design thinking introduction in government structures contributes to the self-education of managers and the development of their soft skills, which has an effect on the quality of practical activities. The core competencies, which are most often insufficiently developed in the civil service, can be conditionally divided into three groups [14].

The first group includes communication skills – persuasive speech, active listening, and clear expression of opinions.

The second group includes skills for establishing effective relationships: teamwork, trust building, and conflict resolution.

The third group includes personal competencies, in particular emotional stability, the ability to self-development, stress resistance, creativity, and the ability to find innovative solutions.

Soft skills are important in all areas of activity. These include leadership qualities, emotional intelligence, sociability, adaptability, problem-solving ability, creativity, and team interaction. Feedback, creative thinking, and emotional intelligence development are especially important in the context of overcoming the consequences of COVID-19. These elements constitute one of the Stanford' design thinking system's main characteristics, which makes it the most appropriate for research. Figure 1 presents the criteria and advantages of this concept [15].

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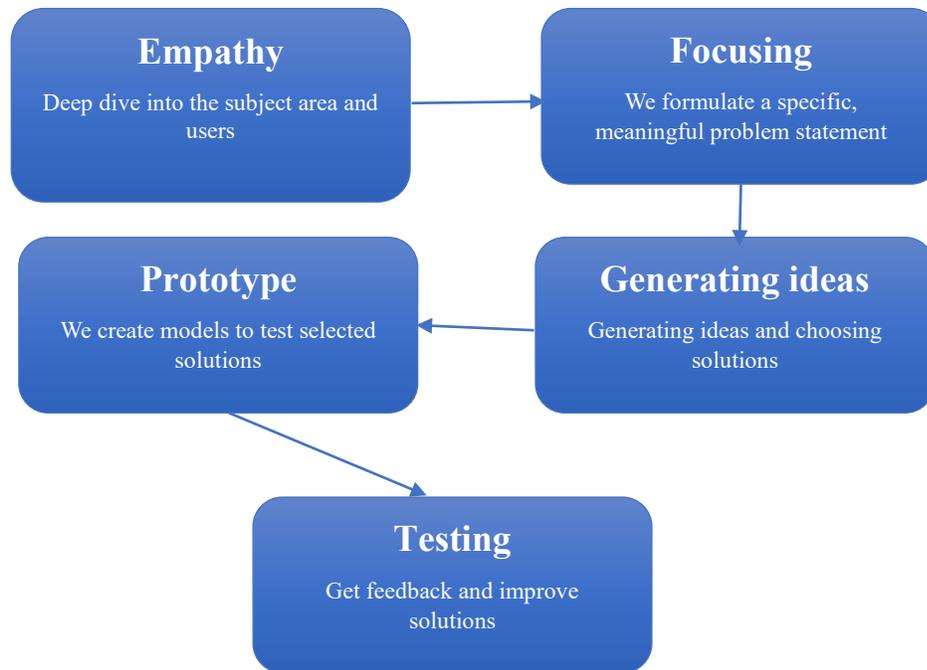


Figure 1. Stanford' Design Thinking Model
Source: compiled by the author

The study interviewed civil servants, managers, and other professionals to assess their soft and hard skills. The main goal was to determine their level of competence and readiness to perform their professional duties. Based on the Stanford model, a prediction was made on how the design thinking application could improve its future performance. The study identified the main criteria for assessing professional skills and the ability of civil servants to perform their functions [16].

These criteria include the ability to monitor the implementation of tasks and evaluate results, education level, ability to plan at the operational and strategic levels, knowledge of regulatory requirements and design thinking methods, and proficiency in English and Ukrainian. Data reflecting the development of hard skills among civil servants at the level are presented in Figure 2.

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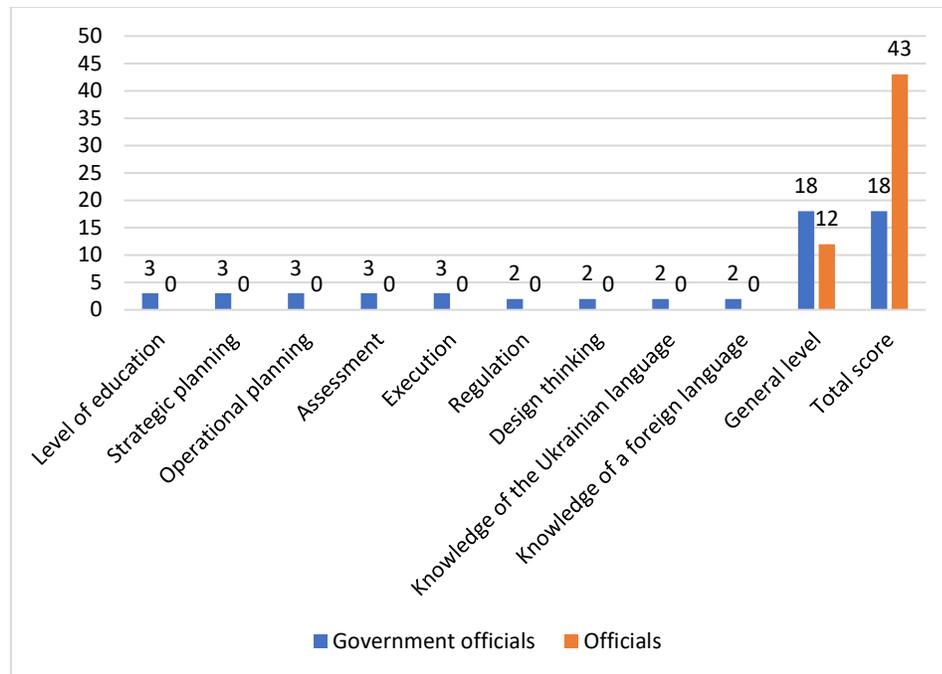


Figure 2. Civil Servants' Qualification Characteristics

Source: compiled by the author

The results of the study indicate that managers have a high level of professional training. They have practical skills and effectively apply them in their work. All three state institutions demonstrate good performance indicators and an average level of use of design thinking in daily activities. The proposed model contributes to improving communication, positive thinking, leadership qualities, motivation, and also helps to find ways to develop these aspects [17].

During COVID-19, state institutions served as an example of how to maintain the stability of the system of state administrative bodies. However, the level of efficiency of management of state institutions remains incomplete, which indicates the need to implement practical solutions to increase the productivity of state employees and improve their practical and professional skills.

To improve team interaction and cooperation between the agency and other institutions, it is necessary to implement effective communication practices in the work of public administration services. The ability to share ideas, propose solutions, accept different points of view, and resolve conflicts politely are key factors in successful communication [18].

Creative and innovative thinking are also important “soft” skills for leaders. Thanks to a creative approach, leaders can generate original ideas, which contribute to the creation of new and competitive innovations.

The main indicators of soft skills development include: self-motivation, flexibility, critical thinking, communication skills, creativity, conflict resolution, time management, leadership, and emotional intelligence (see Figure 3).

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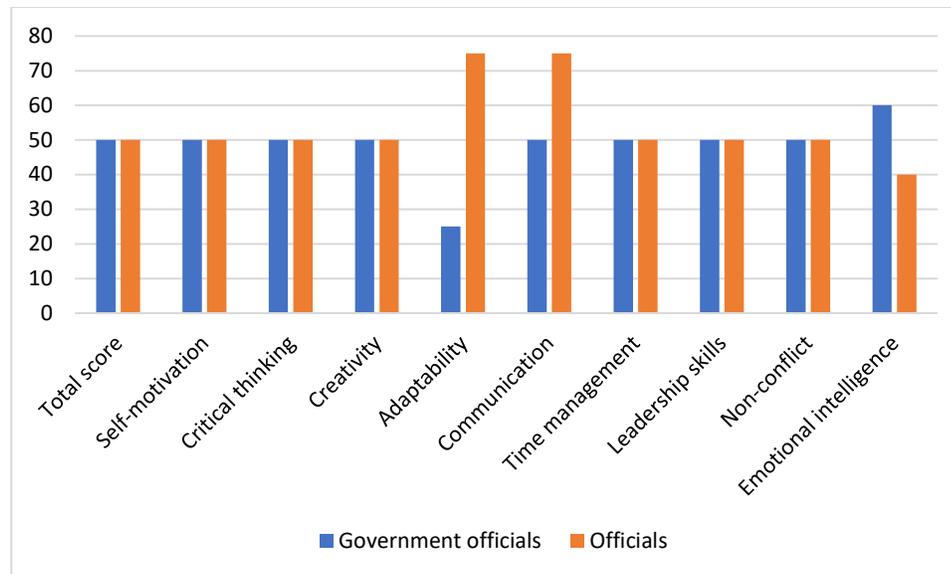


Figure 3. Soft Skills of Civil Servants

Source: compiled by the author

Emotional intelligence, communication skills, and leadership qualities play an extremely important role because they help civil servants effectively perform their duties and cope with professional challenges. These skills also contribute to the development of other professional competencies and form the basis of quality management. Adaptability, motivation, and resilience reflect a person's psychological state, their willingness to make decisions, and the ability to use resources for self-improvement. They are important indicators of competitiveness in the labor market [19].

For managers, professional knowledge, experience, possession, and skills (hard skills) are not a sufficient condition for success. It is also necessary to constantly develop, analyze one's own activities, work effectively in a team, and find non-standard solutions, while maintaining an orientation towards personal growth. Such abilities, often called communicative or flexible skills, are gaining particular importance in modern management.

The ability to effectively allocate time and deeply analyze problems helps managers make more balanced decisions and find optimal ways to overcome difficulties in stressful situations. Developed communication skills also contribute to the faster assimilation of new professional knowledge, which increases labor productivity and promotes career development [20].

The results of the study show that due to the war and its consequences, the main focus of work is still focused on the development of hard skills, while soft skills remain a lower priority. In the event of a repeat of the pandemic of COVID-19 or other crises, this may create certain difficulties. The use of design thinking helps to develop soft skills and strengthen professional competencies. The most important steps are to reduce the level of rigid hierarchy in government structures and implement the Stanford design thinking model, which can improve the work of civil servants in the medium term [21].

Discussion

A recent study demonstrates that a comprehensive mechanism for modern development will reduce the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the work of civil servants. This involves the formation and management of new concept implementation [22].

Analysis of the other authors' opinions shows that the combination of management skills with design thinking plays an important role in state-building. It is believed that an approach that involves project processes or the use of design in local government is necessary to improve the work of the public sector. It contributes to the emotional intelligence development, motivation, and more effective communication of civil servants [12].

Other studies focus on attempts to introduce design thinking into the public bodies' work to respond promptly to current and anticipated challenges. Consultative meetings and seminars are important for civil servants to raise awareness and their managers [23].

Research by Rossokha and Cherednikova [24] shows that one of the key aspects of increasing the efficiency of civil servants is the gradual accumulation. This issue deserves special attention; it can contribute to increasing the productivity of public Ukrainian institutions and the professional development of each employee.

Knowledge of modern digital technologies significantly increases the efficiency of a modern management system. The key in the conditions of global digital transformation and specialists' fierce competition is flexible skills development integrated with computer literacy.

Taking into account the social context, modern scholars offer new approaches to the role of digital competences and soft skills in flexible social contacts for effective interaction and work in public administration [13, 25].

Further research is needed that will focus on increasing the civil servants' digital literacy, and also on introducing modern digital management into the process of managing institutions.

Conclusions

Therefore, design thinking is an extremely important and effective tool to solve problems in the management of the public sector that have arisen after the pandemic of Covid-19. The key components of design thinking are creativity, clear communication, emotional intelligence, and the ability to find optimal solutions that help in public administration. When applying these skills, productivity increases and work results in public administration improve. The design thinking used according to the Stanford model consists of understanding the problem of generating ideas, creating solutions, and testing them, which can improve public administration. The method is aimed at people who are civil servants and want to be creative and find practical solutions to everyday challenges when applying design thinking in management. It also improves command work and creates a more comfortable environment in the command, which helps reduce the negative consequences of COVID-19 and also supports the emotional well-being of the team in public administration, and focuses on people and results.

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