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CULTIVATING INFLUENTIAL LEADERSHIP IN THAILAND'S PUBLIC SECTOR: FUTURE SCENARIOS AND DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

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Abstract

As public organizations increasingly navigate AI-driven transformations, rapid economic shifts, and highly complex operational environments, traditional leadership paradigms must evolve to maintain organizational effectiveness and public trust. This qualitative study explores future scenarios to identify the core components of Influential Leadership (IL) and formulates strategic development guidelines for Thailand's public sector over the next decade. Utilizing a rigorous multiple-method approach, the research first engaged ten key informants in in-depth interviews to define the leadership construct, followed by a focus group with five human resource experts to refine the developmental framework. The findings reveal three foundational IL components essential for future executives: Leadership Capability (encompassing strategic vision and data-driven execution), Social Skills for Influence (highlighting trust-building and powerful communication), and Inner Attributes (focusing on empathy, ethics, and psychological resilience). Subsequently, the study established comprehensive development guidelines that encompass targeted learning interventions, structural support systems, behavioral indicators, and sustainable progress-tracking mechanisms. Ultimately, these proposed guidelines provide policymakers and organizational developers with a robust, context-specific blueprint to systematically cultivate adaptive, ethical, and collaborative leaders capable of driving sustainable public-sector performance and navigating impending global uncertainties.

Keywords: Influential Leadership, Public Organizations, Leadership Development, Future Scenarios, Organizational Adaptability

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Introduction

In an era of rapid economic transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), and increasing organizational complexity, public organizations must continually adapt to volatile and uncertain environments. These conditions place new expectations on leaders, who must not only demonstrate technical capability and adaptability but also navigate ambiguity in AI-driven work contexts (Hossain et al., 2025; Olkiewicz & Jarosik-Michalak, 2022). In Thailand, leadership has long been recognized as a central element of public-sector effectiveness. The Office of the Public Sector Development Commission (OPDC) highlights leadership and vision as key indicators of organizational value and adaptability (Office of the Public Sector Development & TRIS Corporation, 2023; Saengsan, 2018). Research further suggests that high-performing public organizations benefit from leaders who can collaborate across sectors, engage diverse stakeholders, and foster innovation beyond the constraints of traditional bureaucratic systems (Tanchai et al., 2004).

At the same time, assessments of public organizations indicate that leadership capability varies considerably across agencies, which can affect organizational responsiveness and long-term development (Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2015). These findings do not imply failure but rather point to an opportunity: strengthening the type of leadership that can motivate, build trust, and guide personnel toward shared goals. This aligns with the concept of leadership influence, which emphasizes the ability to shape attitudes, inspire cooperation, and create alignment within teams and networks (Cialdini, 2023).

However, widely used leadership theories offer only partial explanations for the kinds of influence needed in today's complex public-sector environment. Transformational leadership may depend on cultural fit and individual differences (Chen et al., 2018), while its impact can be limited without strong ethical grounding (Kark et al., 2003). Charismatic leadership can inspire confidence but may also introduce risks such as overdependence, sensitivity to criticism, or unintended encouragement of unethical pro-organizational behavior (Gray, 2005; Zhang et al., 2020). Experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlight that no single leadership theory consistently explains leadership effectiveness amid rapid change (Suar et al., 2023).

These gaps underscore the critical importance of identifying the precise leadership characteristics that enable executives to influence, motivate, and build trust in Thailand's public sector. To address this need, the primary objectives of this research are twofold: first, to explore future scenarios and identify the core components of Influential Leadership (IL) essential to public-sector executives; and second, to formulate strategic, context-appropriate guidelines for cultivating IL within these organizations over the next decade. By achieving these objectives, this study aims to provide actionable insights that enhance organizational adaptability and drive sustainable public-sector performance in an era of rapid transformation.

Literature Review

This research integrated qualitative multiple-methods and leadership theories to identify Influential Leadership components and, using leadership development approaches, to formulate guidelines for developing public-sector executives in Thailand over the next decade.

Leadership in Public Organizations

This study was conducted within the context of public organizations in Thailand, which play a vital role in providing public services across social, cultural, academic, and other public-interest domains. These organizations operate under non-profit missions and are required to function in parallel with state supervision in terms of policy direction, budgeting, and performance monitoring and evaluation. Achieving success in fulfilling such missions is therefore directly related to the roles of leaders at all levels within public organizations.

Previous research has shown that Thai public organizations exhibit a relatively high degree of managerial flexibility due to their responsibility for specific, specialized missions. This characteristic enables more adaptive management practices and operations that are not strictly constrained by traditional bureaucratic mechanisms (Lorsuwannarat et al., 2015; Pongsapan & Vichit-Vadakan, 2018). Consequently, leaders are required to make decisions, drive policy implementation, coordinate collaboration across multiple sectors, and guide their organizations toward achieving established visions and goals (Tanchai et al., 2004). Research conducted in Thailand thus highlights the structural role of leadership and its critical responsibility in managing and implementing core missions within public organizations.

Studies in Asia and Southeast Asia highlight how context, culture, and governance systems shape leadership styles and effectiveness in public organizations. Research in Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, shows that organizational context significantly influences leadership, particularly during periods of change and crisis (Valero, 2015), while studies in Vietnam demonstrate that leadership styles affect civil servants' organizational commitment and job performance (Thanh & Quang, 2022). Overall, these findings suggest that public-sector leadership must align with each country's cultural, governance, and organizational context. Moreover, both domestic and international studies consistently indicate that a single theory cannot explain leadership in public service organizations but must be understood within specific contextual and governance conditions.

The Influence Principle (IP): The term influence refers to obtaining desired outcomes without using orders or coercion (Lucas & Baxter, 2012). It is considered a form of power that influences others' thoughts, attitudes, and actions, while followers retain the discretion to comply (Chainui, 2011). Studies on the IP show that influential leaders share values and goals, consider internal-external contexts, communicate effectively, listen deeply, build cooperation and unity, persuade, form networks, and demonstrate patience and commitment (Cialdini, 2023; Fourie & Mystris, 2021; Frisina, 2014; Grenny & Pound, 2010; Hoy & Smith, 2007; Kaufman, 2011; Zhang et al., 2020). Similarly, Charismatic Leadership (CL) emphasizes influencing others through charisma, high self-confidence, and trust-building; such leaders demonstrate a clear future vision, sociability, strong relationship-building skills, empathy, confidence, courage, and risk-taking (Akdeniz, 2020; Banks et al., 2017; Choi, 2006; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; House & Howell, 1992; Robbins & Judge, 2010). Likewise, Transformational Leadership (TL) focuses on organizational vision, values, goals, risk tolerance, creating change, engagement, trust, effective communication, and ethical and moral awareness (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Hall et al., 2002; Loon et al., 2012; Maisyura et al., 2022; Alessa, 2021).

The literature review highlights the strengths of IPs, CL, and TL. IPs emphasize leaders' ability to foster group cohesion and positive relationships through flexibility, adaptability, prudence, self-regulation, tolerance for change, deep listening, and relationship building with networks and stakeholders. These attributes expand leaders' spheres of influence and enable organizations to achieve sustainable outcomes under complex and challenging conditions (Fourie & Mystris, 2021; Kaufman, 2011; Zhang & Chua, 2009). CL demonstrates positive effects at both individual and organizational levels, particularly through vision articulation, which enhances performance, affective commitment, motivation, and a sense of group belonging, leading to higher engagement, job satisfaction, and performance (Ansar et al., 2016; Cicero & Pierro, 2007; Machokoto, 2019; Meslec et al., 2020; Supratman et al., 2021). Similarly, TL generates positive outcomes by fostering trust, learning motivation, confidence, positive relationships, team cohesion, engagement, knowledge sharing, and innovation, even in culturally diverse contexts (Afshari, 2022; Chebon et al., 2019; Le & Le, 2021; Otieno et al., 2019).

Overall, these three approaches share a common core: leaders' capacity to exert positive influence through vision, trust, relationships, and role modeling, thereby improving performance, commitment, learning, engagement, and organizational sustainability. However, prior research indicates that no single leadership theory fully explains leadership effectiveness in crisis or highly dynamic contexts (Suar et al., 2023). CL may involve risks such as excessive self-confidence, sensitivity to criticism, poor listening, and competitive tendencies, while high-pressure situations may trigger undesirable behaviors (Gray, 2005; Zhang et al., 2020). Likewise, TL may be less effective in contexts of dispersed teams, limited communication, personality mismatches, or ethical misuse, all of which can undermine its core mechanisms (Chen et al., 2018; Eisenberg et al., 2019; Kark et al., 2003). To clarify the conceptual similarities and differences among these leadership approaches, the comparative points are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Leadership Theories

Comparison Dimension	Influence Principle	Charismatic Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Influential Leadership (IL)
Source of Influence	Relationships and interactions with groups, networks, and stakeholders	Personal attributes, communication, and a powerful vision	Role modeling, values, and inspirational motivation that encourages followers	Integration of influence from capacity, skills, and leader attributes within the context of public organizations
Characteristics of Influence Use	Flexible and rational use of influence, emphasizing active listening and collaboration	Use of charisma, vision, and inspirational motivation to build trust and emotional attachment	Motivating change, developing potential, and creating innovation	Balanced use of influence to connect, coordinate, and drive organizations in alignment with the context
Level of Outcomes	Group level, networks, and stakeholders	Individual and group levels	Individual, group, and organizational levels	Individual, group, organizational, and network levels
Leader Components Emphasized	Emphasis on leader characteristics and skills in using influence	Emphasis on personality traits and charisma of leaders	Emphasis on leadership behaviors and change processes	Integration of leadership capacity, social skills, and inner attributes of leaders
Conceptual Limitations	Potential and readiness of leaders are fundamental	High confidence, need for power, and influence; may lead to unintended behaviors	Effectiveness depends on context, values, and follower characteristics	Limitations of single-theory approaches are addressed through integration suited to the context of public organizations

Table 1 compares influence principles, CL, and TL across key dimensions, including sources and modes of influence, outcome levels, leader characteristics, and limitations, providing the basis for synthesizing IL adapted to the context of public organizations in Thailand.

Synthesis of the Core Components of IL

The researcher synthesized the three concepts based on their distinctive strengths, conceptual alignment, and complementary nature. Influence principles explain the scope and mechanisms of leadership influence, CL highlights internal sources of influence, and TL explains how such influence leads to change at the individual, group, and organizational levels. This integration led to the development of IL, thereby extending the conceptual understanding of leadership attributes in contemporary public organizations. Overlapping components across the three

frameworks were identified, consolidated, and aligned with a competency-based framework comprising knowledge, skills, and attributes, forming the IL construct. The synthesized framework was subsequently used to guide instrument design and the development of interview questions for in-depth interviews, with the core components of IL summarized in Table 2

Table 2 Synthesized Core Components of Influential Leadership

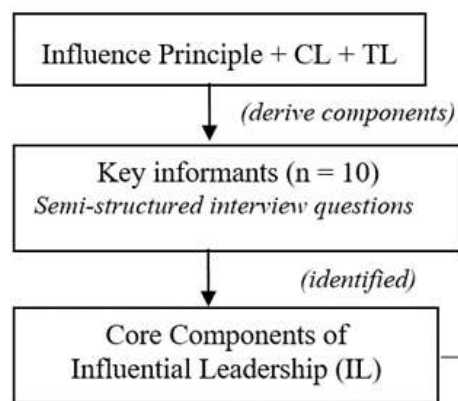
Core Components			Synthesized Core Components
The Influence Principle	Charismatic Leadership (CL)	Transformation Leadership (TL)	Influential Leadership (IL)
Knowledge - Shared Values & Common Goals - Environment & Context	Knowledge - Vision	Knowledge - Vision, Values & Goals	Leadership Know-how - Vision, Mission and Values - Environment and Context
Skills - Communication - Deep Listening - Collaboration - Influence - Group Cohesion - Networking - Flexibility & Adaptability	Skills -Networking	Skills - Participation - Trust-Building - Change Leadership - Communication	Interpersonal Skills - Communication - Building Trust - Flexibility and adaptability - Networking and relationship
Attributes - Perseverance - Determination	Attributes - Risk Taking Willingness - Confidence - Empathy	Attributes - Risk Acceptance - Ethics, Morality & Integrity	Essential Attributes - Determined and patient - Willingness to take risks - Self-confidence - Empathy - Ethic

Table 2 presents the core components of IL, synthesized from the Influence Principle, CL, and TL theories. IL comprises three components: leadership know-how, interpersonal skills, and essential attributes, including vision and values, contextual understanding, effective communication, relationship-building, adaptability, and ethical conduct. These synthesized components formed the preliminary conceptual framework for developing interview questions in Phase 1.

Research Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study was conducted in two phases to ensure a comprehensive exploration of future scenarios and developmental pathways. Phase 1 examined future scenarios for Influential Leadership (IL) components among executives in Thai public organizations by synthesizing the IP, CL, and TL theories into an IL framework. In-depth interviews with ten key informants were then conducted to identify these core components. Subsequently, Phase 2 integrated the findings from Phase 1 with advanced leadership development concepts. Through focus group discussions with five human resource experts, this phase developed strategic guidelines to cultivate IL and enhance organizational adaptability in public organizations over the next decade, as presented in Figure 1.

Phase 1 of the Qualitative Study



Phase 2 of the Qualitative Study



CL = Charismatic Leadership / TL = Transformation Leadership / IL= Influential Leadership

Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a multiple-method design to obtain comprehensive conceptual and empirical insights. The research was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 consisted of in-depth interviews with 10 key informants to explore future scenarios for IL within Thai public organizations. A future scenario-building approach, guided by Ethnographic Future Research (EFR), was used to develop interview questions, with an emphasis on the most probable scenario to reflect the anticipated complexity and change in public sector administration over the next decade. Findings from Phase 1 served as the foundation for Phase 2, which included a focus group discussion with five participants. This phase aimed to collaboratively develop guidelines for IL development among executives in public organizations, ensuring alignment with the future context of public service organizations.

Selection of Key Informants and Focus Group Participants

Phase 1: Data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten key informants selected using criterion sampling. The informants were drawn from three groups: 1) executives or representatives of agencies responsible for overseeing public organizations, such as board chairpersons, board members, or policy-making and supervisory officials; 2) middle- to high-level executives of public organizations representing six mission areas—research, science and technology, education, medicine and public health, policy and national development, and digital and innovation; and 3) professors or academics with experience in teaching, evaluation, and research related to management, leadership development, and human resources in public organizations. Overall, the key informants comprised executives of public organizations (n = 5), policy-makers and supervisory officials (n = 3), and academics (n = 2). All informants were senior professionals with extensive experience, postgraduate-level qualifications, and long-term involvement in public-sector leadership, ensuring that the data obtained were information-rich, credible, and appropriate for exploring IL in the context of Thai public organizations.

Phase 2: The second phase employed a focus group discussion with five participants selected through purposive sampling based on their expertise in leadership development in public organizations. Participants were drawn from two groups: 1) mid-level executives or expert officials from governmental public organizations responsible for human resource development, leadership development, organizational development, or policy and planning, and 2) professionals or subject-matter experts with experience in human resource, leadership, or organizational

development. The focus group comprised three participants from governmental public organizations representing national development, public health, and education, and two professionals in human resource and leadership development. All participants had substantial professional experience, ensuring credible and diverse perspectives to refine the guidelines for developing IL in public organizations.

In Phase 1, data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten purposively selected key informants based on their relevant knowledge and experience, and data collection continued until saturation was reached. In Phase 2, a focus group discussion was conducted with participants selected to align with the research objectives and to ensure both shared and diverse perspectives, continuing until data saturation was achieved and sufficient data were obtained to address the research objectives.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

This research study was conducted after receiving approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Srinakharinwirot University, No.SWUEC-672511.

An interview guide was developed based on the IL framework, integrating the IP, CL, and TL theories. It included four semi-structured questions on: 1) roles and experience of key informants; 2) the future scenario of public organizations; 3) essential IL knowledge, skills, and characteristics for the next decade; and 4) approaches for developing IL. The dissertation advisor reviewed and revised the questions before they were sent to key informants, and prepared probing questions to ensure complete and saturated data.

Focus group questions were developed from the three IL components identified in Phase 1 and the leadership development process concept, which were revised by the dissertation advisor and sent to participants beforehand. The questions covered: 1) the IL development process; 2) the development support system; 3) indicators and behavioral outcomes; and 4) monitoring for continuity and sustainability. Probing questions ensured complete data, and participants received documents summarizing the three IL components to support the discussion.

Both the interview and focus group discussion guides were systematically developed based on relevant leadership theories and synthesized frameworks. The instruments were reviewed and refined through multiple consultations with the dissertation advisor to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Probing questions were used to support data completeness and saturation.

Data Analysis

In the first phase, the research applied the data analysis principles of Miles et al. (2014), beginning with recording and transcribing the interviews verbatim, followed by reviewing and editing the raw data for accuracy. ATLAS.ti (version 25) was used for data condensation, codification, displaying coded data in categorized tables (Code Book), and drawing conclusions and verifying the data, resulting in three core components of IL refined from the initial synthesis. In the second phase, directed content analysis was applied to the focus group discussions using a conceptual framework to categorize statements into themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), combining the IL components from Phase 1 with leadership development processes to develop the question framework; consistent statements were coded, new themes added when needed, and the recorded discussions transcribed and reviewed with the dissertation advisor and fellow researchers to ensure accuracy. This study ensured analytical rigor across both phases by applying the criteria of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, through methodological triangulation, peer debriefing, maintaining a systematic coding audit trail, and verifying all interpretations against the raw data.

Research Results

The findings were organized into two parts based on the research objectives: 1) in-depth interview results identifying the components of influential leadership among public-

organization executives for the next decade, and 2) focus group results outlining guidelines for developing influential leadership in public organizations. Each part has details as follows:

Future Scenarios: Core Components of Influential Leadership

Based on the exploration of future scenarios through in-depth interviews, IL is defined as executives' capability to set a strategic direction aligned with the organization's vision and goals, integrate information and AI-driven technologies, communicate effectively, foster cross-sector collaboration, and demonstrate strong ethical and personal attributes that prioritize the public interest. To drive organizational adaptability, IL comprises three core components—Leadership Capability, Social Skills for Influence, and Inner Attributes—summarized in Table 3, along with their detailed subcomponents.

Table 3 Components of Influential Leadership for Executives in Public Organizations

Core Components	Definition	Sub-Components
Leadership Capability	Able to set directions aligned with organizational missions and goals, think strategically, and adapt to changing environments. Demonstrate initiative and innovation even under risk, while integrating evidence and modern technology to support decision-making and drive organizational effectiveness	• Strategic Vision • Contextual Savvy, Learning Agility & Adaptability • Creative Initiative & Opportunity Seeking • Data & Technology Driven Execution
Social Skills for Influence	Communicates with clarity and sincerity, inspires trust, sets a positive example, and strengthens collaboration both within the team and across networks	• Powerful Communication • Trust-Building • Networking & Relationship Building
Inner Attributes	Determination, resilience, and the confidence to overcome obstacles while learning from mistakes. Empathy and genuine support for team members, guided by integrity and ethical conduct. Such leaders place the organization's interests above personal gain and inspire others through their commitment to values and fairness.	• Drive & Self-Efficacy • Empathy • Ethics & Integrity

Table 3 illustrates the three core components of IL, with definitions and sub-components derived from in-depth interviews with key informants. Examples of related terms are provided below.

Component 1: Leadership Capability: This refers to an influential leader's ability to set direction consistent with the organization's mission and goals; think strategically; understand and adapt to changing environments; dare to initiate and pursue innovations despite risks; and integrate information and technology to support effective decision-making and organizational progress. It comprises the following sub-components:

1) Strategic Vision: influential leaders can clearly see the direction of operations and align with the organization's mission and goals. They lead with a vision and translate that vision into strategies to drive the organization towards success, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "The most important thing is being able to translate that vision into the organization's strategy. This will enable the team to move forward in accordance with the organization's mission and direction." (Key informant 9)

2) Knowledge, Understanding the Context, and Readiness to Adapt: influential leaders have comprehensive knowledge, understand the changing environment, and are ready to adjust work processes or administration to be consistent with the context of a public organization, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "In-depth knowledge is essential in one area, but broad knowledge is also essential because it enables them to utilize multiple disciplines...

This enables the organization to operate." (Key informant 10). Similarly, another key informant emphasized that "Leaders must be able to think, adapt, and learn from existing principles and regulations... The goal is to accomplish the work by applying the rules appropriately... Leadership is a huge challenge today." (Key informant 4)

3) Initiative and Exploring New Opportunities: influential leaders must think systems-based, creatively initiate, and courageously lead change, even when facing uncertain outcomes or risky situations. They strive to learn, seek new approaches, and push past existing limitations, as illustrated by one key informant who stated that "If I were to hire you, I would not focus on education or GPA, but on whether you can learn or challenge... If you have that, you have motivation and drive... If not, you resist change." (Key informant 5). Similarly, another key informant noted that "They have to initiate new things... readiness to demonstrate this is to transcend... think of something new... leaders have to initiate new things, transcend change, and have the courage to change." (Key informant 8)

4) Data and Technology: influential leaders can leverage empirical data and modern digital technology as key tools for analysis, planning, directing and shaping operations to drive organizations based on data and respond to changing situations, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "Digital technology is very influential. We work with it and aim to be an innovative organization, using knowledge, new methods, and data analysis to predict and shape work directions." (Key informant 1). Similarly, another key informant emphasized that "We must govern with data. This is a key factor in enabling public organizations like this to operate in a networked manner... as data-driven." (Key informant 10)

Component 2: Social Skills for Influence: Influential leaders communicate clearly and effectively to inspire and motivate others, listen with transparency and sincerity, and foster trust and confidence. They serve as role models and build strong relationships and networks to support organizational work and enhance collaboration. This component includes the following sub-components:

1) Powerful Communication: influential leaders communicate clearly and with purpose. They can persuade, inspire, and motivate cooperation and compliance. They also listen attentively, engage in two-way communication to build understanding and engagement with their followers, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "Powerful communication is persuasive and credible... not flattery, but helping others see the value in what they do and who they are." (Key informant 8). Similarly, another key informant emphasized that "When leaders do not communicate clearly or listen... rumors increase, engagement declines, and leadership becomes difficult." (Key informant 3)

2) Trust Building: influential leaders must instill trust, acceptance, and confidence, as well as be a good example for their staff to be inspired by, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "Trust is a huge issue... When an organization lacks trust, everything slows down... If they do not trust the leader, no matter what you say, they will not believe you... They know you say one thing and do another." (Key informant 5). Similarly, another key informant emphasized that "If they cannot build or lose trust, they will not be able to lead. If they lose this, they will not be able to influence anyone." (Key informant 3)

3) Networking and Relationship Building: influential leaders can build strong relationships with partner networks to support the organization's work, as well as foster teamwork and collaboration within the organization, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "Leaders play a crucial role in connecting public and private actors to support the organization... Leaders must be well-connected and able to build these relationships." (Key informant 3)

Component 3: Inner Attributes: An influential leader must demonstrate resilience, perseverance, and confidence in overcoming obstacles, while learning from mistakes and driving the team toward shared goals. Such leaders show compassion and genuine concern for

team members' development and act with integrity, honesty, and ethical responsibility by prioritizing organizational interests over personal gain. This consists of the following sub-components:

1) Drive and Self-efficacy: influential leaders must be determined, patient, and never give up when facing obstacles. They are ready to learn from their mistakes, and believe in their own potential to drive the team towards their goals, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "Leaders must be resilient, patient, able to learn from mistakes, and persevere... Even without knowing the way, they must move forward... If we cannot lead ourselves, we cannot lead others... This is self-discipline." (Key informant 4). Similarly, another key informant emphasized that "True leaders remain who they are despite problems and challenges... They are not afraid to experiment, even though experimentation inevitably leads to failure." (Key informant 3)

2) Empathy: influential leaders must understand and care about the feelings, thoughts, and needs of their team members. They view their subordinates as human beings, not just resources. They are prepared to encourage and support their growth, as illustrated by one key informant who stated that "We must also understand our subordinates' stress... Everyone experiences difficulties... In addition to managing our own stress, we must also understand our subordinates." (Key informant 4). Similarly, another key informant noted that "This is the competency of a modern leader... They view their subordinates not as resources, but as human beings... ready to learn from us, work for us, and grow with us." (Key informant 4)

3) Ethics and Integrity: influential leaders must behave with integrity and honesty, both publicly and privately, and avoid any unethical actions, prioritizing organizational gain over personal gain, as reflected by one key informant who stated that "Leaders must be consistent on- and off-screen... Influence must come from within." (Key informant 3). Similarly, another key informant emphasized that "Leadership depends on the individual... Those who work for the people and the country endure, while self-interest does not... Beyond knowledge, honesty and integrity must come from within." (Key informant 7)

In summary, the results of the Phase 1 research study highlight three core components of IL that can clearly reflect the future of public organization executives over the next decade.

However, a closer examination of the subcomponents of IL reveals that data- and technology-driven leadership, powerful communication, and ethics and integrity were the dimensions most strongly emphasized by informants in the context of the coming decade. Although all groups of informants agreed on the necessity of these three components, differences emerged in perspectives and the relative weight assigned to each dimension, reflecting the distinct roles and professional experiences of each group.

Specifically, executives in public organizations tended to emphasize the practical and regulatory use of data, technology, and communication to support decision-making, policy implementation, and the achievement of tangible outcomes. In contrast, academics and human resource development experts placed greater emphasis on leaders' judgment, adherence to ethical principles, and responsibility for social impacts, as well as sincere and transparent communication aimed at building long-term trust. This perspective reflects the expectation that IL in the public sector must be grounded in principles of public interest and service to citizens. These components also reflect future scenarios in which public organizations are likely to face high levels of uncertainty and rapid technological change. Under such conditions, influential leaders must integrate data, communication, and ethics to guide their organizations toward stability and sustainability.

Strategic Guidelines for Cultivating Influential Leadership

Focus group discussions revealed comprehensive strategic guidelines for cultivating impactful leadership, enabling executives to grow systematically in ways that ensure organizational

adaptability and resilience amid future uncertainties. These developmental guidelines encompass the following key dimensions:

Development Issues: Developing executives to enable impactful leadership across all three core components: leadership capability, social skills for influence, and inner attributes. Key development topics and supporting activities are essentially as follows:

1) Leadership Capability: Key development issues include:

1.1) Understanding the context of change: This means, developing leaders to understand the context of change—political, legal, social, and cultural—which presents challenges and necessitates acceptance, adaptation, and rapid change, as reflected by one participant who stated that "The term VUCA World, now that it has evolved into BANI, I see it as a challenge. Today's world is no longer linear. It is complex, difficult to understand, and changing rapidly." (Participant 5)

1.2) AI Mindset and literacy: Leaders must have a mindset for using AI to assist in their work. This starts with building basic AI literacy across their organization, understanding how to apply it in their work, and raising awareness of the benefits and precautions. As one participant noted, "AI transformation in the organization is a challenge for leaders... AI is a tool, not a replacement... Leaders must prepare to appropriately incorporate AI into each organizational process, including readiness in data and systems... Crucially, this involves shaping everyone's mindset to recognize that AI is an aid, not an obstacle... Do not resist it." (Participant 2)

1.3) Learning from real-world experience: Most leadership capability comes from direct experience, hands-on practice, and self-learning. As reflected by one participant who stated that "Regarding leadership capability... It is a matter of learning from experience... Whoever is thrown into a canal, river, sea, ocean—the first to be thrown into the ocean will have very extensive experience." (Participant 1)

2) Social Skills for Influence: Key development issues include:

2.1) Deep conversational communication: Involves engaging in conversation through questioning, storytelling using real-world cases, and deep listening, which form the foundation of quality conversations. This fosters deep understanding and inspiration. As one participant highlighted, "Conversation remains important... storytelling is used to connect stories to topics and foster deep discussion, understanding, empathy, and awareness." (Participant 2)

2.2) Building Trust and a psychologically safe culture: Influential leaders need to build trust and be good role models; they must develop a culture of trust and provide a sense of psychological safety to their subordinates. As one participant noted, "Psychological safety is crucial right now... There is so much toxicity... Mental safety is incredibly important in this era... Attracting them to participate through discussions and activities that strive to create a culture." (Participant 4)

2.3) Hands-on networking activities: Networking is a form of development through on-the-ground exposure, providing opportunities for new experiences with external networks, learning from new perspectives and experiences. As one participant indicated, "Attending conferences, meeting connections, and networking is a form of development... Seeing patterns and engaging with diverse people outside the classroom provides experience for leadership growth." (Participant 1)

3) Inner Attribute: Key development issues include:

3.1) Building mental readiness and strength: It is developing leaders to be ready to adjust their mindset, internal beliefs, and align their actions. To build inner strength, as one participant reflected, "I am reminded of the words of V. Vajiramedhi... that the brain is in harmony with the heart... congruent—the alignment within us... Once we transform ourselves from the inside, that is the best way." (Participant 5)

In addition to the core development issues, there are supporting activities that promote learning and develop IL, such as coaching, using board games, the Point of You technique, and using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) activities.

4) Support Systems: To develop IL, it is necessary to have systems in place that support and facilitate its development, and to consider the following constraints:

4.1) Resources: This includes budgets, relevant personnel such as experts, coaches, consultants, as well as various tools and learning channels that can be used to develop IL. As one participant highlighted, "The resources... whether from the budget or other sources, that support leadership development must be adequate... They must be able to support and demonstrate good leadership skills, with financial support and other support." (Participant 3)

4.2) The Environment and Atmosphere: There are always available and conducive to learning, as reflected by one participant who stated that "Everything must be in place, a learning culture, and learning from the mistakes of leaders is possible." (Participant 4)

4.3) Structure and Policy: Participants emphasized the need for structural and policy support, noting that learning and development must fit the organizational context and hierarchy, allow appropriate time for executives, and remain flexible while enabling them to express opinions and demonstrate leadership. As one participant noted, "Managers should not be too meticulous... Learning administrators must design a concise approach... but flexible and able to answer the question of time management." (Participant 2)

4.4) Behavioral Indicators and Outcomes: Indicators and outcomes assess observed IL behaviors and their impacts after development, measured through observation, assessment methods, and visible changes in organizational culture, as reflected by one participant who stated that "In terms of performance measurement... performance after training and development is crucial." (Participant 3) Similarly, another participant emphasized that "The outcome is the development of a learning organizational culture... reflected in leaders' motivation to learn and experiment and in followers exhibiting similar behaviors." (Participant 1)

4.5) Progress Tracking, Continuity & Sustainability: To ensure sustainable leadership, progress must be continuously monitored, learning systematically developed, participation and experience sharing encouraged, and consistent organizational support maintained. As one participant noted, "It should be continuous, not disappear... evaluation and monitoring must be continuous and consistent... We cannot stop this year and do something next year... it must be an office rule... evaluations can be quarterly or annual... and tied to motivation, or morale." (Participant 3)

In summary, developing IL among public-sector executives entails addressing component-specific issues, providing appropriate support systems, assessing outcomes, and ensuring continuity through ongoing learning and engagement aligned with future national directions (see Figure 2).

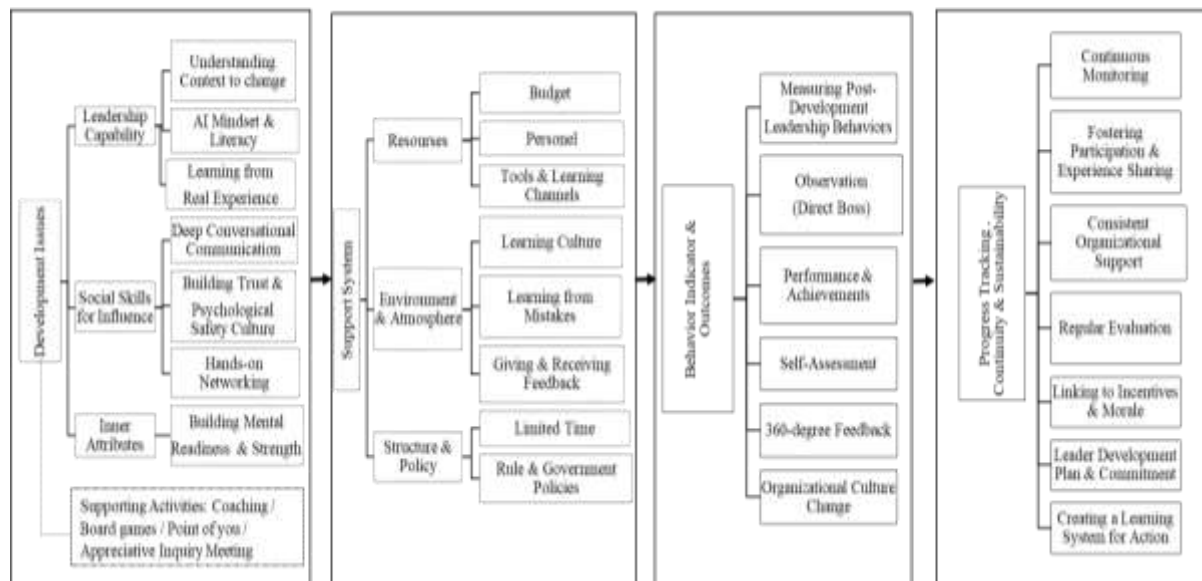


Figure 2 Strategic Guidelines for Cultivating Influential Leadership

However, from the perspectives of focus group participants on approaches to developing IL among executives in public organizations, there was a shared consensus that leadership development should encompass knowledge, skills, and internal attributes to respond effectively to future complexity and uncertainty. Accordingly, the development of IL in the coming decade should adopt a systematic, process-oriented approach that integrates organizational context, leadership roles and responsibilities, and the anticipated direction of public sector transformation.

Comparative analysis further revealed differences in perspectives among participant groups. Executives and practitioners within public organizations emphasized development approaches that are directly applicable in practice, such as experiential learning, the use of data and technology, and communication for policy implementation and organizational driving. In contrast, academics and subject-matter experts placed greater importance on developing leaders' ways of thinking, judgment, and ethical foundations to foster accountability for social impacts and build long-term trust. These approaches to IL development reflect future scenarios faced by public organizations in the coming decade and highlight that leadership development in public organizations should be designed as a continuous, system-based process rather than as isolated or ad hoc activities. Such an approach is essential for enabling public organizations to adapt to ongoing changes in the public sector and to sustain their roles in serving the public interest.

Conclusion and Discussion

Discussion of Findings

The present qualitative study identified the core components of Influential Leadership (IL) and formulated guidelines to develop IL among public-organization executives over the next decade. Through data synthesis and in-depth interviews, the Influence Principle (IP), Charismatic Leadership (CL), and Transformational Leadership (TL) theories were integrated and aligned with most of the identified components, such as vision, communication, and empathy. However, two new subcomponents emerged under leadership capability: initiative and opportunity seeking, and data- and technology-driven execution. The discovery of these components, particularly the necessity to integrate empirical data and leverage modern technologies in rapidly changing contexts, confirms that public sector leadership cannot rely solely on a single theory but requires a new integrated construct termed IL. This aligns with

the research by Suar et al. (2023), who stated that no single theory can fully explain leadership when its role and behavior must be adapted to changing situations.

The formulation of the IL development guidelines directly leverages the findings from Phase 1, seamlessly linking the identified core components to the actionable development approaches established in Phase 2. Specifically, for Leadership Capability, influential leaders must understand and adapt to evolving contexts, leveraging direct experience and AI tools to foster creative behavior and seek new opportunities to drive the organization forward. Regarding Social Skills for Influence, leaders must develop great conversational skills to foster a culture of trust and psychological safety, building tangible networks that lead to sustainable collaboration. Finally, for Inner Attributes, leaders must develop their inner selves to build mental readiness and strength, which translates into behaviors demonstrating commitment, empathy, and ethical adherence. The results of these two phases are related, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Relationship Between the Findings of Phase 1 and Phase 2

Core Components of IL	Qualitative Phase 1 Expert Interviews Synthesis of IL Components	Qualitative Phase 2 Focus Group Refinement & Development Guidelines	Integrated Interpretation
Leadership Capability	- Strategic Vision - Contextual Savvy, Learning Agility & Adaptability - Creative Initiative & Opportunity Seeking - Data and Technology Driven Execution	- Understanding Context to Change - AI Mindset & Literacy - Learning from Real Experience	IL understand and adapt to changing contexts to define vision, direction, and goals. Learning behaviors derived Direct experience will help develop knowledge and thinking. They will use AI technology as a tool to initiate creative behavior and change, and will seek new opportunities to drive the organization forward.
Social Skills for Influence	- Powerful Communication - Trust-Building - Networking & Relationship Building	- Deep Conversational Communication - Building Trust & Psychological Safety Culture - Hands-on Networking	IL develop deep conversational communication skills to create powerful communication. Exhibited behaviors must foster a culture of trust and emotional safety, as well as the ability to build tangible networks that lead to sustainable collaboration and working relationships.
Inner Attribute	- Drive & Self-Efficacy - Empathy - Ethics & Integrity	- Coaching - Building Mental Readiness & Strength	IL must train and develop its inner self to be strong through a coaching process, enhancing readiness and mental strength, which leads to behaviors that demonstrate commitment, confidence, empathy, and adherence to ethics.

Linking the findings of Phase 1 to the development approaches in Phase 2 not only reveals new knowledge but also demonstrates concrete methods for implementation within public organizations. These IL development approaches align with Thailand's public-sector leadership direction, emphasizing strategic vision, ethics, collaboration, and innovation. Furthermore, the findings address practical gaps by systematically linking leadership capabilities to anticipated future challenges, as analyzed through scenario analysis. These findings are consistent with

international evidence, particularly the meta-analysis by Backhaus & Vogel (2022), demonstrating that effective public-sector leadership requires an integrated, context-sensitive approach.

Conclusion

This study provides a vital 10-year outlook with actionable insights for long-term strategic planning in Thailand's public sector. By exploring future scenarios, the findings identify the foundational components of IL and establish robust guidelines for cultivating these qualities among executives. These components are essential for enabling leaders to think strategically, adapt to AI-driven and governmental transformations, enhance cross-sector collaboration, and uphold ethical, public-minded standards. From a sustainability perspective, this concept of IL contributes concretely to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Leadership competencies enable the efficient, value-based use of public resources; social influence skills build trust across public, private, and civil society sectors; and internal attributes ensure that policy formulations prioritize the public interest and long-term impacts. Ultimately, the strategic development guidelines serve as a comprehensive blueprint for cultivating adaptive leaders capable of driving sustainable organizational adaptability, creating socioeconomic value, and maintaining public trust amidst impending global uncertainties.

Practical Implications

The findings of this research offer significant practical implications for organizational developers and policymakers. First, the IL components can be integrated into management competency frameworks to guide workforce planning, executive selection, and succession planning by providing a structured framework to assess personnel readiness and potential for future leadership roles. Second, this study offers a practical and robust blueprint for cultivating influential leadership by outlining key developmental themes and targeted learning interventions that public organizations can seamlessly incorporate into their training programs. It also provides critical insights into structural support systems, behavioral indicators, and sustainable progress-tracking mechanisms, empowering organizations to systematically design, implement, and evaluate leadership initiatives.

Limitations and Future Research

While this qualitative study offers in-depth findings, several limitations should be acknowledged to guide future investigations. The research relied solely on interpreting and synthesizing data based on the perspectives, opinions, and direct experiences of the selected key informants and focus group participants. Consequently, it is limited in its comprehensiveness, and the findings cannot be universally generalized to all executive groups or types of organizations. To address these limitations, future research should apply alternative methods, such as quasi-experimental designs, to test the IL development guidelines. Comparing leaders who participate in these development programs with those who do not will provide stronger empirical evidence of behavioral changes and the practical efficacy of the IL framework.

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