



SOFT SKILLS AS HUMAN CAPITAL: ASSESSING PUBLIC SERVANTS' COMPETENCIES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BATAAN, PHILIPPINES

RONALD Q. QUINTO¹, JESUS RUSSEL T. MANINANG² ANALYN M. BONIFACIO³,
[https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4645-7802¹, \[https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9145-1010²
\\[https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1508-77862³
 Bataan Peninsula State University
 Balanga City, Bataan 2100, Philippines\\]\\(https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1508-77862\\)\]\(https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9145-1010\)](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4645-7802)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54476/ioer-imrj/573027>

ABSTRACT

In contemporary public administration, technical expertise is insufficient to address the complex and dynamic demands of governance. Soft skills—including communication, adaptability, leadership, decision-making, and conflict management—have become essential differentiating competencies that enable public servants to foster collaboration, engage citizens effectively, and deliver responsive services. Guided by Human Capital Theory, Competency-Based Management Theory, and Public Service Motivation Theory, this study examined the soft skills of local government employees in selected municipalities of Bataan, Philippines. Through a descriptive-quantitative approach, information was obtained from 306 purposively sampled public servants representing clerical, technical, and supervisory positions. A researcher-developed questionnaire was validated by experts and pilot-tested for reliability. Statistical analyses, including descriptive measures and ANOVA, revealed that respondents demonstrated a generally strong skill profile, with all domains rated “Very Satisfactory.” Adaptability and flexibility emerged as the highest-rated skills, followed by conflict management, while time management showed significant generational differences, with younger and middle-aged employees outperforming older counterparts. No significant differences were found across sex or work roles. These findings suggest that Bataan’s public servants possess a balanced set of competencies essential for citizen-centered governance. The results align with global evidence on the growing importance of adaptability and conflict management, while highlighting unique contextual insights, such as equitable skill development across gender and work roles. The research highlights the importance of implementing targeted interventions to enhance presentation skills, decision-making autonomy, and contingency planning. By framing soft skills as valuable human capital, the study contributes to strengthening public service delivery and advancing inclusive, trust-based local governance.

Keywords: soft skills, public servants, local governance, human capital, adaptability, conflict management, decision-making

INTRODUCTION

In today’s competitive employment landscape, possessing only technical expertise is no longer enough to thrive in the workplace. Although hard skills gained through education and training continue to be important, organizations now place greater emphasis on soft skills—such

as communication, adaptability, emotional intelligence, leadership, and conflict management—because of their key contribution to teamwork and effective problem-solving (Poláková et al., 2023). In contrast to hard skills, which are specific to particular jobs, soft skills are cultivated through experience and are transferable across

P – ISSN 2651 - 7701 | E – ISSN 2651 – 771X | www.ioer-imrj.com

QUINTO, R.R., MANINANG, J.R.T., BONIFACIO, A.M., *Soft Skills as Human Capital: Assessing Public Servants' Competencies in Local Governance in Bataan, Philippines*, pp. 184 - 191



different fields, equipping employees to manage a wide range of workplace challenges.

Recent findings from peer-reviewed research highlight that employer continue to place significant importance on soft skills, recognizing their direct impact on workplace performance and success. Consistent survey results from executives identify communication, teamwork, integrity, adaptability, and professionalism as among the most highly valued attributes when making decisions related to hiring and career advancement (Robles, 2012). In public administration specifically, studies of municipal and national contexts find that effective service delivery increasingly hinges on communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and customer-orientation, with agencies reporting a need to strengthen these competencies through targeted development (Henderson, 2020; Krpálek et al., 2021). Recent syntheses also link soft skills to higher employee performance and well-being, highlighting communication and integrity as central “hub” competencies (Colledani et al., 2024). Complementary meta-analytic evidence shows that emotionally intelligent behavior—an umbrella for many soft skills—is positively associated with job performance and organizational commitment, underscoring its relevance for government teams facing complex, citizen-facing tasks (Doğru et al., 2022).

In the Philippine public sector, especially at the level of local governance, a persistent soft skills gap has significant implications for effective service delivery and innovation. A recent study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) highlights that many Filipino workers—including those in government—are deficient in essential transversal competencies such as adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking, impairing their ability to thrive in the evolving digital work environment (Bernardo et al., 2023). This concern is echoed by the World Bank, noting that a majority of employers struggle to find applicants with adequate socioemotional skills like communication, decision-making, and teamwork—deficiencies that limit workforce productivity and adaptability (World Bank, 2017). Consequently, efforts to develop soft skills in the

Philippine public workforce remain inadequate, underscoring the need for deliberate and structured development in local government settings. For local government units such as those in Bataan, technical expertise alone is insufficient. Officials and employees must also demonstrate strong communication, sound judgment in decision-making, effective time management, adaptability to change, team leadership, and the ability to address and resolve conflicts. While some training exists, soft skills development often receives less structured attention, creating gaps that may hinder public trust and performance.

Grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives, this study first considers Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964), which asserts that investing in education, training, and the development of skills enhances not only the productivity of individuals but also the overall performance of organizations. In public administration, this extends to soft skills, which—like technical skills—constitute valuable human capital that improves service delivery and responsiveness to citizen needs (Kumar & Deswal, 2023). Competency-Based Management Theory (McClelland, 1973; Spencer & Spencer, 1993) makes a distinction between threshold competencies—necessary for meeting basic job requirements—and differentiating competencies, which distinguish outstanding performers. Soft skills are framed in this study as differentiating competencies that allow public servants to excel beyond basic technical proficiency, enabling them to collaborate effectively and navigate complex service environments (Poláková et al., 2023). Finally, Public Service Motivation Theory (Perry & Wise, 1990; Perry, 1996) asserts that individuals in public service are motivated by a strong sense of commitment to the public interest, compassion, and a willingness to sacrifice for the greater good of society. However, motivation must be complemented by interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to translate intent into effective citizen engagement and quality service outcomes.

Guided by these perspectives, the present study examines the extent of soft skills among local government employees in their delivery of public service. Specifically, it investigates: (1) the



profile of public servants in terms of sex, age, and nature of work; (2) their proficiency in communication, decision-making, time management, adaptability and flexibility, leadership, and conflict management skills; and (3) whether significant differences exist in soft skills based on these profiles. The findings aim to inform targeted program interventions to strengthen local governance capacity and improve public service outcomes.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to assess the soft skills of local government employees in selected municipalities of Bataan, Philippines, within the context of contemporary public administration. Specifically, it aims to determine the level of proficiency of public servants across key soft skill domains such as communication, adaptability, leadership, decision-making, conflict management, time management, and customer service. It also seeks to examine whether significant differences in these competencies exist when respondents are grouped according to demographic and work-related variables such as age, sex, and position. Moreover, the study endeavors to identify skill areas that require targeted development and training interventions, with the end goal of strengthening the capacity of civil servants to deliver citizen-centered and responsive governance. By situating soft skills as integral components of human capital, the study aspires to provide evidence-based insights that will support competency-based management and enhance public service motivation in local government administration.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive quantitative study assessed the level of soft skills among public servants in selected municipalities of Bataan, Philippines. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on availability, willingness, and representation from different local government units (LGU) departments (Etikan et

al., 2016). G*Power analysis was employed to determine the sample size, based on $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.95, and an effect size of 0.3, yielding 306 respondents (Creswell, 2014). Inclusion criteria required respondents to hold clerical, technical, or supervisory positions; have at least three months of work experience; be permanent or contractual; and consent to participate.

A two-part, researcher-developed questionnaire was used: Part 1 captured demographics (sex, age, nature of work), and Part 2 assessed six soft skills domains—communication, decision-making, time management, adaptability and flexibility, leadership, and conflict management—via a Likert-type scale. Content validity was established through expert review, and a pilot test with 15 public servants ensured clarity and reliability.

Data collection was carried out personally, and the results were examined using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) together with Pearson's R correlation. (Bhandari, 2023). The study was limited to selected LGUs in Bataan; findings may not generalize to other settings due to the non-probability sampling design. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and observance of the provisions of the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), were upheld throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sample comprised 306 public servants from selected municipalities in Bataan. Female respondents predominated (63%, $n=192$) compared to males (37%, $n=114$). The workforce was predominantly young, with 57% ($n=175$) aged 20-39 years, followed by middle-aged adults 40-49 years (25%, $n=75$), and older adults 50+ years (18%, $n=56$). Regarding work roles, clerical positions constituted the largest group (61%, $n=187$), followed by technical roles (28%, $n=84$) and supervisory positions (11%, $n=35$).

1. Soft Skills Assessment

The comprehensive assessment of civil servants' soft skills reveals a well-rounded



professional profile, with consistently strong performance across all six essential domains. All competency areas received "Very Satisfactory" ratings, indicating balanced skill development across the workforce.

The skill profile analysis of civil servants reveals a well-rounded and consistently strong performance across all six essential domains of soft skills, with all areas achieving "Very Satisfactory" ratings (3.26–4.00). The symmetrical distribution observed in the assessment indicates balanced competency development, suggesting that no single skill domain is disproportionately underdeveloped.

The strongest performance was recorded in Adaptability and Flexibility (3.51), followed closely by Conflict Management (3.43). Conflict management skills, particularly in maintaining transparency and preventing misunderstandings, were also highly rated. This is crucial in public service contexts, where employee interactions with citizens often involve managing grievances and conflicts. Prior studies, such as those by Hurrell (2016), stress that conflict management is integral to sustaining trust and harmony in public organizations.



Figure 1. Overall Soft Skills Assessment (M=3.37, SD=0.58)

Both Communication and Leadership ranked third, reflecting complementary strengths in receptive listening, understanding, and the ability to motivate collaborative teamwork toward shared objectives. The uniformity in ratings demonstrates a broadly developed skill set, with

adaptability emerging as a critical asset in the dynamic context of public service.

Adaptability and Flexibility stand out as the most developed domains, underscoring the workforce's exceptional capacity to acquire new skills and adjust to evolving work requirements—an increasingly valuable trait in the face of rapid policy and operational changes. Conflict Management ranked second, with strengths notably in maintaining transparency and honesty to prevent misunderstandings, reflecting an ability to navigate interpersonal challenges effectively. Communication and Leadership skills, while slightly lower, are still strong, particularly in active listening, understanding others' perspectives, and fostering cooperative teamwork.

Despite the overall positive profile, the assessment also identified targeted areas for development within each domain. Presentation skills within Communication could be further enhanced to improve clarity and audience engagement. Independent decision-making capabilities require strengthening to foster greater autonomy in complex situations. Within Time Management, contingency planning needs improvement to ensure preparedness for unforeseen disruptions. While adaptability is strong, challenges remain in the consistent implementation of new procedures. Furthermore, proactive engagement with additional responsibilities and the ability to exercise persuasion during difficult conversations represent skill areas that could be enhanced to optimize performance across the workforce.

2. Demographic Influences on Soft Skills

2.1 Sex-Based Comparison

Statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in soft skill proficiency between male and female public servants across all domains [T(304)=-0.75; p-value=.454]. This finding contradicts some research that identified sex disparities in soft skills. The observed sex parity in this study suggests several possibilities: the public service environment may foster equitable skill



development, organizational training and policies may neutralize gender-based skill differences, or selection procedures prioritize candidates with well-developed soft skills irrespective of sex. This finding is particularly encouraging from an equity perspective, indicating comparable levels of essential professional competencies between genders.

2.2 Age-Based Comparison

While five of the six soft skill domains showed no significant age-based differences, Time Management Skills emerged as a notable exception [F(305)=3.76; p-value=.024]. Post-hoc analysis using Tukey HSD revealed that young adults (M=3.36) and middle-aged adults (M=3.42) significantly outperformed older adults (M=3.17) in time management capabilities. This aligns with research indicating that younger employees may demonstrate greater drive in task performance. Several factors may contribute to this disparity, including technological adaptation by younger and middle-aged workers, greater pressure on early and mid-career professionals to demonstrate efficiency, generational differences in time management philosophies, and varying work-life balance priorities across life stages.

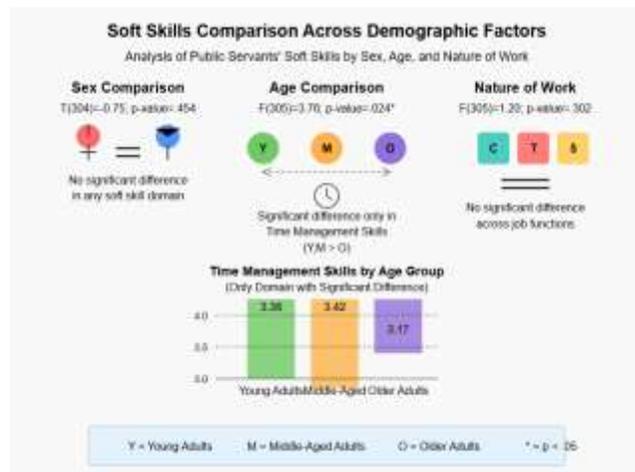


Figure 2. Soft Skills Comparison Across Demographic Factors

3. Nature of Work Comparison

The analysis indicated no significant differences in soft skill levels among public servants performing different work functions (clerical, technical, or supervisory) [F(305)=1.20; p-value=.302]. This consistency across all domains suggests effective hiring and selection processes that prioritize candidates with strong soft skills across various functional roles, a unified organizational culture with consistent communication of interpersonal capability expectations, and equitable distribution of training opportunities across different role types.

DISCUSSION

This study assessed the soft skills of 306 public servants from selected municipalities in Bataan, Philippines. The results revealed a generally strong skill profile across six domains—communication, decision-making, time management, adaptability and flexibility, leadership, and conflict management—with all rated “Very Satisfactory.” Adaptability and flexibility emerged as the highest-rated skill, while time management showed generational differences, with younger and middle-aged respondents scoring higher than older counterparts. No significant differences were observed in soft skills across sex or nature of work.

The findings underscore that Bataan’s public servants possess a balanced soft skills portfolio, a positive indicator for responsive governance and citizen-centered service delivery. Adaptability’s prominence suggests the workforce’s resilience in navigating policy changes, technological integration, and evolving community needs. However, the identified gaps in presentation, independent decision-making, and contingency planning highlight specific developmental areas that could further strengthen overall effectiveness.

The results are broadly consistent with global evidence underscoring the centrality of soft skills in public administration. For instance, Poláková et al. (2023) and Hurrell (2016) emphasized adaptability and conflict management as differentiating competencies crucial to



organizational performance, echoing this study's findings. Similarly, research by Engelbrecht and colleagues (2017) demonstrates that strong communication and relationship-oriented leadership significantly foster trust and cooperation, which in turn enhance teamwork effectiveness in organizational settings. From a quantitative study of students—including Filipino participants—a gender-based analysis of soft skills revealed nuanced findings. While overall soft skills showed no significant gender differences, female students rated themselves higher in communication and flexibility, indicating stronger self-perceived competence in those areas (Dominic & Fulgence, 2019). The age-related variation in time management observed in this study parallels cognitive research indicating that younger adults often outperform older adults in tasks requiring rapid processing and multitasking, skills highly relevant in today's technology-driven workplaces. As people age, declines in working memory and cognitive control may hinder efficiency in managing multiple tasks. For instance, Todorov, Del Missier, and Mäntylä (2014) found that older adults performed worse on multitasking assignments compared to younger adults, underscoring the role of age in shaping time management capabilities.

Theoretically, this study reinforces Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that soft skills, like technical competencies, contribute significantly to workforce effectiveness in the public sector (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). From a management perspective, the results affirm Competency-Based Management Theory's assertion that soft skills serve as differentiating competencies distinguishing strong performers (McClelland, 1973). Practically, the findings suggest that LGUs should prioritize structured capacity-building programs focused on presentation, decision-making, and time management. Policy-wise, integrating soft skills training into continuous professional development could enhance service delivery, strengthen public trust, and foster inclusive governance.

This research adds to the scarce body of empirical studies on soft skills within the Philippine public sector, particularly at the local government

level. Its strengths lie in the large sample size determined through power analysis, ensuring statistical robustness, and in its integration of theoretical frameworks that position soft skills as a form of human capital vital to governance effectiveness. The findings provide evidence-based direction for targeted interventions in capacity-building initiatives.

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. The use of purposive sampling restricts generalizability to other LGUs with different contexts. The use of self-reported measures may have introduced response bias, possibly leading to inflated positive assessments. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study restricts the ability to examine changes in soft skills development over time.

Future studies could adopt mixed-methods approaches to triangulate self-reports with supervisor or citizen evaluations of public servants' competencies. Expanding the scope to other provinces or regions would improve external validity, while longitudinal designs could track how training interventions affect soft skills over time. Further research may also explore the impact of digital transformation on public servants' adaptability, decision-making, and communication skills in e-governance contexts.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this study demonstrates that public servants in Bataan exhibit strong soft skills across critical domains, with adaptability and conflict management as key strengths. The absence of gender and role-based differences suggests equitable competency distribution, although generational gaps in time management highlight areas for targeted intervention. By framing soft skills as essential human capital and differentiating competencies, the study underscores their importance in improving governance outcomes. Strengthening these skills through structured training and policy initiatives has the potential to enhance both organizational performance and public trust in local government.



RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusions presented, the following recommendations are suggested to the concerned local government units:

1. Ensure that soft skills training opportunities are accessible to all employees, including young workers and entry-level staff. This can be achieved by providing training programs tailored to different career stages and roles within the organization, rather than solely focusing on higher-level management.
2. Prioritize comprehensive training programs aimed at enhancing presentation skills for public servants, including workshops, seminars, and coaching sessions. These initiatives should focus on boosting confidence, refining delivery techniques, and enhancing overall effectiveness. To reinforce learning, public servants should practice within a supportive environment, incorporating presentation components into team meetings, internal seminars, and peer feedback sessions.
3. Organize workshops focused on empathy, active listening, and responsiveness to enhance civil servants' abilities to understand and address the diverse needs of communities. Provide scenarios and role-playing exercises to practice these skills in real-life situations. Implement systems for collecting and analyzing feedback from clients to assess the effectiveness of service delivery. Use this feedback to identify areas for improvement and tailor training programs accordingly.
4. Design customized training and development programs to address the identified shortcomings in soft skills. These programs should focus on areas such as communication, leadership, time management, and conflict resolution, providing targeted interventions to enhance competency

5. Conduct further research to explore potential factors contributing to any observed differences in soft skills between male and female public servants. Qualitative studies or surveys may help elucidate underlying reasons for any variations in soft skill development and utilization. Perception of similarity may possibly be attributed to gender blind perspective when viewing men and women in the workplace. Thus, gender sensitivity training programs may be implemented or enhanced to promote awareness and understanding of gender-related issues in the workplace.

REFERENCES

- Becker, G. S. (1964). Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education. University of Chicago Press. <https://www.nber.org/books-and-chapters/human-capital-theoretical-and-empirical-analysis-special-reference-education-first-edition>
- Bernardo, A. B. I., Albert, J. R. G., Vizmanos, J. F., & Muñoz, M. S. (2023, December 21). Toward measuring soft skills for youth development: A scoping study [Discussion Paper No. DP 2023-28]. Philippine Institute for Development Studies. <https://doi.org/10.62986/dp2023.28>
- Bhandari, P. (2023). Descriptive statistics: Definition, types, examples. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/statistics/descriptive-statistics/>
- Colledani, D., et al. (2024). Assessing key soft skills in organizational contexts. *Frontiers in Psychology*. Frontiers
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Doğru, Ç., et al. (2022). A meta-analysis of the relationships between emotional intelligence and organizational outcomes. [Open-access on PubMed Central]. PMC



- Dominic, C., & Fulgence, J. (2019). Undergraduates' perspectives on the significance of soft skills for employment: Gender-based differences. [Conference Paper].
- Engelbrecht, A. S., Heine, G., & Mahembe, B. (2017). The impact of leadership, communication, and teamwork practices on employee trust in the workplace. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 12(3), 241–261. <https://doi.org/10.2478/mdke-2024-0015>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Henderson, J. (2020). Identifying and developing desirable soft skills for public management: Evidence from a high-performing municipal government. *Teaching Public Administration*. SAGE Journals
- Hurrell, S. A. (2016). Rethinking the soft skills deficit blame game: Employers, skills withdrawal and the reporting of soft skills gaps. *Human Relations*, 69(3), 605–628. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715591636>
- Krpálek, P., et al. (2021). Formation of professional competences and soft skills of public administration employees for sustainable professional development. *Sustainability*. MDPI
- McClelland, D. C. (1973). Testing for competence rather than for "intelligence." *American Psychologist*, 28(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0034092>
- Perry, J. L., & Wise, L. R. (1990). The motivational bases of public service. *Public Administration Review*, 50(3), 367–373. <https://doi.org/10.2307/976618>
- Poláková, M., Suleimanová, J. H., Madzík, P., Copuš, L., Molnárová, I., & Polednová, J. (2023). Soft skills and their importance in the labour market under the conditions of Industry 5.0. *Heliyon*, 9(8), e18670. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844023058784>
- Heckman, J. J., & Kautz, T. (2012). Hard evidence on soft skills. *Labour Economics*, 19(4), 451–464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2012.05.014>
- Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*. SAGE Journals
- Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. *The American Economic Review*, 51(1), 1–17.
- Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. Wiley.
- Todorov, I., Del Missier, F., & Mäntylä, T. (2014). Age-related differences in multiple task monitoring. *PLOS ONE*, 9(9), e107619. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0107619>
- World Bank. (2017, November 22). *Developing socioemotional skills for the Philippines labor market*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/publication/developing-socioemotional-skills-for-the-philippines-labor-market>

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright of this article is retained by the author/s, with first publication rights granted to IIMRJ. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution – Noncommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4>).