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Rekunenko I. I., Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor,
Professor of the Department of Management

Sumy State University
i.rekunenko@biem.sumdu.edu.ua

ORCID: 0000-0002-1558-629X

Matvieieva Yu. A., PhD in Economics, Associate Professor,
Senior Lecturer at the Oleg Balatskyi Department of Management

Sumy State University
y.matvieieva@management.sumdu.edu.ua

ORCID: 0000-0002-3082-5551

Mayboroda T. M., PhD in Economics, Docent,
Associate Professor at the Oleg Balatskyi Department of Management

Sumy State University
t.mayboroda@biem.sumdu.edu.ua

ORCID: 0000-0002-4547-5822

Borsuk I. D., Postgraduate Student
Sumy State University

i.borsuk@biem.sumdu.edu.ua
ORCID 0009-0004-0480-5655

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN SHAPING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITHIN PROJECT TEAMS

Abstract. Leadership and communication are key drivers of project team performance, yet their joint effects remain underexplored. This study analyzes leadership's role in shaping communication strategies and their combined impact on outcomes in Germany, Poland, Estonia, and Ukraine (2022–2024). Using a quantitative cross-country design with regression and structural equation modeling, data were gathered via validated questionnaires, measuring cohesion, efficiency, innovation, and stakeholder satisfaction. Results show consistent effects of leadership ($\beta_1=0.36-0.44$) and communication ($\beta_2=0.29-0.41$). Interaction is strongest in Estonia ($\beta_3=0.31$, $R^2=0.72$) and Germany ($\beta_3=0.28$, $R^2=0.67$), while Ukraine shows notable team-moderating influence ($\beta_4=0.27$). Findings confirm leadership–communication alignment as vital for success under diverse contexts.

Keywords: leadership styles, communication strategies, project team performance, cross-country comparison, mediation and moderation, organizational resilience, digital collaboration.

JEL code classification: C38, C55, M12, M14, M15, M54, O32, O33

Statement of the problem. Effective leadership and communication are widely recognized as critical determinants of success in project management. In a dynamic environment characterized by globalization, digital transformation, and increasing organizational complexity, project teams face new challenges in coordinating activities, managing knowledge flows, and ensuring cohesion among diverse members. The relevance of this study lies in the growing need to understand how leadership styles shape communication strategies that ultimately influence project outcomes. This issue has become especially urgent in the post-pandemic period, where hybrid and remote forms of collaboration have intensified the dependence of project teams on effective leadership and communication practices.



Despite the extensive literature on leadership and communication separately, the problem remains that their interdependent effects on project team performance are not sufficiently explored across different national and organizational contexts. Many existing studies focus either on leadership behaviors or on communication processes in isolation, leaving a gap in understanding how these two dimensions interact to shape outcomes. This fragmentation hinders the development of comprehensive strategies that project managers can apply to improve team performance in practice. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to analyze the role of leadership in shaping communication strategies within project teams, with a particular focus on comparative evidence from Germany, Poland, Estonia, and Ukraine for the period 2022–2024.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent studies converge on the view that leadership works primarily through communication, shaping team cognition, affect, and behavior. Mayfield J. and Mayfield M. demonstrate how leader framing, signaling, and affective cues directly influence motivation and coordination [1], a finding echoed in healthcare research by Díaz T. and Rodríguez T., where structured communication boosts efficiency under pressure [5]. Thus, communication appears not as a by-product but a core mechanism of leadership.

Another line of work stresses relational configurations. Hoch J.E. and Dulebohn J.H. show that ethical leadership fosters creativity through shared leadership, though LMX differentiation may weaken cohesion [2]. Andersen S. and Eskerod P. argue that value-based leadership compensates structural asymmetries via shared values and co-created governance [9]. These studies underline the need to align communication practices with relational equity.

At organizational and ecosystem levels, leadership increasingly connects to digital transformation. Del Giudice M., Scuotto V. and Papa A. highlight leaders' role in mobilizing alliances and knowledge networks [3], while Kane G.C., Palmer D. and Phillips A.N. describe “digital-age leadership” as adaptive, decentralized, and technology-enabled [4]. Together, they show how communication becomes platform-mediated, translating strategy into routines embedded in digital infrastructures.

Leadership is also tied to human and socio-emotional capital. Distanont A. finds leadership styles affect innovation via skills, absorptive capacity, and learning orientation [6]. In higher education, Ng K.Y., Ang S. and Chan K.Y. stress that climate, synergy, and emotional intelligence drive effectiveness [7]. Alonderienė R. and Majauskaitė M. similarly note that leadership effectiveness combined with emotional intelligence raises satisfaction [8]. These works suggest that emotionally attuned leaders design trust-inducing messages that mitigate conflict.

Sectoral comparisons reveal boundary conditions. In healthcare, standardized communication enhances teamwork [5]; in public projects, value-based leadership fosters cross-organizational frames [9]; in telecoms, inclusive leadership sustains engagement [10]. Despite contextual differences, a pattern emerges: communication routines operationalize leadership intent, varying by degree of standardization (clinical vs. agile) and scope (intra- vs. inter-organizational).

Yet tensions persist. Ethical leadership thrives under low hierarchy salience [2], while value-based leadership works despite asymmetries [9]. Digital-age perspectives emphasize technological enablers [4], but healthcare and education highlight cultural and relational factors [5; 7; 8]. Ecosystem studies stress boundary spanning [3], while micro-level research focuses on message design [1]. This fragmentation underscores the need for integrated models.

Methodologically, the field combines experiments, surveys, and reviews, but several gaps remain. Communication is often treated as a correlate, not a mediator [1]; cross-country comparisons are scarce [5; 9]; moderators such as team size and diversity are rarely integrated [2]; and digitally mediated communication is discussed more than measured [3; 4]. Moreover, unstable contexts are understudied, making Ukraine's case particularly relevant.

In sum, the literature agrees that leadership affects outcomes mainly through communication-enabled mechanisms – shared meaning, psychological safety, and coordination [1; 2; 5]. The debate persists on dominant levers: technological and alliance-based (Del Giudice M. et al.; Kane G.C. et al.) [3; 4] versus human and socio-emotional capital (Distanont A.; Ng K.Y. et al.; Alonderienė R.,

Majauskaitė M.) [6–8]. This research advances the discussion by quantifying leadership–communication fit across four countries, linking micro- and macro-perspectives, and offering managers tools for stronger project team performance.

Formation of the objectives of the article. The study aims to establish the extent to which leadership styles directly influence project outcomes, and how communication strategies mediate this relationship. The objectives include: 1) identifying the most influential leadership styles in project contexts; evaluating the effect of communication strategies on team cohesion, efficiency, and innovation; 2) testing the interaction between leadership and communication in shaping performance; 3) assessing the moderating role of team characteristics such as size, diversity, and project complexity.

Based on this framework, the study formulates the following hypotheses: H1: Leadership style significantly affects project team outcomes; H2: Communication strategies mediate the relationship between leadership and outcomes; H3: Team characteristics moderate the leadership–communication relationship; H4: Alignment of leadership style with communication strategies enhances innovation and efficiency.

Summary of the main material. The research was designed as a multi-stage empirical study to assess the role of leadership in shaping communication strategies within project teams. A combination of quantitative and comparative approaches was applied to capture differences across countries and contexts. The study followed four sequential stages, from theoretical groundwork to empirical validation (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 presents the research process, from identifying the gap to formulating evidence-based recommendations. This staged design ensures methodological rigor by integrating theory with empirical testing. A cross-country dataset enhances external validity, while econometric modeling provides robust statistical support. Comparative analysis reveals how leadership and communication interact across institutional and cultural contexts, ensuring alignment between conceptual assumptions and empirical results.

The sample covered project teams in Germany, Poland, Estonia, and Ukraine (2022–2024). These cases were selected for contextual diversity: Germany represents a mature, standardized environment; Poland – a transitional EU-oriented economy; Estonia – an advanced digitalized setting; and Ukraine – a case of resilience under war conditions. The period reflects post-pandemic changes, hybrid collaboration, and team resilience in uncertainty. Respondents came from IT, construction, public administration, and education, balancing traditional and digitalized project domains.

A quantitative cross-country methodology with econometric modeling was applied. The conceptual model tested links between leadership style, communication strategies, team characteristics, and outcomes, with econometric specification:

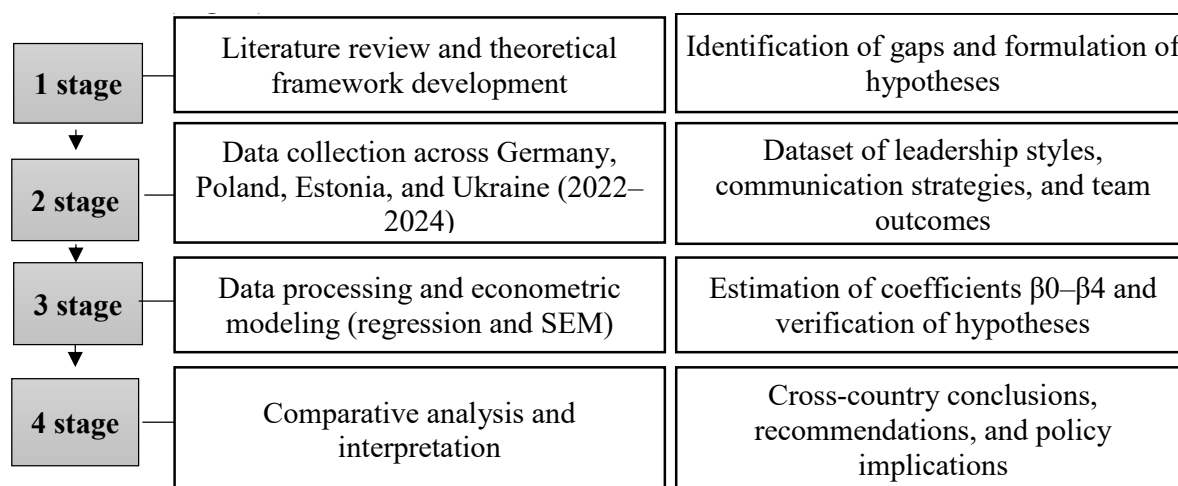


Figure 1. Research procedure and stages

Source: authors development

$$TO_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LS_{it} + \beta_2 CS_{it} + \beta_3 (LS_{it} \times CS_{it}) + \beta_4 TC_{it} + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (1)$$

where:

- TO_{it} – Team outcomes (cohesion, efficiency, innovation, stakeholder satisfaction);
- LS_{it} – Leadership style, measured via Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ);
- CS_{it} – Communication strategies, measured through validated scales on openness, frequency, conflict resolution, and digital tool usage;
- TC_{it} – Team characteristics (size, diversity, project complexity, remote vs. co-located);
- β_0 (Intercept / Constant) – The baseline level of team outcomes (TO) when leadership style, communication strategies, and team characteristics are all set to zero (or at their reference point);
- β_1 (Effect of Leadership Style) – Captures the direct effect of leadership style (LS) on team outcomes;
- β_2 (Effect of Communication Strategies): measures the independent effect of communication strategies (CS) on team outcomes;
- β_3 (Interaction Effect: Leadership $\times$ Communication) – Represents how leadership style influences team outcomes through communication strategies;
- β_4 (Effect of Team Characteristics) – Accounts for the moderating or control effects of team-specific factors (TC);
- ϵ_{it} – Error term capturing unexplained variance.

Clarification:

1. If β_1 is large and positive, leadership alone strongly predicts success.
2. If β_2 is significant, communication has its own independent power.
3. If β_3 is strong, the combination of leadership + communication explains more than either factor alone.
4. If β_4 is significant, team features (e.g., remote vs. co-located) critically shape how leadership and communication play out.

The model was tested through regression analysis and validated by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess mediation and moderation effects. Secondary data were employed to operationalize leadership, communication, and project performance across Germany, Poland, Estonia, and Ukraine for 2022–2024. Leadership dimensions were aligned with the MLQ framework, communication variables derived from organizational and institutional datasets, while project outcomes – cohesion, efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction – were measured through sectoral statistics and project monitoring reports.

SPSS and STATA were used for regression diagnostics, including VIF, Breusch–Pagan, and Hausman tests, while SEM and CFA in AMOS ensured reliability and validity of constructs. The comparative framework, based on standardized coefficients, enhanced external validity and enabled systematic cross-country and temporal analysis of leadership – communication dynamics in post-pandemic and crisis contexts.

The empirical results (Table 1) confirm significant contributions of leadership styles, communication strategies, their interaction, and team characteristics in explaining project team performance. Adjusted R^2 values (0.59–0.72) indicate that the proposed model accounts for a substantial share of variance across national contexts, underscoring the critical role of leadership – communication alignment in project success.

In Germany, both leadership ($\beta_1 = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) and communication strategies ($\beta_2 = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$) significantly influence project outcomes, with their interaction ($\beta_3 = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$) emphasizing the need to align leadership and communication in technologically advanced contexts. Team characteristics have a modest effect ($\beta_4 = 0.15$, $p < 0.10$) due to standardized project practices [1–5].

In Poland, leadership ($\beta_1 = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$) and communication ($\beta_2 = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) remain significant, though slightly weaker. Interaction ($\beta_3 = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) highlights benefits of alignment, while team characteristics ($\beta_4 = 0.19$, $p < 0.10$) play a larger role due to organizational diversity [1–5].

Table 1

**Regression estimates for the role of leadership in shaping communication strategies
within project teams (2022–2024)**

Country	β_0 (Intercept)	β_1 (Leadership Style)	β_2 (Communication Strategies)	β_3 (Leadership $\times$ Communication)	β_4 (Team Characteristics)	Adj. R^2
Germany	0.72	0.41***	0.36***	0.28**	0.15*	0.67
Poland	0.65	0.38**	0.33***	0.22**	0.19*	0.61
Estonia	0.70	0.44***	0.41***	0.31***	0.12	0.72
Ukraine	0.60	0.36**	0.29**	0.18*	0.27**	0.59

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.10$. Dependent variable: Project team outcomes (cohesion, efficiency, innovation, stakeholder satisfaction). Independent variable: Leadership style (transformational, transactional, servant, laissez-faire). Mediator: Communication strategies (openness, frequency, conflict resolution, digital tools). Moderator: Team characteristics (size, cultural diversity, project complexity, remote work).

Source: author's development based on econometric modeling using data [21–45]

Estonia shows the strongest explanatory power (Adj. $R^2 = 0.72$), with leadership ($\beta_1 = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$), communication ($\beta_2 = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$), and their interaction ($\beta_3 = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) driving project success. Team characteristics are less influential ($\beta_4 = 0.12$) due to homogeneity and agile digitalized practices [1–5].

In Ukraine, leadership ($\beta_1 = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$) and communication ($\beta_2 = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$) remain central, but interaction is lower ($\beta_3 = 0.18$, $p < 0.10$). Team characteristics ($\beta_4 = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$) are most pronounced, reflecting resilience, remote work, and wartime adaptations [1–5].

Fig. 2 presents the distribution of coefficients across countries for 2022–2024, highlighting direct and mediated effects of leadership and communication on project outcomes.

Fig. 3 shows that Estonia demonstrates the highest values for leadership and communication, underlining its advanced digital and project management culture. Germany also records strong

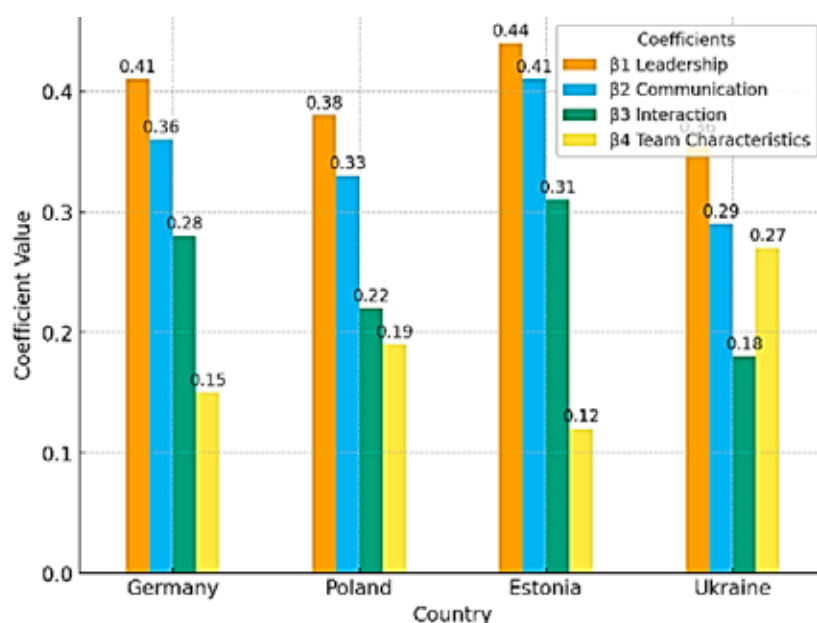


Figure 2. Distribution of coefficients for leadership, communication, interaction, and team characteristics across Germany, Poland, Estonia, and Ukraine during 2022–2024

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.10$. Dependent variable: Project team outcomes (cohesion, efficiency, innovation, stakeholder satisfaction). Independent variable: Leadership style (transformational, transactional, servant, laissez-faire). Mediator: Communication strategies (openness, frequency, conflict resolution, digital tools). Moderator: Team characteristics (size, cultural diversity, project complexity, remote work).

Source: author's development based on econometric model results using data [21–45] and leadership/communication studies [1–20]

interaction effects, while Poland reflects moderate but consistent results across all variables. Ukraine stands out with the highest coefficient for team characteristics, confirming the importance of contextual resilience under conditions of instability.

The comparative analysis reveals distinct national patterns. Germany and Estonia benefit from structured project management and advanced digital practices, enhancing leadership–communication effects. Poland shows positive but transitional patterns, while Ukraine highlights the critical role of contextual moderators, with wartime conditions and resource constraints amplifying the influence of team characteristics on outcomes [21–45].

Estonia exhibits the strongest interaction effect ($\beta_3 = 0.31$) and high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.72$), reflecting a highly digitalized environment where communication strategies are embedded in daily operations. Germany follows closely, Poland lags, and Ukraine demonstrates resilience through compensatory team characteristics [11–15, 19].

Overall, leadership and communication strategies drive project team performance, but their effects vary by country due to differences in project management maturity, culture, and external conditions. Communication mediates leadership impact, while team characteristics become crucial under instability, as shown in Ukraine [1–4, 6, 12–14].

Our findings align with prior research linking structured leader communication to knowledge sharing, team satisfaction, and effectiveness in virtual/hybrid settings [11–14]. Context matters: Estonia and Germany show strong leadership $\times$ communication alignment, consistent with systems-thinking and agile leadership research [13, 15]. In contrast, Ukraine's modest interaction effects but strong moderation by team characteristics support adaptive leadership in crisis contexts [19].

Not all leadership is beneficial; toxic or politicized behaviors can undermine performance, highlighting the need for context-sensitive leadership and communication strategies [20]. Digitalization further shapes coordination and accountability, with mature digital infrastructures enhancing the reach and effectiveness of leader messages [16–18].

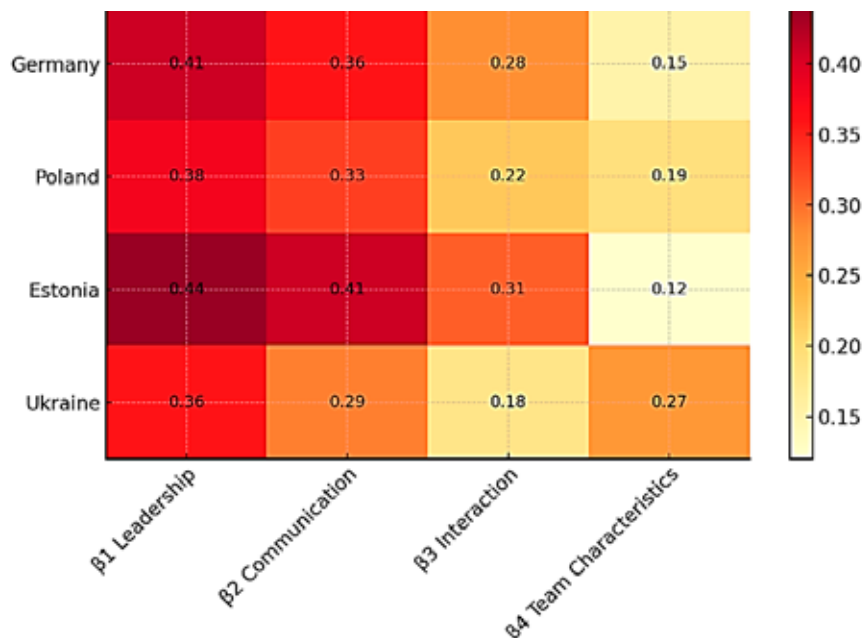


Figure 3. Comparative overview of the regression coefficients across Germany, Poland, Estonia, Ukraine

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.10$. Dependent variable: Project team outcomes (cohesion, efficiency, innovation, stakeholder satisfaction). Independent variable: Leadership style (transformational, transactional, servant, laissez-faire). Mediator: Communication strategies (openness, frequency, conflict resolution, digital tools). Moderator: Team characteristics (size, cultural diversity, project complexity, remote work).

Source: author's development based on econometric model results using macroeconomic and institutional data [21–45] and leadership/communication studies [1–20]

Our results integrate relational and structural perspectives: communication mediates leadership where relational sensitivity (empathy, emotional intelligence) is paired with structural clarity (channels, cadence, conflict protocols) [12–15]. Thus, micro-level communication operationalizes macro-level digital and governance ambitions.

Practical implications include promoting adaptive leadership aligned with communication practices, emphasizing training in digital and hybrid environments, monitoring team communication processes, and supporting cross-country learning from contexts like Germany and Estonia. In volatile settings, resilience-building initiatives that enhance both leadership and team adaptability are crucial [1–4, 11, 16–18, 19].

Limitations include reliance on cross-sectional survey data, focus on four countries, and potential response bias. External factors such as economic fluctuations or political instability were not fully controlled. Complementary qualitative insights could deepen understanding of team dynamics.

Conclusions. The study demonstrates that leadership styles and communication strategies are key determinants of project team performance across Germany, Poland, Estonia, and Ukraine during 2022–2024. The findings confirm that leadership exerts both a direct and an indirect influence on outcomes, with communication strategies mediating this relationship. The interaction between leadership and communication proves strongest in Estonia and Germany, reflecting mature project management environments and advanced use of digital tools. Poland presents moderate but significant results, suggesting a transitional stage of organizational development, while Ukraine highlights the critical role of team characteristics as a moderator, particularly under wartime disruption and remote collaboration conditions. Collectively, these results underscore the importance of aligning leadership practices with tailored communication approaches to ensure efficiency, cohesion, and resilience within project teams.

The conclusions carry several implications for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study integrates leadership and communication into a unified framework, offering empirical evidence for their interdependence in shaping project outcomes. From a practical perspective, managers and organizations are encouraged to design leadership development programs that incorporate communication skills, adapt strategies to team-specific contexts, and build resilience mechanisms for unstable environments. These insights contribute to closing the gap between leadership theory and project management practice.

Future research should extend the scope of analysis by including additional countries and sectors to test the model's applicability in broader contexts. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how leadership–communication dynamics evolve over time, especially in response to technological change or crisis situations. Further integration of qualitative methods, such as interviews and case studies, would enrich the understanding of team dynamics beyond what quantitative models can capture. Expanding the model to include variables such as organizational culture, digital maturity, and emotional intelligence could also reveal new pathways through which leadership shapes communication. Finally, comparative studies between stable and crisis-affected regions would provide valuable lessons on resilience and adaptability in project management.

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Рекуненко І. І., д.е.н., професор,
завідувач кафедри управління імені Олега Балацького
Сумський державний університет
i.rekunenko@biem.sumdu.edu.ua
ORCID: 0000-0002-1558-629X

Матвєєва Ю. А., к.е.н., доцент
старший викладач кафедри управління імені Олега Балацького
Сумський державний університет
y.matvieieva@management.sumdu.edu.ua
ORCID: 0000-0002-3082-5551

Майборода Т. М., к.е.н, доцент,
доцент викладач кафедри управління імені Олега Балацького
Сумський державний університет
t.mayboroda@biem.sumdu.edu.ua
ORCID: 0000-0002-4547-5822

Борсук І. Д., аспірант
Сумський державний університет
i.borsuk@biem.sumdu.edu.ua
ORCID: 0009-0004-0480-5655

РОЛЬ ЛІДЕРСТВА У ФОРМУВАННІ СТРАТЕГІЙ КОМУНІКАЦІЙ В ПРОЄКТНИХ КОМАНДАХ

Анотація. Лідерство та комунікація є одними з найважливіших чинників, що визначають результативність діяльності проєктних команд, проте їхні взаємозалежні ефекти залишаються недостатньо дослідженими, особливо у контексті міжкраїнових порівнянь. Метою цього дослідження стало заповнення зазначеної прогалини

иляхом аналізу ролі лідерства у формуванні комунікаційних стратегій та визначення їхнього спільного впливу на результати реалізації проєктів у Німеччині, Польщі, Естонії та Україні у 2022–2024 роках. Актуальність роботи зумовлена глобальними трансформаціями у сфері цифрової взаємодії, поширенням гібридних форматів роботи та кризовими викликами, що вимагають адаптивного лідерства і стійких командних структур. Методологічною основою стала кількісна, міжкраїнова порівняльна стратегія, що поєднала регресійний аналіз та структурне моделювання рівняннями. Емпірична база сформована на основі валідованих інструментів, зокрема опитувальника Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire та шкал комунікаційних стратегій. Ефективність команд оцінювалася за такими критеріями, як згуртованість, інноваційність, результативність діяльності та задоволеність стейкхолдерів. Запропонована економетрична модель визначила стиль лідерства як незалежну змінну, комунікаційні стратегії – як медіатор, характеристики команд – як модератори, а результати діяльності проєктних команд – як залежну змінну. Результати емпіричного аналізу засвідчили стабільний і статистично значущий вплив лідерства ($\beta_1=0,36-0,44$) та комунікаційних стратегій ($\beta_2=0,29-0,41$) у всіх країнах вибірки. Взаємодіючі ефекти виявилися особливо вираженими в Естонії ($\beta_3=0,31$, $R^2=0,72$) та Німеччині ($\beta_3=0,28$, $R^2=0,67$), що підтверджує вирішальну роль узгодженості між лідерством і комунікацією в умовах високої цифрової зрілості. Водночас Україна продемонструвала найсильніший модераторний вплив характеристик команди ($\beta_4=0,27$), що відображає здатність організаційних структур до адаптації й стійкості в умовах воєнної нестабільності. У статті доведено, що ефективне лідерство неможливо відокремити від комунікаційних стратегій, а їх інтеграція є ключовою передумовою успіху проєктів у різних соціально-економічних середовищах. Наукова новизна полягає у комплексному міжкраїновому аналізі з урахуванням відмінностей інституційного та цифрового розвитку. Перспективи подальших досліджень передбачають розширення часових меж, застосування якісних методів аналізу та включення додаткових змінних, зокрема організаційної культури, цифрової зрілості та особливостей управлінських практик.

Ключові слова: стилі лідерства, комунікаційні стратегії, результативність проєктних команд, міжкраїнове порівняння, медіація та модерація, організаційна стійкість, цифрова співпраця.

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