



# THE CONCEPT AND CONTENT OF PROFESSIONAL (HARD SKILLS) COMPETENCIES OF CIVIL SERVANTS

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| <b>Article history:</b>                                                                                                                                                                      |                             | <b>Abstract:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Received:</b>                                                                                                                                                                             | 11 <sup>th</sup> April 2026 | <p>This article examines the essence and content of the professional competence of civil servants, its structural composition, and the functional interrelationship of its principal components. The study analyzes contemporary requirements for civil servants’ professional competence in the context of increasingly complex public functions, digital transformation, continuous legislative updates, and growing societal expectations regarding the quality and effectiveness of public administration. Based on an analysis of scholarly approaches to professional competence, the article identifies two major perspectives: interpreting competence as a system of professional knowledge, skills and abilities, and understanding it as a combination of behavioral characteristics, capabilities and personal qualities that ensure effective professional performance. It is substantiated that professional competence should not be regarded as a mere sum of knowledge, skills, abilities and personal qualities, but rather as an integrated capacity to apply these components effectively in specific professional situations and achieve meaningful professional outcomes. The functional relationship between professional knowledge, skills and abilities is described through the logical sequence of “knowing – being able to apply – being able to apply effectively.” Professional knowledge of civil servants is systematized into five major blocks: legal, sector-specific, position-functional, organizational-managerial, and contemporary professional knowledge. The study argues that the consistent development and integration of these components constitute an essential condition for the formation of genuine professional competence, improvement of civil servants’ performance, and development of human-resource capacity within the modern civil service. The findings may serve as a theoretical and practical basis for improving mechanisms for assessing and continuously developing the professional competence of civil servants.</p> |
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| <b>Keywords:</b> civil service; professional competence; professional competency; professional knowledge; professional skills; professional abilities; professionalism; professional mastery |                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of a modern public administration system largely depends not only on the institutional capacity of public authorities but also on the professional potential of the personnel working within them. The increasing complexity of state functions, digital transformation, the growing social significance of managerial decisions, the continuous updating of legislation, and rising public expectations of state institutions require civil servants to possess not only traditional knowledge and skills, but also the ability to apply them effectively in specific service situations.

The relevance of this issue is also reflected in the fact that the legal foundations for the continuous development of the professional competencies of civil servants have now been established in Uzbekistan [1]. In particular, pursuant to the Regulation approved by Decree No. PF-95 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated June 19, 2025, continuous improvement of professional competencies is identified as one of the principal duties of civil servants (hereinafter referred to as "civil servants"), while the development of professional competencies is established as one of the important conditions for their



motivation, appointment to higher positions, assignment of a higher qualification level, and inclusion in the National Personnel Reserve [2].

An analysis of the experience of developed countries, particularly the Republic of Korea, Singapore, France, and the United Kingdom, demonstrates that competency-based approaches are given priority in the processes of personnel selection, assessment, and appointment within the civil service system. Within this approach, alongside the formal suitability of a candidate for a particular position, their professional knowledge, practical skills and abilities, as well as managerial, communicative, analytical, and decision-making capabilities that ensure effective performance in that position are assessed comprehensively.

At the same time, although the Regulation "On the Procedure for Continuous Improvement of Professional Competencies of Civil Servants" defines the concept of professional competence and establishes its relationship with professional knowledge, skills, and abilities, it does not fully disclose the substance, internal structure, and functional interrelationship of the components constituting this concept. From this perspective, it is important to conduct a scholarly study aimed at clarifying the essence of professional competence of a civil servant, its structural composition, and the content and interrelationship of its principal indicators.

Taking into account that the concepts of competence, competency, and the competency-based approach have been analyzed in our previous scholarly studies, this article focuses primarily on the scholarly examination of the substance, structural composition, and specific characteristics of professional competence [3].

At the national level, there are a number of scholarly studies addressing the requirements imposed on civil servants, most of which are characterized by a focus on the specific features of a particular profession or field of activity [4]. However, the growing requirements for the professional competence of civil servants within the modern public administration system, the need to identify its constituent components and criteria, as well as the improvement of mechanisms for the continuous development of professional competence, necessitate a comprehensive and in-depth examination of these issues from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Existing scholarly approaches to the professional competence of civil servants may conventionally be divided into two principal groups.

Representatives of the first approach, including V.I. Baydenko, interpret professional competence as a system of knowledge, skills, and abilities [5]. The

principal advantage of this approach is that it makes it possible to assess competence according to specific criteria and to establish an integral connection between competence and the processes of education and professional development. The definition of professional competence provided in the national legislation analyzed above is also conceptually close to this approach.

Proponents of the second approach, by contrast, interpret professional competence as a combination of behavioral characteristics, abilities, and personal qualities that ensure the achievement of effective results in specific service situations. This approach is significant because it encompasses not only the cognitive aspects of competence but also its practical and personal-psychological dimensions.

In our view, the second approach provides broader conceptual opportunities when taking into account the specific characteristics of civil service activities. However, this cannot serve as grounds for rejecting the first approach. Effective professional behavior can be formed only when it is based on relevant professional knowledge, skills, and abilities. In this sense, it is appropriate to regard these approaches not as mutually exclusive, but as complementary approaches that reveal different dimensions of professional competence.

In particular, proponents of the second approach, V.V. Klyukina and A.M. Li, regard the professional competence of a civil servant as an integral characteristic enabling the effective resolution of professional tasks and problems and distinguish cognitive and personal components within it. The authors include knowledge of the state and law, management, economics, sociology, psychology, as well as knowledge related to the exercise of the powers of public authorities within the structure of professional knowledge [6].

## **3. RESULTS**

However, in our view, these approaches require further development and supplementation. Defining the professional competence of a civil servant solely as a combination of cognitive and personal components does not fully reveal its functional content. The mere possession of relevant professional knowledge and positive personal qualities does not, in itself, guarantee the legality, appropriateness, and effectiveness of professional activity. For example, a civil servant who has extensive knowledge of legislation but is unable to correctly and effectively apply that knowledge to a specific service situation cannot be regarded as fully competent.



From this perspective, we believe it is appropriate to interpret professional competence not as a simple sum of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal qualities, but as a comprehensive category expressing the ability to integrate and apply these elements in a specific service situation and to achieve an effective professional outcome.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of a civil servant's professional activity is directly related not only to their ability to demonstrate an appropriate behavioral model in specific situations, but also to their level of professional mastery (professionalism). Therefore, professional competence and professionalism should be regarded as closely interconnected but independent categories that cannot be equated in terms of their substance. Accordingly, we propose a three-stage structure of professional competence: "knowledge – practical application – effective professional behavior." Within this logical sequence, each subsequent stage does not negate the preceding one but functionally complements it, ensuring the transformation of professional knowledge into practical activity and its manifestation in effective professional behavior. Thus, the actual level of professional competence is determined not merely by the volume of theoretical knowledge possessed by a civil servant, but by their ability to apply such knowledge appropriately and effectively in specific service situations and, ultimately, to ensure lawful, high-quality, and effective professional activity.

Moreover, professionalism is recognized as one of the important values of civil service in certain public authorities of Uzbekistan, including the system of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, internal regulatory documents establishing the values of the Ministry of Justice system define "professionalism" as "the systematic, effective, and reliable performance of complex professional activities under various circumstances, thorough knowledge of one's profession and timely fulfillment of assigned tasks, modesty, and contribution to enhancing citizens' and the public's trust in the state."

T.M. Ryabova and O.V. Rogach regard professionalism as an employee's ability to achieve a high degree of adaptation to the requirements of the employer and the external environment, emphasizing that its foundation consists of specialized education, professional experience, and a high level of professional mastery [7]. Some scholars identify the following as criteria and indicators of the effectiveness of a civil servant's professional mastery (professionalism): the number of tasks performed; the total number of planned and

unplanned tasks completed during a specific period; the quality of completed work; an integral indicator, namely, whether work is accepted upon its initial submission; the advancement of proposed and adopted decisions; and compliance with deadlines for completing tasks. In particular, T.V. Chernyak, supporting the approach of certain researchers who use the term "professional suitability," interprets this concept as a set of individual personal characteristics that influence the successful mastery and effective performance of a particular type of labor activity [8].

In her scholarly research devoted to the formation of professional competence, M.D. Ilyazova interprets the concept of professional competence as a characteristic expressed through an individual's potential activity, readiness, and aspiration to perform professional activities effectively, as well as their awareness of full responsibility for the results of such activities [9].

According to A.A. Mamurov, who examined the professional competencies of teachers, professional-pedagogical competence is characterized by such components as personal and human orientation, systematic perception of the pedagogical process, the ability to navigate effectively within one's professional field, and thorough mastery of pedagogical technologies [10].

The approach proposed by Yu.V. Chepurnaya is also of particular scholarly interest. Based on an extensive analysis of scholarly research devoted to the concept of professional competence, the author puts forward her own approach to its substance. According to her, "professional competence is understood as the correspondence of personal characteristics and the level of professional competencies to the objective requirements imposed on a specialist by professional activity" [11].

However, in our view, this definition requires a certain degree of refinement. In particular, the use of the concept of "professional competencies" in defining the substance of professional competence creates a certain degree of logical tautology. Professional competence itself represents an integrated state of knowledge, skills, abilities, capabilities, and personal qualities that enables an individual to perform a particular professional activity effectively. From this perspective, defining professional competence through the professional competencies constituting it results in a conceptual overlap between closely related notions.

Therefore, we believe that professional competence should be interpreted as an integral characteristic reflecting the degree to which a specialist is able to effectively demonstrate their knowledge, skills, abilities,



capabilities, and personal qualities in practice in accordance with the objective requirements imposed on professional activity.

An analysis of scholarly approaches to the concept of professional competence requires not only a deeper understanding of its substance but also the identification of its principal components and their constituent indicators.

Depending on their nature and functional purpose, professional competencies may be divided into "hard skills," representing the specialized professional knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform a particular professional activity, and universal "soft skills," which ensure effective interpersonal relations, communication, cooperation, and the effective organization of professional activities.

The study of the principal indicators of professional knowledge, skills, and abilities constituting professional competencies first requires an understanding of the substance of these concepts, as well as a scholarly justification of their relationship and functional interdependence.

The scholarly literature provides various definitions of the concept of "knowledge." At the same time, in our view, the definition proposed by A.A. Verbitsky most fully reflects the substance of this concept. According to him, "knowledge is a result of understanding reality that has been tested in practice, its accurate reflection by a person, and a result that serves as a basis for action" [12].

From this perspective, it is appropriate to examine scholarly approaches that elucidate the substance of the concept of "professional knowledge." In particular, according to E.G. Efremova, M.Yu. Smirnov, and S.V. Shmachilina-Tsibenko, "professional knowledge" represents the understanding (reflection) by the subject of professional activity of the properties of phenomena and processes of reality and the possibilities of their interaction, as well as the body of knowledge necessary for the effective resolution of professional tasks [13].

Supporting this scholarly approach, we consider it appropriate to identify the principal structural indicators constituting professional knowledge and to disclose their substance. In our view, the professional knowledge of a civil servant may be divided into five interrelated principal blocks: legal, sector-specific, position-functional, organizational-managerial, and contemporary professional knowledge. Thus, legal knowledge refers to knowledge of national legislation relevant to the activities of a civil servant, including the content of laws and subordinate regulatory legal acts.

This classification makes it possible to assess the professional knowledge of a civil servant not merely as theoretical knowledge relating to a particular field, but as an integrated system of legal, functional, managerial, and contemporary professional knowledge necessary for the effective performance of their official duties.

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language defines the term "skill" as mastery acquired through performing a particular activity, while the term "ability" is explained in the meanings of capability, talent, characteristic, and habit [14].

Based on the definitions of these terms provided in dictionaries, we shall attempt to clarify the substance of the concepts of professional skills and professional abilities. From a professional perspective, a skill may be interpreted as the ability to apply acquired knowledge to practical activities in specific professional situations. This ability may manifest itself in such practical forms of activity as effectively performing professional tasks; working with regulatory legal acts; preparing and formalizing official documents; searching for, selecting, and analyzing information; identifying problems and developing appropriate solutions; making well-grounded decisions; using digital technologies; planning and organizing work processes; engaging in effective professional communication; and adapting to changing professional situations.

Thus, a skill represents the practical expression of knowledge, and its principal criterion is the ability to use acquired knowledge purposefully, correctly, and effectively.

Professional ability is characterized by a high level of mastery of knowledge and skills, as well as the capacity to apply them independently, consistently, and effectively in accordance with specific professional circumstances. Its principal indicators include the degree of independence in performing tasks; the stability and consistency of professional actions; the quality of work performed; the accuracy and reliability of results; the speed and efficiency of task performance; the ability to act appropriately in complex and non-standard professional situations; the reduction and prevention of professional errors; the purposeful use of professional experience; the ability to make independent and well-grounded professional decisions; and an awareness of responsibility for the results of professional activity.

Such a definition makes it possible to characterize professional ability as a form of knowledge and skills that has reached a level capable of producing stable results in a particular professional activity.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**



The professional competence of a civil servant is primarily determined by the level of mastery of the necessary professional knowledge, skills, and abilities. From this perspective, a scholarly examination of the relationship, functional interdependence, and complementary nature of these components is of significant importance for determining the substance of professional competence. Within professional competence, knowledge, skills, and abilities manifest themselves as closely interconnected components that complement one another both substantively and functionally. In terms of their relationship, professional knowledge constitutes the theoretical and intellectual foundation for professional activity; skills represent the methods and means of applying this knowledge in practical activity; while abilities express the stable capacity to apply acquired knowledge and skills independently and appropriately in various professional situations, including non-standard and changing circumstances [15].

Professional knowledge provides a civil servant with the theoretical and practical information base necessary to understand the content of specific service duties, identify the essence of an existing problem, analyze its causes and consequences, and determine appropriate solutions. However, the mere possession of knowledge does not, in itself, guarantee its effective application in practice. Therefore, skills that enable the application of professional knowledge to practical activities constitute an important functional component of professional competence.

Professional skills are manifested in a civil servant's ability to perform specific service actions on the basis of acquired knowledge and to carry out professional tasks such as working with documents, analyzing information, communicating, developing decisions, and ensuring their implementation. The regular application of skills in practical professional activities contributes to their consolidation and improvement and creates the basis for the formation of professional abilities.

Professional abilities, in turn, are characterized by a high level of mastery of knowledge and skills and the capacity to apply them in accordance with the specific conditions of professional activity. Given the changing and complex nature of civil service, professional ability is manifested not only in the performance of standard professional tasks but also in the capacity to independently assess non-standard situations, adapt existing knowledge and skills to new circumstances, analyze alternative options, and make appropriate decisions.

From this perspective, the relationship among these components may be conditionally expressed through the logical sequence of "knowing – being able to apply – being able to apply effectively." In this sequence, professional knowledge constitutes the cognitive foundation of activity, skills represent the mechanism through which knowledge is transformed into practical action, while professional abilities express the capacity to perform such actions consistently, independently, and effectively in various professional situations. Consequently, an insufficiently developed level of any one of these components directly affects the overall level of professional competence. In this sense, professional knowledge, skills, and abilities should be regarded as interrelated and complementary structural components that form the actual professional competence of a civil servant.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Thus, the professional competence of a civil servant constitutes one of the important categories determining the human-resource potential of the modern civil service institution. The professional knowledge, skills, and abilities that constitute this competence are interrelated structural components that make it possible to determine and assess the level of its development. The consistent development of these components, in turn, should be recognized as an important prerequisite for enhancing the professional potential of civil servants, orienting their service activities toward effectiveness, and developing human resources that meet the requirements of a modern civil service.

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