


# Chapter 8

## The Human Core of Digital Government: Emotional Intelligence as a Strategic Imperative for Public Sector Digital Transformation

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on how digital transformation is connected to emotional intelligence in public administration, with a special emphasis on the Greek public sector. Based on the integration of Scopus and ABS-indexed journals research, this chapter identifies emotional intelligence as the most important factor that leads the way to successful digital transformation. The chapter offers the theoretical sources, the instruments of measurement, and the research that shows how the leaders with high emotional intelligence are able to solve problems of technostress, manage*

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*change, and create cultures of innovation. The digitalization of Greece is a great example of the two sides of the coin - the challenges and the opportunities - at this intersection, thus emphasizing the importance of putting the human factor first before the technical side.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The modern public sector is confronted with a paradoxical challenge: on the one hand, digital technologies are said to bring efficiency, transparency, and interaction with citizens to the public sector at an unprecedented level, but on the other hand, the very successful implementation of these technologies depends largely on human capabilities (Mergel et al., 2024; OECD, 2019; Viterouli et al., 2025; Ntalakos et al., 2025). As a result, digital transformation has been recognized as a global strategic move for governments, a step forced by the demands of citizens, the tightening of public budgets, and the proven potential of information and communication technologies for public service delivery (Kraus et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the technical aspect of the digital transformation is only a fraction of the problem (Irani et al., 2024). The body of evidence is growing, indicating that the success or failure of digital projects largely depends on leadership skills, organizational culture, and the emotional intelligence of frontline staff and managers in the public sector (Ertiö et al., 2024; Levitats & Vigoda-Gadot, 2019).

Emotional intelligence, a construct whose significance to the fields of organizational psychology and leadership has been widely acknowledged over the last thirty years, is a source of a new understanding regarding the human factors that are the causes or the barriers of digital transformation (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). One significant aspect of emotional intelligence is the ability to spot, understand, and even control not only one's own emotions but also the emotions of other people (Ntalakos et al., 2024; Ntalakos et al., 2022). Emotional intelligence also encompasses characteristics highly relevant in the face of technological changes, including behavior change, empathy, awareness of others, and the ability to navigate the hesitant and uncertain during the change process (Mayer et al., 2003; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Several recent systematic reviews have acknowledged that a considerable number of studies on emotional intelligence have been conducted in different areas of knowledge, and a major concern in these studies is the role of emotional intelligence in leadership and team performance (Sharma & Tiwari, 2022).

The merging of these two fields—digital transformation and emotional intelligence—creates a relatively new area of research for public administration, as noted by Beltrán-Velasco et al. (2023). The private sector literature is gradually unfolding

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