

## **BEHAVIORAL COMPETENCIES IN HIGH-STRESS SITUATIONS**

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For Ukrainian PMs, the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation became a factor that added military and infrastructure risks directly affecting the basic needs, safety, and daily performance of the team to the usual professional stressors (lack of time, budget, changing requirements, stakeholder conflicts). According to an analytical report by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on IDP employment, as of mid-2024, there were 4.7 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine, and more than 2 million of them were of working age [1]; at the same time, some IDPs needed employment and turned to employment centers. These statistics matter for the project environment because they show the scale of migration and shifts in staff availability, while official reports from the Ministry of Social Policy indicate that as of the end of 2024, about 4.6 million IDPs were registered in Ukraine and more than 6.8 million Ukrainians remained abroad [2], which for PMs translates into a sustained reality of distributed teams, time-zone gaps, uneven stress exposure, and legal/domestic/resource constraints that must be managed as a new normal rather than exceptions. A separate powerful stress multiplier of war is energy instability. An official statement by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine noted that as a result of a series of massive enemy attacks on the power system, more than 9 GW of capacity was lost [3]. For project management, this is not just an «inconvenience» but a systemic risk: unstable connections, disruptions in synchronous communications, the inability to work within the usual time frames, and a drop in the throughput of approval and quality control processes. In such conditions, PMs are forced to design their teams' work to be resistant to interruptions: with backup channels, asynchronous protocols, and planning in «short sprints of productivity».

In everyday practice, war adds a number of stress factors to PM that go beyond classic «project pressure». For PM in Ukraine, these are primarily security interruptions, alarms, and shelling, as well as the need to simultaneously organize work and maintain life support (heat, power, internet). For PMs «in Ukraine», this means managing a team where some members are periodically forced into survival mode (searching for heat/power/communication), and the manager has to quickly reconfigure the plan without destroying trust or creating guilt for «inefficiency». For PMs abroad, the stress profile is different, for example, adapting to a new social and legal environment, restoring basic stability (housing, documents, family work, school/kindergarten for children), as well as anxiety for loved ones in Ukraine. At the same time, the PM's responsibility as a leader does not disappear: on the contrary, there is a growing need for clear communication, empathy, and process discipline, as the team works in heterogeneous conditions and has various limitations. That is why the topic of anti-crisis PM logically focuses on behavioral competencies, which in a crisis determine not only the psychological climate, but also the speed of decision-making, the quality of coordination, and the ability of the team to remain operational.

The IPMA ICB competency system (People Competencies) [4] separately highlights the elements of self-reflection and self-management, communication, leadership, teamwork, as well as conflict and crisis management competencies. These

competencies are most «vulnerable» to the effects of high stress, and the military context exacerbates both acute (incidental) and chronic (background) stress. From a scientific point of view, this is to be expected: review and experimental studies show that acute stress can impair decision-making and lead to less advantageous choice strategies [5]. More recent data also describe acute stress as being associated with impaired working memory, cognitive flexibility, and planning – functions that are directly at the heart of PM activities (prioritization, testing assumptions, plan restructuring, and compromise coordination) [6]. It is also important to note that the combination of stress and time pressure can lead to a decline in the quality of decisions – a typical situation for crisis «windows» when teams have little time, incomplete data, and a high cost of error.

At the behavioral level, this often looks like this: (1) self-management «slips» due to sleep disturbances, overload, and anxiety, and PM begins to make decisions reactively; (2) communication becomes either too directive or too vague – both options undermine transparency and trust; (3) leadership shifts from service-oriented to controlling, which increases tension and conflict; (4) conflict management becomes more difficult because people have less «emotional resources» for compromise. In project studies, PM emotional intelligence is associated with better project performance (including through mechanisms of commitment and quality of interaction), making EI an important anti-crisis resource [7]. In addition, empirical work in the *International Journal of Project Management* shows that psychological distress among employees can negatively affect project success [8].

This leads to the practical conclusion that anti-crisis PM must simultaneously manage the project and maintain people's working capacity. This means that «war-induced stress» must be integrated into management as a separate class of risks: security risks, energy and communication gaps, forced displacement, uneven availability of participants, emotional exhaustion. Since these factors are recurring, they must be reflected in the risk register, communication rules, and «process architecture» (asynchrony, redundancy, clear escalation channels).

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