

Advancing the Legal Competences of Public Officials through the Administrative Consultation Platform: A Conceptual and Empirical Approach

Špela Mar

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Public Administration, Slovenia
spela.mar@fu.uni-lj.si
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1698-4273>

Nina Kristl

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Public Administration, Slovenia
nina.kristl@fu.uni-lj.si
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1297-3796>

Eva Murko

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Public Administration, Slovenia
eva.murko@fu.uni-lj.si
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2868-3726>

Jernej Buzeti

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Public Administration, Slovenia
jernej.buzeti@fu.uni-lj.si
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8985-8190>

Polonca Kovač

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Public Administration, Slovenia
polonca.kovac@fu.uni-lj.si
<https://orcid.org/000000277430514>

Received: 20. 7. 2025

Revised: 25. 9. 2025

Accepted: 8. 10. 2025

Published: 11. 11. 2025

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This article examines the development of the legal competences of public officials within the Slovenian public administration who use the Administrative Consultation Platform (ACP) when conducting procedures under the General Administrative Procedure Act (GAPA). The ACP is an open-access legal clinic that serves as a supplementary source for

Mar, Š., Kristl, N., Murko, E., Buzeti, J., Kovač, P. (2025). Advancing the Legal Competences of Public Officials through the Administrative Consultation Platform: A Conceptual and Empirical Approach.
Central European Public Administration Review, 23(2), pp. 31–61

interpreting procedural rules. To this end, a conceptual framework delineating legal competences for public officials was developed to assess how the use of the ACP affects the development of their acquired legal competences for the purposes of conducting administrative procedures. Based on this framework, a structural model was created to enable empirical testing of the impact of public officials' affinity for the ACP and the frequency of its use on the development of their technical-legal and entrepreneurial-relational competences.

Design/methodology/approach: The theoretical component employs normative, doctrinal, and comparative research methods to study legal competence models in the existing literature. The empirical component includes statistical analysis of data collected using a questionnaire measuring the technical-legal and entrepreneurial-relational competences of public officials who use the ACP, combined with an axiological-deontological evaluation of the results. Structural equation modelling was used to verify how affinity for the ACP and the frequency of its use when conducting administrative procedures affect the development of their legal competences.

Findings: The empirical study conducted in spring 2025 involved 112 public officials who conducted administrative procedures in administrative bodies and used the ACP between 2023 and 2025. The results indicate that the use of the ACP contributed significantly to the development of public officials' legal competences, particularly relational competences, such as the ability to communicate effectively and respectfully with parties involved in the administrative procedure, and entrepreneurial competences, especially the ability to uphold core ethical principles (e.g., integrity) and proactively seek solutions that balance the public interest with parties' rights. However, they developed technical-legal competences—such as legal reasoning for resolving procedural issues, understanding of the GAPA, and data protection regulation—to a lesser, though still not negligible, degree.

Academic contribution to the field: The article focuses on relatively under-explored aspects of public officials' legal competences. The conceptual framework represents an original contribution, complementing existing research on legal competences in a narrower context, while in a broader context it can be categorised as dealing with the subjects of administrative law and public administration. The empirical study advances scientific understanding of the impact of public officials' affinity for the ACP and the frequency of its use on the development of their legal competences, providing key feedback for ACP stakeholders.

Research/practical/social implications: The conceptual framework of legal competences serves as the foundation for further scholarly examination of the legal competences possessed by public officials and functions as a baseline for the systematic upgrading of the ACP to continue fostering the development of public officials' legal competences while they use it. From a societal perspective, this article contributes to raising awareness of the critical importance of cultivating legal competences and of the effective utilisation of the ACP as an instrument for more participatory and problem-solving-oriented administrative decision-making processes.

Originality/significance/value: The article offers an original contribution by (1) establishing a conceptual framework that advances the study of legal competences among public officials who use the ACP when conducting administrative procedures, and (2) demonstrating the pivotal role of

the ACP as a repository of accumulated collective knowledge, which aids public officials in developing their legal competences and facilitates the networking of stakeholders engaged in addressing administrative law challenges. The findings provide guidelines for enhancing the effectiveness of public officials and for fulfilling the objectives and principles of Good Governance in modern public administration.

Keywords: public officials, legal competences, Administrative Consultation Platform, legal clinic, administrative procedural law

Nadgradnja pravnih kompetenc javnih uslužbencev prek Upravne svetovalnice: konceptualni in empirični pristop

POVZETEK

Namen: članek preučuje razvoj pravnih kompetenc uradnih oseb v slovenski javni upravi, ki pri vodenju postopkov po Zakonu o splošnem upravnem postopku (ZUP) uporabljajo Upravno svetovalnico (US). US je odprtodostopna pravna klinika, ki je dopolnilni vir za razlago procesnih pravil. V ta namen je bil razvit konceptualni okvir pravnih kompetenc uradnih oseb, s katerim se ocenjuje, kako uporaba US vpliva na razvoj njihovih pridobljenih pravnih kompetenc za potrebe vodenja upravnih postopkov. Na podlagi tega okvirja je bil oblikovan strukturni model, ki omogoča empirično preverjanje vpliva naklonjenosti uradnih osebdo US in pogostosti njene uporabe na razvoj njihovih tehnično-pravnih ter podjetniško-odnosnih kompetenc.

Zasnova/metodologija/pristop: teoretični del uporablja normativne, doktrinarne in primerjalne raziskovalne metode za proučevanje modelov pravnih kompetenc v literaturi. Empirični del vključuje statistično analizo podatkov, zbranih z vprašalnikom za merjenje tehnično-pravnih in podjetniško-odnosnih kompetenc uradnih oseb, ki uporabljajo US, v kombinaciji z aksiološko-deontološko oceno rezultatov. Za preverjanje, kako naklonjenost US in pogostost njene uporabe pri vodenju upravnih postopkov vplivata na razvoj njihovih pravnih kompetenc, je bilo uporabljeno modeliranje strukturnih enačb.

Ugotovitve: empirična raziskava, izvedena spomladi 2025, je zajela 112 uradnih oseb, ki so v obdobju 2023–2025 vodili upravne postopke v upravnih organih in uporabljali US. Rezultati kažejo, da je uporaba US pomembno pripomogla k razvoju pravnih kompetenc uradnih oseb, zlasti odnosnih kompetenc, kot so zmožnost učinkovitega in spoštljivega komuniciranja s strankami v postopku, ter podjetniških kompetenc, predvsem zmožnosti spoštovanja temeljnih etičnih načel (na primer integritete) in proaktivnega iskanja rešitev ob upoštevanju ravnotžja med javnim interesom in pravicami strank. Tehnično-pravne kompetence – kot so sposobnost pravnega argumentiranja, rešitev procesnih problemov, razumevanje ZUP in predpisov o varstvu podatkov – so se razvijale v manjši, toda kljub temu ne zanemarljivi meri.

Akademski prispevek k področju: članek se osredotoča na razmeroma premalo raziskane vidike pravnih kompetenc uradnih oseb. Konceptualni okvir je izviren prispevek, ki dopolnjuje obstoječe raziskave o pravnih kompetencah v ožjem kontekstu, v širšem pa ga je mogoče uvrstiti med tematike upravnega prava in javne uprave. Empirična raziskava pogloblja

znanstveno razumevanje vpliva naklonjenosti do US in pogostosti njene uporabe na razvoj pravnih kompetenc uradnih oseb ter zagotavlja ključno povratno informacijo deležnikom US.

Raziskovalne/praktične/družbene implikacije: konceptualni okvir pravnih kompetenc je temelj za nadaljnje znanstveno proučevanje pravnih kompetenc uradnih oseb in izhodišče za sistematično nadgrajevanje US, da bo tudi v prihodnje spodbujala razvoj pravnih kompetenc uporabnikov. Z družbenega vidika članek pripomore k dvigu zavedanja o ključnem pomenu razvoja pravnih kompetenc in učinkovite uporabe US kot orodja za bolj participativne in k reševanju problemov usmerjene upravne postopke.

Izvirnost/pomembnost/vrednost: članek ponuja izviren prispevek z (1.) vzpostavitvijo konceptualnega okvira, ki pripomore k preučevanju pravnih kompetenc uradnih oseb, ki pri vodenju upravnih postopkov uporabljajo US, ter (2.) prikazom osrednje vloge US kot vira akumuliranega kolektivnega znanja, ki uradnim osebam pomaga razvijati pravne kompetence in olajšuje medsebojno povezovanje deležnikov na področju upravnopravnih dilem. Ugotovitve ponujajo smernice za krepitev delovanja uradnih oseb ter za uresničevanja ciljev in načel dobrega upravljanja v sodobni javni upravi.

Ključne besede: javni uslužbenci, pravne kompetence, Upravna svetovalnica, pravna klinika, upravnoproceno pravo

JEL: K40, J24, M53, H83

1 Introduction

In contemporary society, administrative procedures constitute a cornerstone of public officials' work with clients within administrative authorities, given that administrative relationships regulate relations between governing bodies and individual citizens (Galetta and Ziller, 2024). Pursuant to the General Administrative Procedure Act (GAPA; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 80/99, 1 October 1999, as amended), administrative bodies in Slovenia address several million administrative matters annually. Accordingly, it is imperative that public officials who conduct these procedures are professionally trained (Kovač, 2024; Kovač and Jerovšek, 2024) and possess well-developed relevant legal and other competences (Hamilton and Bilonis, 2022; Carrel, 2019). Public officials acquire said legal competences primarily during education in accredited academic programmes (Kovač and Stare, 2014), and further refine them through continuous professional development, including access to and use of the Administrative Consultation Platform (ACP) (Kovač et al., 2023).

The ACP is a joint initiative of the Faculty of Public Administration (FPA UL) and the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA), specifically designed to provide principled interpretations of issues arising in administrative procedural law and administrative practice, particularly concerning the application of the GAPA. Established in 2009 as a research project addressing complex administrative procedure-related challenges encountered in administrative practice

(Kovač and Stare, 2014), the ACP experienced partial suspension in 2014 and was reinstated in 2022 in response to substantial demand, with new inquiries accepted since spring 2023 (Kovač et al., 2023). Following its overhaul, the ACP is defined as a research and pedagogical project under the governance of the FPA UL and the MPA, supervised by mentors from the faculty and officials from administrative bodies. It provides principled explanations of dilemmas concerning the application of the GAPA in individual situations. The project interprets the provisions of sector-specific regulations and the GAPA with due consideration of the fundamental principles of public administration. The ACP gathers and addresses dilemmas in the implementation of the GAPA across various administrative authorities and fields. Since 2009, the ACP has made available over 1,200 documented cases, with approximately 120 views and 300 daily user interactions recorded in the 2023–2025 period. Access to the platform's comprehensive repository – comprising published questions and answers, alongside the facility to submit new queries – is provided free of charge to users. Three-quarters of ACP users are public officials who conduct administrative procedures across various administrative domains (e.g., foreigners, taxation, construction, social affairs, data protection). In this context, the question arises regarding the nature of the legal competences possessed by public officials conducting administrative procedures, and the extent to which their affinity for and frequency of use of the affect the development of their legal competences.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the use of the ACP affects the development of legal competences among public officials conducting administrative procedures within Slovenian public administration, while also understanding how the perceived performance and effort expectancy of the ACP, social influence, and facilitating conditions impact the frequency of ACP use. The objectives of the paper are: (1) to develop a conceptual framework of the legal competences of public officials conducting administrative procedures; (2) to investigate the acquired legal competences of public officials as ACP users; and (3) to analyse the extent to which public officials' affinity for and frequency of use of the ACP contribute to the development of their legal competences. The following research question was formulated: How does the use of the ACP affect the acquisition and development of legal competences among public officials conducting administrative procedures within the Slovenian public administration? In line with the research question, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: The acceptance of the ACP (measured through performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions) among public officials influences the frequency of ACP use in the conduct of administrative procedures.

H2: The frequency of ACP use among public officials conducting administrative procedures affects the development of their legal competences.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 elaborates on the concept of legal competences, the findings of studies concerning the sig-

nificance of legal competence development for students and legal professionals (Finch and Fafinski, 2020; Isaacs et al., 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Shultz and Zedeck, 2011), and legal competence models (Hamilton and Bilonis, 2022; Carrel, 2021; Carrel, 2019; Mak, 2017). To this end, normative, doctrinal, and comparative research methods were employed. Section 3 outlines the methodological design in three subsections, namely the conceptual framework of legal competences, data collection and sampling, and the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The results of the empirical study are presented in Section 4, followed by discussion and recommendations in Section 5, and concluding remarks in Section 6. The core contribution of this study is the developed conceptual framework of legal competences for public officials, specifically tailored for the empirical investigation of their technical-legal, entrepreneurial, and relational competences essential for conducting administrative procedures. The conceptual framework concurrently serves as the groundwork for the structural model to empirically test the influence of public officials' affinity for the ACP and the frequency of its use on the development of these three dimensions of legal competences. This research constitutes a foundation for further studies and measures aimed at acquiring and fostering the appropriate legal competences among public officials.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Legal Competences of Public Officials

Competences encompass all those skills, abilities, and attitudes of employees that are essential for the successful execution of work tasks in general (Schaffar, 2021; Kruyen and Van Genugten, 2020; Arzenšek et al., 2019), including within public administration (Džinić and Manojlović, 2018), as they have an important effect on whether the established objectives are achieved (Buzeti and Stare, 2010). The study of competences using competence models, which represent an organisational framework for defining the competences, tasks, and responsibilities of employees to ensure effective work and performance evaluation subject to the strategic goals of the organisation (Mikhridinova et al., 2024), began in the latter half of the 20th century (Sommerman et al., 2025). In line with public administration reforms, various competences of public officials have been prioritised (Kruyen and Van Genugten, 2020). In traditional public administration, the competences of public officials comprised professional knowledge and technical skills, whereas during the New Public Management era, competences highlighting the importance of efficiency and effectiveness in public administration came to the fore (Kruyen and Van Genugten, 2020). With the implementation of Good Governance (Kovač, 2018) and influenced by social changes, digitalisation, and artificial intelligence, contemporary public administration has become complex (Galetta and Ziller, 2024), thereby increasingly accentuating those competences with which public officials effectively address individual and societal challenges (Vitello et al., 2021; Schneider, 2019).

When conducting administrative procedures, public officials must demonstrate appropriate professional qualifications, as evidenced by fulfilling the statutory requirements under Article 31 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (GAPA), which include: (1) *employment within the competent authority* (knowledge, attitudes); (2) *relevant education* (knowledge, skills); (3) *state professional examination in administrative procedure* (knowledge, skills, attitudes); (4) *authorisation* (knowledge, attitudes); and (5) *impartiality* (knowledge, attitudes) (Kovač and Jerovšek, 2024). However, since public officials decide on the rights, obligations, or legal interests of individuals, legal entities, or other parties when conducting administrative procedures, it is of paramount importance that their acquired legal competences are adequately developed. Legal competences are those that enable public officials, within the scope of legal regulations, to effect changes to their own or others' legal status through legal acts within the legal system (Villa-Rosas and Spaak, 2023). Typically, these encompass legal knowledge, skills, and abilities that empower public officials to actively and responsibly participate in societal development. Public officials achieve this by respecting the rule of law, exercising rights and obligations, and cooperating with state authorities and other key societal actors (Korotun and Bogdanova, 2020).

Existing research (Hamilton and Bilonis, 2022; Finch and Fafinski, 2020; Carrel, 2019; Gerkman and Cornett, 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Shultz and Zedeck, 2011) mostly examines the legal competences acquired by law students during their education and those further developed by practising lawyers through their professional work. However, very few studies directly address the development of legal competences among public officials after the completion of their formal education, particularly at the intersection of legal and administrative domains. For example, Kovač and Stare (2014) examined the general competences of students and graduates of public administration who participated in the ACP, while the Tuning project (Krogt and Reichard, 2012) is recognised as a key initiative for public administration. There is, however, no research that focuses specifically on those already employed in public administration and their legal and other relevant competences, which is a significant research gap in the study of legal competences among public officials. Given the substantive similarities in the work of public officials when conducting administrative procedures, especially regarding the interpretation and application of (procedural) law, the following section employs doctrinal analysis and synthesis to examine the legal competences of law students and practising lawyers (Bedner et al., 2020; Finch and Fafinski, 2020; Gerkman and Cornett, 2016; Isaacs et al., 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Kovač and Stare, 2014; Shultz and Zedeck, 2011) alongside existing legal competence models (Hamilton and Bilonis, 2022; Carrel, 2021; Carrel, 2019; Mak, 2017). These studies provide the basis for developing a conceptual framework of legal competences tailored to public officials using the ACP and for the further empirical examination of their legal competences.

2.2 Legal Competences and Legal Competence Models

According to analyses by various authors (Bedner et al., 2020; Finch and Fafinski, 2020; Gerkman and Cornett, 2016; Isaacs et al., 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Kovač and Stare, 2014; Shultz and Zedeck, 2011), law students must develop appropriate competences during their studies that then form the basis for further enhancement and deepening throughout their professional careers, enabling them to be fully competent in their respective fields.

Shultz and Zedeck (2011), in collaboration with alumni, students, professors, clients, and judges, identified 26 of the most important legal competences required during law studies and legal practice. These competences – e.g., analysis and reasoning, creativity, problem solving, practical judgment, legal research, writing, speaking, listening, organising and managing, negotiation skills, networking and business development, and stress management – are crucial in practice, as they contribute to employees' work performance.

Similarly, Hamilton (2014), drawing from a range of sources (Consulting Group – BTI, 2013; Survey of Newly Licensed Lawyers – NCBE, 2012; Association of Corporate Counsel – ACC, 2009), concluded that students aspiring to work as lawyers, especially in client-facing roles, should possess well-developed *technical-legal competences* (e.g., knowledge of doctrinal law, legal analysis, written and oral communication) as well as *other competences* (e.g., integrity, honesty, good judgment, problem solving, work ethic, dedication to client service, responsiveness to clients, seeking feedback). These competences should be acquired during their studies to such a degree that graduates already meet employer expectations upon entering the labour market, and they are then further developed during professional practice. However, Gerkman and Cornett (2016) found that law graduates often do not adequately develop certain legal competences (e.g., integrity, work ethic, resilience) which employers regard as essential and expect young lawyers to demonstrate in professional settings. To address this, they developed within the *Whole Lawyer* conceptual framework a set of the most important legal competences categorised for the short term as *professional competencies* (professionalism, emotional and interpersonal intelligence, communication) and *characteristics*, and for the longer term or throughout a legal career as *legal skills* (transactional practice, litigation practice, legal thinking and application, workload management) and *professional competencies* (professional development, workload management, and collaboration with others).

Law graduates are expected to master several categories of legal competences, such as *sources of law* (e.g., understanding legislation, locating and applying legislation and case law), *academic legal skills* (e.g., writing, referencing/avoiding plagiarism, answering problem questions), and *practical legal skills* (e.g., presentation skills, mooted, and negotiation skills) (Finch and Fafinski, 2020). Similarly, Bedner et al. (2020) categorised the legal competences and associated legal skills of law graduates – who are expected to become lawyers, judges, or public officials – into two groups. Group 1, *general skills* (e.g., critical thinking, juridical analytical skills) and *primary legal skills*

(e.g., case analysis, legal reasoning), provide law graduates with the foundation for the development of legal thinking. Whereas Group 2, *secondary legal skills* (e.g., legal writing, constructing legal arguments, legal drafting, and contract drafting), equip them with the ability to apply acquired knowledge in concrete legal practices.

The importance of developing legal competences among law students has also been emphasised in the Tuning pilot project, aimed at harmonising educational programmes in Europe for the field of public administration following the implementation of the Bologna process (Krogt and Reichard, 2012). Slovenia participated in the TuCAHEA task group within this project (Isaacs et al., 2016). Within this context, law students and graduates are expected to demonstrate, in addition to their general legal knowledge (e.g., regulatory and legal governance of social relations; legal and state development of the society; drafting and implementation of legislation), the legal knowledge of societal norms, legal forms of organisations, state functions, and specific legal fields (e.g., administrative law, civil law), alongside appropriately developed legal competences. The TuCAHEA project used the input from academics, employers, students, and graduates to classify 30 *general competences* and 20 *subject-specific competences* according to the importance of developing the respective competences during law studies. Among the most important general competences were the ability to apply knowledge in practice, autonomous learning, and the use of logic and critical thinking to solve problems. The most important elements among subject-specific competences were knowledge of current norms, statutes, and regulations as well as other sources of law, knowledge of and ability to apply national and international instruments to protect and promote human rights, skills to draw up legal documents and the like.

Following the Tuning project, Kovač and Stare (2014) examined the general competences of postgraduate public administration students at the Faculty of Public Administration in Ljubljana participating in the ACP. They found that the ACP contributed to students' development of the ability to apply knowledge in practical situations, deepen knowledge and understanding of the subject area and profession, demonstrate determination and perseverance in tasks and responsibilities, among other competences. According to them, the ACP is pivotal in developing these student competences, although they also highlighted the need to boost ties with employers and expand cooperation with various administrative bodies – a measure introduced during the ACP overhaul in 2022 (Kovač et al., 2023), although the results of this were not yet measured by the time of the present study.

For the purposes of the systematic study of the legal competences of students and legal professionals, a number of authors have developed various legal competence models, notably the *T-shaped Lawyer* (Carrel, 2021; Carrel, 2019; Mak, 2017), the *Delta Lawyer Competency Model* (Carrel, 2019), and the *Foundational Competences Model* (Hamilton and Bilonis, 2022). Using any of these models, organisations – including administrative bodies – can analyse

the level of development of legal competences acquired by law students and practitioners in their client-facing work (Hamilton and Bilionis, 2022). This approach is also applicable to graduates of law-related programmes, such as public administration, since this field is inherently bound to act in line with legal rules and principles due to its authoritative intervention into individuals' legal status (Stare and Pečarič, 2021).

According to the *T-shaped Lawyer* model (Carrel, 2021; Carrel, 2019; Mak, 2017), law students and legal professionals – including lawyers, judges, and academics – adapt to societal changes, digitalisation, and globalisation by acquiring appropriate legal knowledge alongside capabilities such as data analytics, technology use, and project management. This model delineates three distinct but overlapping lawyer profiles: 1) *the lawyer-statesman*, a traditional lawyer who emphasises the rule of law and justice, acting for the public good with moral integrity, sound judgment, and the ability to apply broad legal knowledge in practice; 2) the *rational legal professional* reflects the new public management influence, prioritising economic values (e.g., efficiency, effectiveness, transparency); this profile specializes in legal fields (e.g., commercial law, criminal law) while also mastering other disciplines (e.g., management, psychology) and is able to adapt to an organisation's goals and ethical frameworks; and 3) the *t-shaped lawyer* epitomises the modern 21st-century lawyer who responds to social changes, possesses relevant legal knowledge, is client-focused, demonstrates highly developed social and relational competences (e.g., empathy), interdisciplinary competences (e.g., sustainability, social justice), is technologically proficient, and acts in accordance with personal ethical standards (Mak, 2017). These profiles primarily describe lawyers, judges, and legal scholars, as law students are still developing these characteristics.

However, Carrel (2019) critiqued the model as being deficient for insufficiently promoting the development of traditional legal competences among law students and professionals within organisations. She proposed an enhancement through the *Delta Model of Lawyer Competence* (Delta Model), according to which graduates and lawyers systematically develop their legal competences when performing client-facing work and while effectively solving legal problems. The Delta Model exists in multiple iterations, simplified and adapted over time in response to societal changes. This article summarises the original triangular version, which categorises legal competences as follows: *legal knowledge and skills* (legal analysis, legal judgment, legal research) enabling lawyers to understand client's problems; *personal effectiveness skills (PES)* (e.g., emotional intelligence, relationship management, communication); and *process, data and technology* (technology and social media, data analytics, data security), covering the business and operational aspects of legal service delivery.

Consistent with the Delta Model, Hamilton and Bilionis (2022) developed the *Foundational Competences Model* aimed at enhancing law students' legal competences for academic success and lawyers' competences in delivering client services and career advancement. Their model also depicts legal competenc-

es as a triangle divided into three categories. At the core are foundational legal competences (responsible conduct and trust-building in client dealings), which influence the growth of other competences (e.g., social responsibility). The triangle's base includes *traditional technical competencies* – those emphasized by law schools and expected by employers and clients. On the left are *client-centred relational skills* and *problem-solving competences*, fostering client focus, while the right side emphasizes *ownership of professional development (initiative-taking) of essential competences*, emphasising continuous professional growth.

Existing legal competence models are not fully adequate to identify the necessary legal competences among public officials participating in the ACP, as they primarily target the educational phase or perspectives of lawyers, employers, and clients, and are developed within academic and professional milieus. Due to the absence of directed research in this domain and given the substantial role overlap between lawyers and officials, it was necessary to develop an adapted conceptual framework that would consider the specific legal competences of public officials whose work focuses on conducting administrative procedures.

3 Methodological Outline of the Theoretical Legal Competences Model and Its Empirical Verification

3.1 Designing a Conceptual Framework of Public Officials' Legal Competences

The conceptual framework of legal competences for public officials developed here is based on the three-dimensional structure of the Foundational Competences Model (Hamilton and Bilionis, 2022), which itself was based on the Delta Model (Carrel, 2019), comprising the *technical-legal*, *entrepreneurial*, and *relational* dimensions. It encompasses a set of specific legal competences that can be empirically examined by taking a comprehensive view of the professional, ethical, and socially responsible conduct of legal practitioners. Another foundational approach in the conceptual framework is derived from the TuCAHEA project under the Tuning initiative (Isaacs et al., 2016), which systematically defines *general competences* and *subject-specific competences*. This approach is employed due to its recognition and established use in implementing Bologna Process higher education programmes within the field of public administration. Additionally, it has been utilised by other authors to study student competences (cf. Kovač and Stare, 2014), and for its content as it covers a broad range of legal competences relevant to the ACP. The Foundational Competences Model and the Tuning/TuCAHEA framework together serve as the essential groundwork for the conceptual framework, since the former synthesises existing empirical studies in the field of law, while the latter specifies the particularities of legal competences within legal and public administration education. Although originally developed to enhance higher education in law and public administration, they are adapted in the conceptu-

al framework to define the legal competences of public officials that are critical for the effective discharge of their administrative duties, such as conducting administrative procedures, which substantively and functionally lie at the intersection of law and public administration. Therefore, it is vital for public officials to develop these competences through lifelong learning. Within the conceptual framework, competences irrelevant to conducting administrative procedures (e.g., ability to innovate, teamwork/collaboration, conscientiousness/attention to detail, grit/resilience) are excluded, whereas others (e.g., use of necessary technology for information retrieval in juridical practice and work ethic) are adjusted in accordance with the requirements of Article 31 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (GAPA).

Table 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of legal competences for public officials, structured across three dimensions and competences, where *subject-specific competences* are contained within the 1) technical-legal dimension, and *general competences* form parts of the 2) entrepreneurial and 3) relational dimensions.

The conceptual framework of legal competences for public officials presented in Table 1 provides a structured and comparable overview of diverse research underpinning, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of public officials' work. Based on this framework, propositions were developed for the empirical study of legal competences (for example, the legal competence is *understanding of administrative procedures*, and the corresponding proposition to investigate is *to understand the GAPA and sector-specific procedures*).

Table 1: Conceptual framework of legal competences for public officials

Legal Competences of Public Officials			
Competence model	Technical-legal dimension	Entrepreneurial dimension	Relational dimension
Tuning/ TuCAHEA	<p><i>Subject-specific competences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of current norms, statutes, regulations and other sources of law. • Capacity to apply a legal rule to a particular legal case. • Understanding of administrative procedures. • Skills to draw up legal documents. • Ability to understand professionally and explain legal norms in the process of their application. • Ability to produce effective written or oral legal decisions and advice. • Capacity to identify the legal interests of the parties. • Capacity to use the technology necessary for information searches in juridical practice. • Ability to apply knowledge in practice. • Ability to use logic and critical thinking for solving problems. • Knowledge of the professional field. 	<p><i>General competences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to learn. • Ability to communicate in official, state, and foreign languages. • Ability to prevent and resolve conflicts. 	<p><i>General competences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to learn. • Ability to communicate in official, state, and foreign languages. • Ability to prevent and resolve conflicts.
Foundational Competences Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of doctrinal law in the basic subject areas. • Legal analysis. • Legal research. • Written/oral communication in the legal context. • Legal judgment. • Knowledge of the law-of-lawyering, responsibilities to clients and the legal system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work ethic. • Organisation and management of legal work. • An entrepreneurial mindset to serve clients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior client focus, responsiveness to the client. • Exceptional understanding of the client's context/business. • Client-tailored communication. • Creative problem solving/ good professional judgment synthesising all the competences.

Source: Based on Hamilton and Bilionis (2022); Tuning TUCAHEA (2012-2016)

3.2 Data Collection and Sampling for the Empirical Analysis through an Online Survey

In order to investigate the legal competences acquired through the use of the ACP by public officials who conduct administrative procedures in Slovenian public administration, and to understand the extent to which their attitude toward and frequency of ACP use contribute to the development of their legal competences, we employed a self-designed survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of our conceptual framework of legal competences, as presented in Section 3.1. Both the questionnaire and framework draw upon the *Foundational Competences Model* (Hamilton and Bilionis, 2022) and the *Tuning/TuCAHEA* approach (Isaac et al., 2016). At the same time, they account for the specific intersection of law, public administration, and the ACP, while deliberately excluding formal educational aspects. Instead, the focus is placed on career-long training and adaptation to the specific professional demands faced by public officials responsible for conducting administrative procedures.

The questionnaire was structured into several sections. The first part focused on measuring legal competences, followed by items assessing respondents' attitudes and dispositions toward the use of the ACP. In addition, demographic data were collected to enable an analysis of the state and development of individual (and group) legal competences against reference benchmarks across multiple indicators. The questionnaire comprised 32 items, organised into several thematic sections. The first section measured technical-legal competences (7 items), including understanding of the GAPA and sector-specific procedures, knowledge of administrative case law on procedural rules, analytical thinking when solving administrative problems, legal reasoning when solving procedural problems, application of general rules to specific cases, and awareness of the fact that the processing of personal data is regulated by law and that digital content is protected by copyright law. The second section, entrepreneurial dimension (3 items), assessed adherence to fundamental ethical principles (integrity, impartiality, confidentiality) when performing duties or conducting administrative procedures, the accuracy in conducting administrative procedures, and proactive solution-seeking while balancing the public interest and the rights of the parties. The third section, relational competences (5 items), evaluated the effectiveness and respectfulness of communication with participants in the administrative procedure and with parties, a parties-centred focus, recognition of parties' legal interests in individual cases, and the ability to learn.

For the purposes of data collection, the questionnaire was transformed into an online survey using the open-source application 1KA (One Click Survey; www.1ka.si). Data were collected between March and April 2025. The target population consisted of 226 public officials employed in Slovenian public administration who conduct administrative procedures and who, between 2023 and 2025, had submitted at least one question to the ACP and received an answer as active users of the platform. Respondents participated on a voluntary

basis through self-selection, employing a non-probability sampling approach. Out of the 226 invited public officials, 112 completed the survey in full, yielding a 49.6% response rate, which is sufficient to allow extrapolation of the results and support valid conclusions. To uphold the integrity of the research process, special attention was devoted to ensuring the anonymity of the respondents' data.

The collected demographic indicators show that 74% of respondents were women, with approximately 57% from Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), with around 17% older and the remainder younger. This distribution broadly reflects the composition of employees in the Slovenian public administration (Kovač and Stare, 2014). Age distribution also aligns with national data: in 2023 only 8% of central administration employees were aged 18–34, while 29% were aged 55 or older (OECD, 2025). Taken together, these comparisons support the representativeness of our sample and uphold the legitimacy of the inferences. In line with formal entry requirements, the vast majority of respondents hold a university degree, with 21% possessing a postgraduate qualification. Among them, 37% are law graduates, while 35% hold a degree from the Faculty of Public Administration, forming a relatively homogeneous group whose legal competences were, to a large extent, acquired through formal education prior to employment. This provides a solid basis for assessing which competences have subsequently been developed through the use of the ACP. Despite this common background, respondents are currently distributed across a variety of administrative domains: nearly 30% across multiple policy areas, about 19% in environment, construction, and agriculture, 17% in inspection services, 13% in internal affairs, and 6% in social affairs.

Further on, to assess the extent to which public officials' attitudes towards and frequency of use of the ACP contribute to the development of their legal competences, the questionnaire incorporated the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003). The UTAUT synthesises insights from eight earlier technology acceptance models and identifies four core determinants of technology adoption: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. These constructs have consistently demonstrated strong explanatory power for predicting both behavioural intention and actual system use, accounting for up to 70% of variance in intention and around 50% in use (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In this study, each construct was operationalised with four items measuring respondents' perceptions of the ACP's usefulness, ease of use, organisational and peer influence, and the availability of institutional support. Additionally, one item assessed the frequency of ACP use to browse existing cases, with response categories ranging from "daily" to "never".

The use of the UTAUT was particularly well suited to this research context for two reasons. First, the ACP represents a digital tool, available to public officials from the Slovenian public administration, for which adoption and consistent use are not guaranteed despite the potential for gaining legal competency. And secondly, the UTAUT has been successfully applied in com-

parable contexts where public officials' or employees' acceptance of various e-government tools was examined, thereby providing a validated lens to measure attitudes and usage behaviour (Salah et al., 2025; Zeebaree et al., 2022). These studies confirm the UTAUT's robustness and transferability to public administration settings, reinforcing its suitability for examining how ACP acceptance and usage contribute to the development of legal competences among Slovenian public officials.

All items in the questionnaire were formulated as statements. Respondents expressed their agreement using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly agree, with the option to select "I do not have enough information". For competences, a separate 5-point scale was used to indicate the extent of competence development as a result of ACP usage (not at all, slightly, moderately, considerably, fully developed). The Likert scaling method is a widely recognised approach for measuring responses, and is also widespread in public administration research (Croasmun and Ostrom, 2011).

3.3 Measurement Model Reliability and Validity

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Summary statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to provide an overview of the variables. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test hypothesised relationships among latent constructs. Descriptive analyses were performed in IBM SPSS 29, and SEM was conducted using IBM SPSS AMOS 29.0 (Arbuckle, 2021). Prior to evaluating the measurement model, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted specifically on the items measuring legal competences, as this scale was newly developed for the purposes of this study and had not been previously validated.

The EFA indicated that legal competences are best represented by two underlying factors. The analysis revealed that the theoretically proposed dimensions of *entrepreneurial* and *relational competences*, did not emerge as distinct factors. Instead, the items intended initially for these two dimensions were grouped into one coherent factor. This factor reflects a broader competence related to professional responsibility and interpersonal conduct within administrative procedures. Considering the content of these items (e.g., respect for ethical principles, accuracy in procedural actions, respectful communication, balancing public and individual interests), this factor was labelled *entrepreneurial-relational competences*. The second factor included items measuring legal reasoning and procedural expertise, such as understanding procedural law, applying general rules to specific cases, and analytical reasoning; hence, this factor was labelled technical-legal competences. Two items, to reason legally when solving procedural problems and to focus on the parties, cross loaded on both factors, suggesting that these competences are not exclusively tied to the dimensions mentioned above but instead reflect an integration of both. Consequently, these two items were excluded from further analysis.

Following the EFA, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the fit of the proposed (theoretical) model and evaluate its reliability and validity. The model fit indices suggest that the model provides an acceptable representation of the observed data – the chi-square statistic was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 646.71$, $df = 335$, $p < .001$). However, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ($\chi^2/df = 1.93$) was below the recommended threshold of 3, indicating a good fit between the model and the observed data. Incremental fit indices further supported the adequacy of the model (CFI = .867, IFI = .870, TLI = .838), since the values are close to or exceed the conventional cutoff of .85 for acceptable fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Although slightly above the ideal threshold of .08, the RMSEA (.092) remains within the range of reasonable error of approximation. The hypothesis of close fit could not be confirmed (PCLOSE = .000). Parsimony-adjusted indices indicated a reasonably efficient model given its complexity (PNFI = .630, PCFI = .715).

To evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study, we calculated the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. As shown in Table 3, all constructs demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.772 to 0.937, and CR values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2: Reliability and validity of the measurement model

		M	SD	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1	Performance expectancy	4.36	.64	.857	.878	.646	-				
2	Effort expectancy	4.41	.66	.929	.933	.779	.608	-			
3	Social influence	3.19	.95	.899	.902	.701	.442	.372	-		
4	Facilitating conditions	4.20	.62	.772	.793	.570	.561	.599	.290	-	
5	Technical-legal competences	3.88	.58	.883	.859	.605	.396	.305	.241	.279	-
6	Entrepreneurial-relational legal competences	4.11	.72	.937	.942	.645	.506	.279	.201	.344	.729

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. The lower triangle presents correlations among latent factors.

Source: Own (2025)

The AVE values are above the 0.50 threshold for all constructs, indicating convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, which compares the square root of each construct's AVE with its correlations to other constructs. The square root of the AVE for each construct (represented on the diagonal) was greater than its correlations with other constructs.

4 Results of the Empirical Study on the Legal Competences of Public Officials Related to the ACP

The results of the study indicate that the respondents generally agree that using the ACP has contributed to the development of key legal competences, such as understanding procedural rules and the protection of personal data. The use of the ACP has positively impacted the development of competences related to the application of rules and analytical thinking in legal tasks. Ethical principles, task precision, and proactive problem solving were strongly impacted by the use of the ACP. ACP use also helped to develop competences from the relational dimension, including effective communication with participants and focusing on client needs. Further, regarding the UTAUT part, the survey revealed a high agreement on items measuring performance expectancy which suggests that the respondents believe the ACP improves task efficiency and correctness, and is useful in task performance. The respondents reported that the ACP is easy to use, with a significant percentage (89.8%) reporting that they were able to quickly learn how to use it. The high ratings for ease of use and understanding of the tool point to a user-friendly experience. The low average agreement on items measuring social influence indicates that co-workers play a relatively minor role in users' decisions to use the ACP. The respondents have the necessary material resources and knowledge to use the ACP, but seem to lack proper internal support when facing difficulties, although they receive support from ACP administrator when needed. A total of 59.8% of the respondents are regular users of the ACP, using it at least once a month.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for items

		M	SD	%
Performance expectancy				
PE1	The ACP is useful for performing tasks.	4.61	.607	97.2%
PE2	Using the ACP enables me to complete tasks faster.	4.22	.777	80.6%
PE3	Using the ACP allows me to perform tasks more accurately.	4.38	.733	88.9%
PE4	By using the ACP, I have improved my task performance abilities.	4.28	.807	83.3%
Effort expectancy				
EE1	The ACP is easy to use.	4.36	.767	89.8%
EE2	Using the ACP is understandable.	4.46	.676	91.7%
EE3	It is not difficult to become proficient in using the ACP.	4.42	.750	88.0%
EE4	I quickly learn how to use the ACP.	4.42	.725	89.8%
Social influence				
SI1	My colleagues are of the opinion that I should use the ACP when conducting administrative procedures.	3.27	1.065	44.3%
SI2	My colleagues expect me to use the ACP when conducting administrative procedures.	2.89	1.081	29.2%

SI3	My superiors expect me to use the ACP when conducting administrative procedures.	2.93	1.173	33.0%
SI4	My superiors are in favour of me using the ACP.	3.65	1.015	55.7%
Facilitating conditions				
FC1	I have all necessary equipment and resources to use the ACP.	4.42	.688	94.3%
FC2	I know how to use the content of the ACP effectively.	4.30	.733	87.7%
FC3	If I encounter problems using the ACP, I can turn to a colleague at work for help.	3.32	1.143	49.1%
FC4	If I encounter problems using the ACP, I can contact the ACP administrator at the FPA UL.	3.88	.825	67.0%
Frequency of use				
FREQ	Frequency of using the ACP for browsing existing cases.	3.80	.890	59.8%
Technical-legal dimension				
OTPK1	To understand the GAPA and sector-specific procedures.	3.92	.590	85.6%
OTPK2	To be familiar with administrative case law on procedural rules.	3.67	.679	65.8%
OTPK3	To think analytically when solving administrative problems.	3.87	.788	75.0%
OTPK4	To reason legally when solving procedural problems.	3.88	.871	81.3%
OTPK5	To apply general legal rules to specific cases.	3.96	.709	80.4%
OTPK6	To be aware that the processing of personal data is regulated by law.	4.14	.994	80.4%
OTPK7	To be aware that digital content is protected by copyright law.	3.99	.704	72.3%
Entrepreneurial dimension				
PM1	To respect fundamental ethical principles (integrity, impartiality, confidentiality) when performing duties or conducting administrative procedures.	4.13	.969	83.9%
PM2	To perform actions accurately when conducting administrative procedures.	3.84	.954	91.1%
PM3	To proactively seek solutions while balancing the public interest and the rights of the parties.	4.17	.889	79.5%
Relational dimension				
OD1	To communicate effectively with the parties involved in the administrative procedure.	4.26	.720	73.2%
OD2	To communicate respectfully with the parties involved.	4.12	.836	78.6%
OD3	To focus on the parties involved.	3.96	.750	83.0%
OD4	Identify the legal interests of the parties in individual cases.	4.00	.783	77.5%
OD5	Ability to learn.	4.22	.744	87.4%

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; % = Proportion of respondents who selected "agree" or "completely agree" on UTAUT items, proportion of those who reported using the ACP regularly (at least monthly), and proportion of those who indicated that ACP use had a "significant" or "very significant" impact on their development of legal competences.

Source: Own (2025)

The use of the ACP was associated with substantial improvements in technical-legal and entrepreneurial-relational competences among public officials responsible for administrative procedures.

Specifically, the most pronounced gain in the technical-legal competences concerned legal reasoning for resolving procedural problems, where the mean score increased from 3.47 to 4.07. Before using the ACP, 47.9% of public officials reported this competence as developed to a large extent or fully; after the ACP, this share rose to 87.7%. Understanding of the GAPA and sector-specific regulations also improved, with the mean rising from 3.59 to 3.97. Although more than half of public officials (54.8%) already reported this competence as largely or fully developed, the 87.5% figure after using the ACP indicates a significant improvement. Application of general rules to individual cases strengthened as well ($M = 4.05$), with 83.6% reporting substantial or complete development, compared to 58.9% at baseline. Awareness of data-protection regulation was already very high before ACP ($M = 4.21$; 79.5% largely or fully developed, including 42.5% fully developed), yet still improved for 86.3% of public officials. Awareness that digital content is protected by copyright increased from a mean of 3.74 to 3.95, with 57.5% reporting high competence before using the ACP and 76.8% afterwards. Analytical thinking improved from 3.45 to 3.85, with the proportion reporting strong competence rising from 50.7% to 75.3%. Knowledge of administrative case law was comparatively the weakest competence, however, the mean rose from 3.23 to 3.71, and the share with high competence increased from 42.5% to 68.0%.

Under entrepreneurial competences, accuracy in conducting administrative procedures reached the highest overall level, rising from 3.99 to 4.32. While 74.0% already reported strong competence before using the ACP, almost all officials (94.5%) improved further. Ethical conduct and confidentiality started at a high level ($M = 4.27$; 86.3% reporting strong competence) and improved for 87.7% of officials. Proactivity in finding solutions was initially less developed ($M = 3.73$; 54.8% at baseline), but rose to 4.05, with four in five respondents (80.9%) reporting a significant improvement.

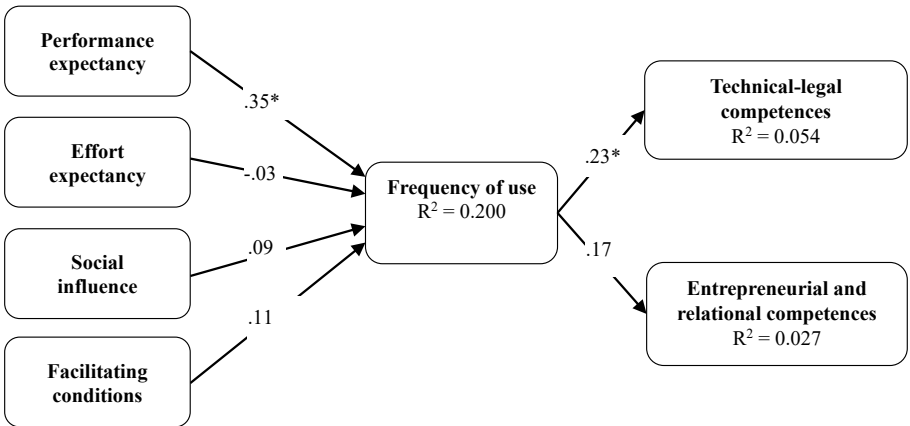
Using the ACP also lead to an improvement in relational competences, whereby recognition of parties' legal interests specifically improved from 3.79 to 4.11, with the share of officials reporting high competence increasing from 63.0% to 86.1%. Effective communication with participants, initially rated at 3.85, rose to 4.03, with improvements reported by 79.5% of respondents. Client orientation, already developed in 78.1% of respondents, was further improved to 89.0%. Respectful communication began at an especially high level ($M = 4.38$; 83.6% largely or fully developed), so overall change was limited, although 87.7% still reported some improvement, and more than half (52.1%) reported full development. The ability to learn was already present in 80.8% of officials and was further enhanced in nearly all cases (93.2%).

Overall, the findings confirm that ACP use makes a significant contribution to legal competence development among public officials. The strongest development was observed in five key areas: accuracy in conducting procedures,

ability to learn, legal reasoning in addressing procedural issues, application of general rules to specific cases, and proactive problem solving. Effective communication with participants also exceeded the threshold of strong competence development. These results highlight the ACP as not only a tool for supporting legal expertise, but also as a mechanism that strengthens the broader professional competences that are crucial for quality public service delivery.

Furthermore, the hypothesised relationships among UTAUT constructs, the frequency of using the ACP, and the perceived development of legal competences as a result of ACP use were tested with structural equation modelling (see Figure 1). The model assessed the acceptance of the ACP measured through predictive power of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions on the frequency of use (H1), and subsequently, the effect of frequency of use on the perceived development of legal competences (H2).

Figure 1: The structural model



Note. $* = p < 0.05$.

Source: Own (2025)

The model explained 20% of the variance in usage frequency, 5.4% in technical-legal competences, and 2.7% in entrepreneurial-relational competences, suggesting an overall weak explanatory power. While the statistical explanatory power of the model is modest, the results still provide meaningful insights. They show that the most important factor driving public officials to use the ACP regularly is their belief that it is useful for their work. In other words, if public officials clearly see practical benefits, they are more motivated to integrate the ACP into their daily procedures. More frequent use, in turn, is associated with stronger development of technical-legal competences, while the effects on broader entrepreneurial-relational competences are weaker. This pattern suggests that the ACP is most effective as a tool for strengthening core technical-legal competences, but its potential to support

entrepreneurial-relational competences development may depend on additional organisational or contextual factors.

5 Discussion and Recommendations

In modern public administration, conducting administrative procedures under the General Administrative Procedure Act (GAPA) requires public officials to not only be professionally trained (Kovač and Jerovšek, 2024; Džinić, 2018), but to also possess appropriately developed competences (Sommerman et al., 2025; Kruyen and Van Genugten, 2020; Schneider, 2019). Among these, legal competences are of central importance, as they demonstrate the officials' professional competence in their work (Schaffar, 2021).

Public administration, grounded in the doctrine of Good Governance, is a vital part of contemporary society, contributing to its development and addressing social and individual challenges. Within this framework and the concept of Good Administration, public officials hold a key role in contemporary and complex public administration (Galetta and Ziller, 2024), where conducting administrative procedures is a core task (Pečarič and Stare, 2021). Public officials may conduct administrative procedures if they fulfil formal education and other requirements under Article 31 of the GAPA (Kovač and Jerovšek, 2024). However, effective and professional conduct of administrative procedures requires them to also possess a variety of skills and abilities, which in turn need to be continuously further developed. This guarantees professional administrative services and contributes to the stable and sound functioning of public administration (Vitello et al., 2021; Arzenšek et al., 2019). Administrative procedures increasingly serve as a critical mechanism in this regard in modern society where the role of authority in administrative relations (Galetta and Ziller, 2024) is defined by procedural law and relevant problem-solving-oriented conduct of administrative procedures. Due to the rapidly changing environment, substantive law and classical work organisation no longer meet the needs of participative public governance (Kovač, 2018).

As the complexity of administrative procedures grows, so does the importance of appropriate competences for the public officials conducting these procedures. According to various authors (Villa-Rosas and Spaak, 2023; Korotun and Bogdanova, 2020), public officials who conduct procedures and decide on the rights, obligations, and legal benefits of parties are expected to have acquired and properly developed legal competences. These competences extend beyond administrative-legal expertise to others such as legal analysis, written and oral communication, and legal judgment, gained through legal and public administration studies (Finch and Fafinski, 2020; Isaac et al., 2016; Kovač and Stare, 2014). They continue to develop these competences on the job and through use of the ACP. The ACP, as a pedagogical and research project of the FPA UL and the MPA, serves as a knowledge repository, providing stakeholders with generic and frequently usable expert responses to concrete administrative legal dilemmas in line with the proper application of the GAPA and the Decree on Administrative Operations (Official Gazette

of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS], Nos. 9/18, 14/20, 167/20, 172/21, 68/22, 89/22, 135/22, 77/23, and 24/24) as well as other regulations. The ACP facilitates networking among diverse stakeholders, with a key role played by academic staff from the FPA UL, the MPA, and experts from administrative bodies as it enables users (such as parties, citizens, companies, NGOs, and civil servants) to identify practical administrative law issues, contributing to their improved functioning and, consequently, societal benefit (Novak et al., 2025; Kovač, 2024).

Numerous authors (Bedner et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2014; Shultz and Zedeck, 2011) emphasise that lawyers and public officials must build up their legal competences as this enhances their work efficiency. Others (Hamilton and Bilionis, 2022; Carrel, 2021; Carrel, 2019; Mak, 2017), who examined legal competences through competency models, argue that such individuals are therefore more competent in their work. In this context, it can be concluded that legal competences are crucial specifically for the work of public officials. However, a review of existing research on legal competences shows that such studies are nearly non-existent, with only one exception (cf. Kovač and Stare, 2014). Thus, for the empirical part of the study of ACP use and the development of legal competences among public officials, it was necessary to design a conceptual framework of legal competences. This framework served as the basis for a structural model based on the (UTAUT), which was then used in the study to examine how public officials' attitudes toward the ACP and the frequency of its use influence the development of their technical-legal and entrepreneurial-relational competences.

The results of the study, as presented in Figure 1 and obtained from 112 public officials between 2023 and 2025, indicate that performance expectancy has a statistically significant positive effect on the frequency of ACP use ($\beta = 0.349$, $p = .012$). Respondents who perceive the ACP as useful tend to use it more often. In contrast, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions do not appear to significantly impact the frequency of ACP use ($p > .05$). Therefore, H1 is partially accepted. It can thus be assumed that supervisors and colleagues did not significantly influence respondents' frequency of ACP use, nor did they expect its use in the conduct of administrative procedures. However, the respondents confirmed that they perceived ACP as useful in their work, which gave rise to the possible conclusion that they used it voluntarily when conducting administrative procedures. Additionally, facilitating conditions (e.g., availability of equipment, access to resources, or the capacity to use the ACP) did not affect usage frequency; when encountering problems with the ACP, respondents typically contacted the ACP administrator at the FPA UL.

The results also show that the frequency of use significantly predicted technical-legal competences ($\beta = 0.232$, $p = .023$). Regular use of the ACP was associated with greater self-reported development of technical-legal competences. The effect on entrepreneurial-relational competences was positive but marginally non-significant ($\beta = 0.165$, $p = .094$). Consequently, H2 is

accepted. It was hypothesised that the development and enhancement of legal competences through ACP use is indirectly influenced by performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions, as mediated by frequency of use. Specifically, it was assumed that better acceptance of the ACP leads to more frequent use, which in turn supports the development and enhancement of legal competences. The findings suggest that only performance expectancy has a statistically significant positive effect on the frequency of ACP use. Furthermore, frequency of use positively influences the development of technical-legal competences, but not the entrepreneurial-relational legal competences. Although public officials developed entrepreneurial and relational competencies most strongly through the use of the ACP, these advances cannot be explained by ACP acceptance. The development of entrepreneurial and relational competencies appears to be influenced by factors outside the scope of the current model.

Descriptive statistics (Table 3) indicate that the use of ACP contributed most strongly to the development of relational competences, particularly the ability to communicate effectively and respectfully with the parties involved in the administrative procedure. Additionally, public officials reported improvement in entrepreneurial competences, especially in their ability to uphold core ethical principles (such as integrity, impartiality, and confidentiality) and to proactively seek solutions that balance the public interest with the rights of the parties. These competences help improve the public officials' dialogue with the parties involved in administrative procedures, enabling the establishment of relevant facts and the harmonisation of interests among all stakeholders. In this way, both public officials and participants are proactively involved throughout the entire administrative process. Similarly, the development of entrepreneurial and relational competences is emphasised by several authors (Hamilton and Bilionis, 2022; Finch and Fafinski, 2020; Carrel, 2021; Carrel, 2019; Shultz and Zedeck, 2011) who identify these as essential for legal professionals working with clients, as understanding, empathy, and more effective communication aid in resolving legal issues and building trustworthy client relationships. The technical-legal competences (e.g. legal reasoning for resolving procedural problems, understanding of the GAPA and sector-specific procedures, application of general rules to individual cases) were developed to a lesser extent as a result of ACP use; however, the extent was in no way negligible. This suggests that public officials already possess adequate legal knowledge (i.e., familiarity with fundamental principles of the GAPA) and understand general elements and structures of administrative procedural law, which they apply to solving concrete administrative procedural problems in practice. Several authors (Bedner et al., 2020; Isaac et al., 2016; Hamilton, 2014) stress that it is crucial for students to acquire technical-legal competences (e.g., knowledge of doctrinal law, legal analysis, legislation comprehension, knowledge of current norms, statutes, and regulations) during their studies, as these form the foundation for their professional work. It is noteworthy that Gerkman and Cornett (2016) found that some students and employees may not have adequately developed legal competences, which could affect the quality and results of their work (Mak, 2017).

This article thus answers the research question, confirming that ACP use influences the acquisition and development of technical-legal, entrepreneurial, and relational competences among public officials. The results offer relevant insights, demonstrating that the ACP is a crucial resource supporting officials in advancing their legal competences and thereby facilitating more effective resolution of administrative-legal dilemmas.

Theoretical and practical implications, limitations and suggestions for future research: This study has several important theoretical and practical implications. The central theoretical implications are the conceptual framework of legal competences of public officials and the structural model, which advance the theory of public officials' legal competences. From a practical perspective, they open possibilities for various studies on legal competences subject to the factors posited by the UTAUT across different ACP users (e.g., students and the parties involved). The findings indicate that the ACP plays a dual role: it aids in resolving administrative-legal dilemmas and enables more participatory and problem-solving-oriented administrative decision-making.

Although our study offers useful insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, since previous authors (Hamilton and Bilionis, 2022; Carrel, 2021; Bedner et al., 2020; Finch and Fafinski, 2020; Isaac et al., 2016; Hamilton, 2014, etc.) investigated the legal competences of law students and lawyers, the legal competences of public officials in our conceptual framework and structural model were interpreted subjectively. Second, the conceptual framework and structural model were only empirically tested on a specific sample of ACP users – public officials conducting administrative procedures – but not on other ACP users (e.g., the parties involved, students, and other members of the public), preventing us from drawing direct generalisations about the results. Third, the results are interpretatively adapted to existing studies on public officials' legal competences, and since legal competences are socially and individually conditioned they may change over time, limiting the long-term relevance of the conceptual framework and structural model.

A number of improvements are proposed based on this work, including the future broadening of research on the impact of ACP use on the development of legal competences among other ACP users. Employing mixed methods in the broadened study would provide data that would broaden the results and aid their comparative analysis as well as the critical evaluation of ACP's role in legal competence development. Furthermore, it would be advantageous to upgrade the ACP with artificial intelligence tools and a tutorial (educational video) about its use and about the impact on users' legal competence development. Generally, this would help ACP users better understand the foundational principles and rights laid down by administrative procedural law, especially as administrative procedures become increasingly complex. Additionally, it would be appropriate to introduce ACP's usefulness to law and public administration students, who are still developing legal competences during their studies, as well as to newly employed public officials who do not yet meet all professional requirements under Article 31 of the GAPPA (e.g.,

those who have not yet passed the professional examination in the administrative procedure). Organising training on ACP use for public officials wishing to advance their legal knowledge and strengthen their existing legal competences would also be beneficial.

6 Conclusion

In modern public administration, public officials must possess adequately developed legal competences to address complex societal challenges and conduct administrative procedures effectively. Administrative procedures in Slovenian public administration represent a critical legal interface between the parties involved; therefore, it is essential that public officials master their technical and entrepreneurial-relational legal competences as well as continuously develop them in their work. The ACP, a joint pedagogical-research project of the FPA UL and the MPA, plays a significant role in this context, and supports the development of administrative law and equality before the law through interpretative application of GAPA principles. It represents a synergistic form of collaborative governance and serves as a tool for public officials to develop their legal competences, thereby fostering participatory and problem-solving-oriented administrative decision-making and contributing to sustainable societal development.

The central contributions of this article are the development of a conceptual framework of legal competences and a structural model. Using these, a study conducted in spring 2025 with public officials from Slovenian administrative bodies showed that, by using the ACP between 2023 and 2025, public officials developed their entrepreneurial and relational competences to a significant extent, and to some extent their technical-legal competences, too. It was also found that both the positive attitude of public officials toward the ACP and the frequency of its use contribute to the development of all three groups of legal competences. This in turn indicates that public officials recognise the importance of the ACP, perceiving it as a quick-to-learn and easy-to-use tool as well as beneficial in their work or in conducting administrative procedures.

The importance of developing legal competences using the ACP should continue to be highlighted, for example, by expanding research on the influence of ACP use on the development of legal competences among its other users (e.g., students, the parties involved, and other members of the public), demonstrating ACP's utility through organised training of students and public officials, and introducing innovations (e.g., AI tools) to the ACP. By developing legal competences more effectively, public officials resolve administrative procedures more efficiently, which is crucial in practice for all the parties involved and, in a broader sense, for achieving the goals and principles of modern public administration.

Bibliography

- Administrative Consultation (2025). Official webpage. At <<https://upravna-svetovalnica.fu.uni-lj.si/index.php>>, accessed 1 June 2025.
- Arbuckle, J. L. (2021). IBM SPSS Amos (Version 27.0) [Computer program]. Chicago: IBM Corporation.
- Arzenšek, A. et al. (2019). Pripomoček za uporabo modela kompetenc za kadrovice v državni upravi. Ministrstvo za javno upravo, Direktorat za javni sektor, financirano iz sredstev evropskih skladov.
- Bedner, A., van Huis, S. and Susanti, B. (2020). Legal education in Indonesia. *The Indonesian Journal of Socio-Legal Studies*, 1(1), pp. 1–11.
- Buzeti, J. and Stare, J. (2010). Self-Concept of Leaders in Administrative Units. *Central European Public Administration Review*, 8(4), pp. 33–57.
- Carrel, A. (2021). The Delta Model: An Evolution for a Revolution. At <<https://designyourdelta.substack.com/p/the-delta-model-an-evolution-for->>, accessed 1 December 2024.
- Carrel, A. (2019). Legal intelligence through artificial intelligence requires emotional intelligence: a new competency model for the 21st century legal professional. *Georgia State University Law Review*, 35(4), pp. 1–32.
- Croasmun, J. T. and Ostrom, L. (2011). Using Likert-Type Scales in the Social Sciences. *Journal of Adult Education*, 40(1), 19–22.
- Džinić, J. and Manojlović, R. (2018). Analysis of academic papers on quality and performance management in public administration, [Zbornik Pravnog Fakulteta u Zagrebu], 68(2), pp.243–273.
- Finch, E. and Fafinski, S. (2019). *Legal Skills*. Oxford: University Press.
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39-50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3151312>
- Galetta, D. U. and Ziller, J. (2024). *EU Administrative Law*. Edward Elgar.
- Gerkman, A. and Cornnet, L. (2016). Foundations for practice, the whole lawyer and the character quotient. the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS).
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J. and Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Hamilton, N. W. and Billionis, L. D. (2022). *Law Student Professional Development and Formation: Bridging Law School, Student, and Employer Goals*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Hamilton, N. W. (2014). Empirical research on the core competence needed to practice law: WHAT do clients, new lawyers, and legal employers tell us? *Legal Studies Research Paper Series* pp. 14–34.
- Hu, L. and Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), pp.1–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118>
- Isaacs, K. (2016). TuCAHEA, Tuning Central Asia Towards a Central Asian Higher Education Area. Co-funded by the Tempus Programme of the European Union. At <http://www.tucahea.org/doc/Tucahea_GUIDELINESandREF_POINTS.pdf>, accessed 1 December 2024.

- Korotun, A. V. and Bogdanova, Y. N. (2020). Developing Legal Competence of a Contemporary Specialist in Conditions of Digitalization of Education. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 437, pp. 37–42.
- Kovač, P. (2018). Potentials of Administrative Procedures as a Participatory Tool within Governance Models in Central and Eastern Europe. *Danube*, 9(4), 227–244. <https://doi.org/10.2478/danb-2018-0014>
- Kovač, P. (2024). Challenges in Exercising the Right to Appeal – The Case of Slovenian Administrative Consultation. *Central European Public Administration Review*, 22(2), pp. 225–250. <https://doi.org/10.17573/cepar.2024.2.11>
- Kovač, P. and Jerovšek, T. (2024). *Upravni postopek in upravni spor [Administrative Procedure and Administrative Dispute]*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za upravo.
- Kovač, P. and Stare, J. (2014). Challenges of the administrative consultation wiki research project as a learning and competence development method for MPA students. *Teaching PA*, 33(3), pp. 273–291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0144739414557856>
- Kovač, P., Remic, M. and Sever T. (2023). *Upravni postopki med teorijo in prakso. Izbrani aktualni primeri Upravne svetovalnice*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za upravo. <https://ebooks.uni-lj.si/ZalozbaUL/catalog/view/481/818/9205>
- Krogt, van der T. and Reichard, C. (2012). Competences and Learning Outcomes: Tuning Public Administration. Paper presented at the 20th NISPAcee Conference (Public Administration East and West: Twenty Years of Development). Ohrid: NISPAcee.
- Kruyen, P. M. and Van Genugten, M. (2019). Opening up the black box of civil servants' competence. *Public Management Review*, 22(1), 118–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1638442>
- Mak, E. (2017). The T-shaped Lawyer and Beyond: Rethinking Legal Professionalism and Legal Education for Contemporary Societies. At <<https://www.elevenpub.com/law/catalogus/the-t-shaped-lawyer-and-beyond-1#>>, accessed 1 December 2024.
- Mikhridinova, N., Wolff, C. and Van Petegem, W. (2024). Taxonomy of competence models based on an integrative literature review. *Educ Inf Technol* 29, pp. 16997–17033. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12463-y>
- Novak, J., Mar, Š. and Kovač, P. (2025). Administrative Consultation Platform as a Mechanism for the Development of Legal Competences in Public Administration. At <<https://upravna-svetovalnica.fu.uni-lj.si/gradiva.php>>, accessed 1 June 2025.
- OECD. (2025). Government at a Glance 2025: Slovenia country note. OECD Publishing. At <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/government-at-a-glance-2025-country-notes_da3361e1-en/slovenia_5ce66026-en.html>, accessed 19 August 2025.
- Salah, M. et al. (2025). Generative AI and Sustainable Policy Implementation: Expanding UTAUT2 to Examine Sustainable Policy Alignment and Ambiguity Impact on Street-Level Bureaucrats' Discretion. *Sustainable Futures*, 100899, pp. 1–14.
- Schaffar, B. (2021). Competent uses of competence: on the difference between a value-judgment and empirical assessability. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 7(2), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2021.1958993>

- Schneider, K. (2019). What Does Competence Mean? *Psychology*, 10 (14), pp. 1938–1958. <https://www.scirp.org/journal/psych>
- Shultz, M. M. and Zedeck, S. (2011). Predicting Lawyer Effectiveness: Broadening the Basis for Law School Admission Decisions [Journal Article]. *Law and Social Inquiry*, 36(3), pp. 620-661. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-4469.2011.01245.x>
- Sommermann, K., P., Krzywoń A. and Fraenkel-Haeberle, C. (2025). *The Civil Service in Europe. A Research Companion*. London: Routledge.
- Stare, J. and Pečarič, M. (eds.) (2021). *The Science of Public Administration*. Ljubljana: Faculty of Administration of University of Ljubljana.
- The Delta model (2025). *The Delta Model an agile competency model for the modern legal professional*. At <<https://www.lawdeltamodel.com/>>, accessed, 1 December 2024.
- Van Laar, E. et al. (2020). Determinants of 21st-century skills and 21st-century digital skills for workers: A systematic literature review. *Sage Open*, 10(1), 2158244019900176.
- Venkatesh, V. et al. (2003). User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view. *MIS quarterly*, pp. 425–478. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30036540>
- Villa-Rosas, G. and Spaak, T. (2023). *Legal Power and Legal Competence: Meaning, Normativity, Officials and Theories*. Vienna: Springer.
- Vitello, S., Greateorex, J. and Shaw, S. (2021). What is competence? A shared interpretation of competence to support teaching, learning and assessment. [Research Report]. Cambridge University Press and Assessment, pp. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.110829>
- Zeebaree, M., Agoyi, M. and Aqel, M. (2022). Sustainable adoption of e-government from the UTAUT perspective. *Sustainability*, 14(9), 5370, pp. 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095370>

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Competence pillar	Legal Competences	To what extent did you have this competence developed before using the ACP?					To what extent, in your opinion, is this competence developed today due to the use of the ACP?				
		1 – None	2 – Low	3 – Moderate	4 – Much	5 – Completely	1 – None	2 – Low	3 – Moderate	4 – Much	5 – Completely
Technical-legal competences	To understand the GAPA and sector-specific procedures.										
	To be familiar with administrative case law on procedural rules.										
	To think analytically when solving administrative problems.										
	To reason legally when solving procedural problems.										
	To apply general legal rules to specific cases.										
Entrepreneurial competences	To be aware that the processing of personal data is regulated by law.										
	To be aware that digital content is protected by copyright law.										
	To respect fundamental ethical principles (integrity, impartiality, confidentiality) when performing duties or conducting administrative procedures.										
	To perform actions accurately when conducting administrative procedures.										
	To proactively seek solutions while balancing the public interest and the rights of the parties.										
Relational competences	To communicate effectively with participants in the administrative procedure.										
	To communicate respectfully with parties.										
	To communicate respectfully with parties.										
	Identify the legal interests of the parties in individual cases.										
	Ability to learn.										

Appendix 2: Structural (UTAUT) Model

