

THE PARTICULARITIES OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract

This paper deals with the management of human resources in the public sector. In order to achieve the set objective, the main characteristic elements of human resources management in the public sector that differentiate it from the private sector are presented. Thus, the contribution of several researchers who analysed different aspects of human resource management in the public sector is highlighted. Human resource management in the public sector can only be better understood by comparing it with that practiced in the private sector. The objectives of human resources management in the public and private sectors are different, therefore; the interpretation of some of its elements has a distinctive character, which leads to highlighting the distinctive character. Considering that human resource management directly impacts the public organization's performance, we analysed its connection with performance management.

Key words: *human resources management, public sector, public institution performance, performant management, decoupling, trust,*

JEL Classification: *M12; M54.*

1. Introduction

The public sector in the Republic of Moldova has been in a process of restructuring for almost 30 years. Right from the declaration of independence of the Republic of Moldova, in 1991, state institutions have been subject to a continuous restructuring process in order to adapt to the rigors imposed by society and become more efficient. Separated from an over-centralized and dictatorial system, public sector institutions had to adapt "overnight" to the laws of democracy in order to serve the interest of the citizen and not the political one. However, the lack of experience and professionalism, in the new conditions of state development, made some public administration reforms take place much more slowly. A "contribution" to the procrastination of the reforms of the state institutions was also made by some political leaders who held the power in their hands, which made a good part of the state institutions become ineffective, and the citizens' dissatisfaction with the quality of the services provided increased from year to year.

Apart from the increase in the demands towards the new reforms of the public administration and some economic crises that the Republic of Moldova went through during this period, the public sector was under constant pressure to improve performance and regain the trust of citizens performing in public institutions. Human resource is the primary resource that contributes to the high performance of public institutions. Therefore, the lack of adequate motivation of civil servants,

expressed in lower salaries, as well as the instability of jobs, has determined that the public sector has become unattractive compared to the private sector in terms of employment.

In the Republic of Moldova, the political factor played an essential role in the process of managing human resources in the public sector, and policies and practices in the field became unstable. Depending on the party in power, the human resources practices in terms of hiring, evaluation, and salary were modified, which, more or less, influenced the psychological comfort of civil servants. Also, the lack of a strategy for human resources management in the public sector made some human resources practices and procedures more vulnerable to changes within public, central, and local administrations.

Over time, the public sector has developed a distinct approach to HRM and introduced many innovations that have provided significant opportunities for employees. The public sector was perceived as a "model employer", and working conditions were at the forefront of HR reform and innovation. The notion of a model employer embodied best practice principles, setting an example to the private sector regarding employees' fair treatment and good working conditions, including high levels of job security, superior holiday entitlements, and generous pensions (Black & Upchurch 1999). In an international context, HRM in the public sector was characterized by the following:

- the creation of more flexible structures and processes;
- the elimination of centralized agencies;
- the standardization of the rules at the level of the entire service;
- the grant of a higher responsibility to managers and supervisors (Shim 2001).

New HRM models in the public sector aimed to achieve performance in line with the strategic direction of the public sector organization. From this perspective, emphasis was placed on securing and retaining staff who could achieve the desired outcomes of the public sector organization. With significant changes and reforms to the public sector, there has been a dilution of some of the practices and conditions that have traditionally differentiated the public sector from other organizations in the private and not-for-profit sectors.

The changing dimensions of public sector employment indicate that HRM has had a significant impact on the functioning of the public sector. Multiple competencies, restructuring of career paths, removal of seniority as a basis for promotion, greater emphasis on equity considerations, and removal of rigidity in the hiring process were some of the benefits of the shift from personnel management to HRM in the public sector (Brown 1997).

HRM strategy and practice are complexly shaped by the state's role and its economic, legislative, and administrative relations with capital and labour. Thus, the state is an actor that can influence the form and content of HRM policy and practice. Different roles that the state plays in developing HRM strategies can be highlighted. They focus on how the state develops reform strategies concerning HRM practices, new forms of participation, and supporting networks and learning processes related to HRM. In today's conditions, the state should play new roles, supporting more individualized ways of participating in the workplace, preparing the workforce for a new market facing a context in terms of flexibility and adaptability, creating an environment that supports entrepreneurial ideas and innovation, and the creation of best practices and benchmarks in HRM (Martínez Lucio, M. & Stuart, M., 2011).

In many countries, HRM has replaced the traditional model of personnel management in the public organization, changing the culture from "rules-based" to "performance-based" (Shim, 2001). Thus, the newly adopted HRM practices allow for a more flexible approach to staff recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal, and salary administration.

The institutional environment of public organizations is characterized by the prevalence of values that shape and interact with public officials' identities, beliefs, and actions. The values that have acted as a framework for civil servants include legality, neutrality, fairness, loyalty, and service to the public interest.

Public personnel policies in the era of welfare state expansion were primarily oriented toward fairness, employee welfare, and good union relations rather than being driven by a rational management interest in improving organizational performance. The emergence of HRM in the public sector has been seen as a result of the New Public Management (Boyne, Jenkins, and Poole, 1999). Public organizations provide services commissioned and/or funded primarily by the government to citizens and corporate actors. Organizations are defined as public based on the following three formal characteristics: ownership, funding, and authority. Public organizations are owned by the government, mainly financed by public funds, and the political authority is dominant over the economic authority, which means that the authority of public managers is dependent and subject to political decision-making.

Several authors (Boyne et al., 1999; H. G. Bach et al., 2009) argue that the public sector is characterized by constraints on managerial autonomy. This is undoubtedly the result of the power of government directives, detailed regulations on personnel policy, and the legacy of traditional administrative HRM roles. Organizations with low degrees of managerial autonomy are often characterized by centralization of decision-making. Meyer & Hammerschmid (2010) studied the degree of decentralization of HRM decision-making in central government. They showed that, on average, HRM decision-making in the twenty-seven EU member states is highly centralized. However, there is considerable variation among HRM practices. Some HRM practices, such as wages, codes of conduct and ethical standards, downsizing, and basic working time arrangements, are usually decided centrally. Other HRM practices, such as performance-related pay, performance management, training and development, and flexible working time patterns, are decided at lower hierarchical levels. This resonates with Brewster, Brookes, and Gollan's (2015) findings that decision-making responsibilities for industrial relations, wages, and benefits tend to be assigned to central HR departments. Meyer & Hammerschmid (2010) also show considerable variation between countries. HRM decision-making varies from the most centralized in Eastern European countries to the least centralized in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian EU Member States, with Southern European and Continental Member States occupying a position in between.

2. Defining characteristics of HRM in the public sector

Traditionally, HRM in the public sector has been primarily based on a paternalistic approach to management where the well-being and interests of employees have been considered paramount. Thus, efficient work practices and attempts to reduce costs are unlikely to be of interest to public sector managers (Gould-Williams, 2004). Second, public sector organizations are characterized by the tendency to standardize some HRM practices, especially those of recruitment, selection, performance evaluation, and pay. Third, full-time employment and job security are generally considered the norm for many public sector employees (Shim 2001). The third characteristic of HRM in public organizations relates to the collective approach to industrial relations, employee participation, consultation, and recognition of trade unions. This has led to higher union density in public sector organizations.

The need to reconfigure human resource management in the public sector has been driven by advances in highly sophisticated information technology, including human resource information systems, the importance of understanding the implications of demographic trends such as an aging population, the need for increased attention to leadership, greater emphasis on workforce capability and knowledge management systems (Shim 2001).

Likewise, the change in human resources management in public institutions was also generated by the need to achieve a higher organizational performance in the public sector. Several researchers have analysed the relationship between human resource management and organizational performance in the public sector (Giauque et al., 2013; Knies et al., 2018). Aimed at achieving the highest possible organizational performance, human resource management practices have focused either on more rigorous control of employees or increasing commitment to the organization (Wood & Menezes,

1998). Control practices were designed to increase organizational efficiency while reducing labour costs by using strict rules and procedures, as well as performance-based financial rewards. The second practice, organizational commitment, was designed to enhance employee performance while promoting mutual influence, respect, and accountability (Huselid, 1995). Research proves that organizational commitment can contribute more to employee engagement and performance than controlling individual behaviours (Whitener, 2001).

3. The connection “Performance Management – Human Resources Management”

Performance in public institutions has been the subject of research for several researchers. For example, M. Armstrong (2006) defines performance management as "a systematic process of improving organizational performance by increasing the performance of individuals and work teams". In another approach, Walters (1995) argues that performance management is the process of directing and supporting employees so that they work effectively and as efficiently as possible in accordance with the organization's needs. According to Lebas (1995), "performance management: involves professional training, teamwork, dialogue, management style, attitudes, shared vision, employee involvement, skills, incentives, and rewards, etc." The purpose of performance management is to obtain the highest possible results from the organization, teams, and individuals by managing performance based on planned objectives, standards, and competency requirements (Armstrong, 2001). Therefore, performance management considers, first of all, improving performance as a way of ensuring organizational effectiveness. Second, performance management considers the continuous development of employees by expanding and enriching professional skills and capabilities. Third, performance management involves meeting the needs and expectations of all stakeholder groups. And finally, performance management is about communication and engagement by creating a climate where there is an ongoing dialogue between managers and their team members.

In order to increase the efficiency of public institutions, performance management tools specific to the private sector were borrowed and adapted to the public sector (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2004). In addition, other researchers in the field promoted and justified the idea of implementing performance management in public organizations to increase their efficiency (Greve 2006). At the same time, several authors have questioned whether performance management applied in the public sector will contribute to improving its performance (Heinrich, 2002; Brignall & Modell, 2000).

Considering that performance management tools were borrowed from the private sector, some authors made comparisons between public and private sector performance management, highlighting similarities and differences (Hvidman, U. & Andersen, S. C. (2013). At the same time, Dixit (2002) highlights two essential characteristics of the public sector. The first is that bureaucrats serve multiple stakeholders, namely: service users, payers for the service, politicians at different levels of government, and professional organizations. The second characteristic is that public authority and, therefore, the bureaucrats who work for it often have multiple goals to achieve. These two characteristics mean that the incentives offered in the public sector should be less intense than for the public sector.

The performance management system assumes that when performance information is generated, managers will use it to make better decisions. However, public sector managers are limited by the legal framework in terms of driving performance in the public sector. Swiss (2005) argues that public sector managers are less motivated to react to performance results because they do not have the necessary incentives to improve them, which should not lead to more effective performance management.

Researching organizational performance in the public sector, Daley and Vasu identified seven general practices considered strategic resource management practices, namely: (1) internal career advancement, (2) formal training systems, (3) performance appraisal results-oriented, (4) job security, (5) employee involvement and participation, (6) extended jobs, (7) performance-based reward (Daley and Vasu, 2005). To highlight the impact of human resource management on

performance, Gould-Williams analyses the relationships between high commitment, on the one hand, and job satisfaction, employee motivation, and employee's intention to leave the organization (Gould-Williams, 2004). In another approach, Baptiste analysed the effects of HRM practices on organizational effectiveness through the lens of employee well-being. The author measured employee well-being using three variables: employee engagement, job satisfaction, and work-life balance (Baptiste, 2008).

Some authors operate with the notion of performing organizations that refer to that set of practices related to human resource management that have the desired effects of improving competitiveness, flexibility, and innovation (Kaleberg et al., 2006). Subsequently, Giaucue D. et al., (2013) analysed the relationships between human resource management practices, motivation in the public sector, and organizational performance in the public sector that can be measured in terms of individual perception of organizational effectiveness. Many studies show the link between HRM practices and individual employee performance, arguing for their positive effects on employee knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

4. The differences of HRM in the public and private sectors

According to several authors, there are differences between human resource management practices in the public and private sectors. The first characteristic distinguishing public from private organizations is that private sector organizations have a single outcome (profit maximization), while public sector organizations do not (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). Achieving the mission is the ultimate goal of public organizations as it "defines the value the organization intends to produce for its stakeholders and society at large" (Moore, 2000). This value is generally authorized by politicians. Public organizations also strive to provide high-quality services equitably, with public money used to create public value for the benefit of the wider public rather than individual citizens.

The second distinguishing feature is that the set of HR practices is implemented to contribute to achieving performance or mission. Empirical evidence shows that not all HR practices are suitable for application in public sector organizations, given the nature of the services provided, the characteristics of public sector employees, and the fact that public organizations are responsible for how they spend public funds (Kalleberg et al., 2006). According to Kalleberg et al. (2006), many public organizations have adopted bundles of HR practices that improve skills and opportunities but far fewer practices that will enhance motivation.

The third distinction concerns the relationship between HRM and outcomes, which is dual. First, to what extent can public managers influence employee performance, given the constraints on managerial autonomy and the prevalence of bureaucracy? Adherence to excessive bureaucracy has led to compliance cultures, and public sector managers are viewed as the "guardians" of established rules and procedures (Knies & Leisink, 2014). Second, to what extent can public managers influence employee performance related to HRM practices? Wright and Nishii (2013) proposed a general value chain emphasizing the mediating variables that link HRM and performance, particularly employee attitudes and behaviours. This value chain can also be applied in the public sector but needs to be adjusted to fit the distinctive motivational context of public employees (Knies, 2018). Also, Perry & Hondeghem believe that motivation in public service involves "the orientation of an individual to provide services to people with the goal of doing good for others and society" (2008).

In this context, Vandenabeele et al., 2013 developed a model showing the implications of human resource management on public value (Figure 1).

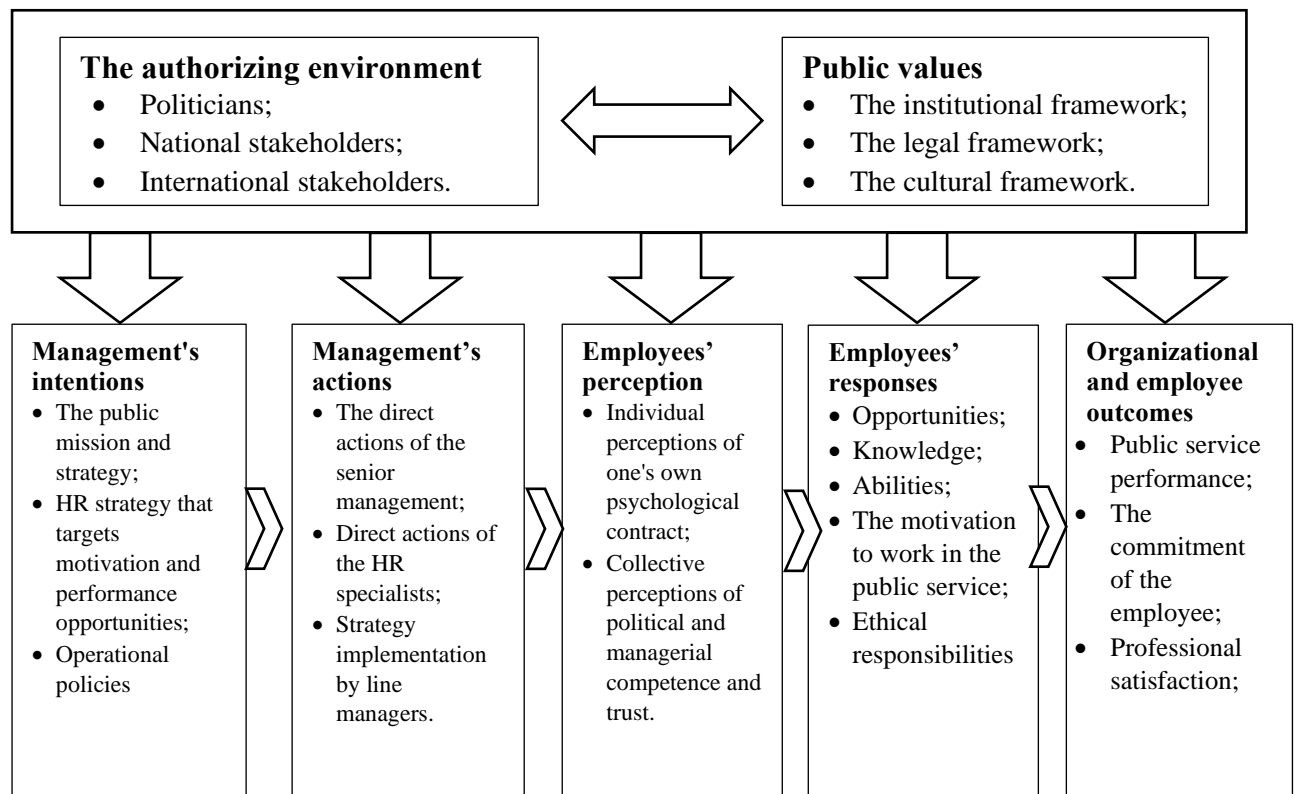


Figure 1. The process of creating public value from the perspective of human resources management

Source: Adapted from: [26].

The authors of the above model show that human resource management also has implications for value creation in the public sector. At the same time, it should be mentioned that a more significant number of variables can directly or indirectly influence the professional behaviour of employees in the public sector, with direct implications on the value created. The political factor has an essential role in the public sector that ensures the institutional and legal framework that can directly influence the value created in the public sector and the perception society makes of the results.

Motivation is an essential element that causes employees to work in public rather than the private sector. Under these conditions, senior management and the political factor must consider this aspect if value creation in the public sector is to be truly desired.

In another approach, Boyne et al. (1999) highlight some particularities regarding HRM in the public sector. First, many public sector organizations have promoted the policy of "a good employer" in combination with the moral obligations emphasized by public organizations. This is to deal with the problem of attracting and retaining employees in public sector organizations, which are in increased competition in the labour market, with private sector organizations offering higher salaries. Second, considering the political control of organizational activity in a highly institutionalized environment, public organizations are subject to the pressure of social legitimacy in terms of equal opportunities for all employees. Equality is on the agenda in public institutions and has reflected complaints resolution procedures related to performance evaluation, internal promotion opportunities, and pay. Third, many public sector organizations have been affected by neoliberalism, privatizations, and government cuts. Fourth, HRM practices such as recruitment and selection, staff training and development, performance appraisal, and pay have been subject to coercive and normative pressures for most employees in public organizations.

HRM fit is a particular problem in the public sector context. In the given case, there are two relevant factors to be considered. The first factor relates to the complexity of the HRM fit concept. Fit is a construct covering at least two notions: strategic and internal. Likewise, fit can be conceptualized at different levels of the HRM system (Arthur & Boyles, 2007). The second factor relates to the greater complexity of the organizational and institutional context in which HRM systems in the public sector are embedded. As organizations become much larger and more diversified, internal structural levels and occupational differentiation increase, making the HRM system more complex, segmented, and diversified (Lepak & Shell, 1999).

5. Conclusions

Human resource management has a special significance in the organization's activity, regardless of whether it is part of the public or private sector. The investigations show that the autonomy of human resources management is limited in the public sector, and the actions taken are restrictive and conditioned by various norms and regulations developed and applied at the central and local levels.

In the context of public administration reform, changes also occurred in human resource management practices. Decoupling is a concept implemented in public institutions that provides a reasonable explanation for the difficulties of implementing human resources management in the context of decentralization.

Performance is a particular concern for public institutions. That is why the management of human resources in the public sector is oriented towards a multitude of aspects that, if approached correctly, can contribute to achieving public institutions' objectives and increasing trust on the part of society. Currently, trust in the public institutions of the Republic of Moldova, especially in those in the legal field, is relatively low. Under these conditions, human resources management has an essential role in developing or reshaping human resources policies that lead to citizens' better appreciation of state institutions.

Even though HRM activities are practically similar in both public and private organizations, their expected result is different. If in private organizations, HRM practices are oriented towards profit maximization, then in public organizations, they aim to achieve institutional goals by increasing the satisfaction of interested persons. Starting from this approach, different interpretations exist of how some HRM practices can lead to the desired result. Thus, HRM practices in public organizations continue to differ in some respects, but not in others, from those applied in private sector organizations. It is still little or no evidence in public organizations of what Boyne et al. (1999) called rational management targeting efficiency, job performance, and service quality through pay for performance.

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