



Public Personnel Policies and HRM:  
Developments Within the Field  
and in the (Long History) of the EGPA  
Study Group on Public Personnel Policy  
Permanent Study Group 3: Public Personnel  
Policies

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Established in 1992, the main objective in the field of Public Personnel Policies and Human Resource Management (HRM) has been the same for many years: Analysing how active leadership and HRM strategies can motivate employees and ultimately achieve relevant performance objectives in public organizations in diverse contexts. As discussed in more detail below, the key changes have been the relative emphasis on performance versus motivation in

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itself and the methods used in scientific investigations. Public personnel policies have many relevant aspects, and this has also been reflected in the systematic way in which the study group in European Group of Public Administration (EGPA) has focused on different aspects of the broader topic.

We will first discuss these broader trends in the study group's contributions, because they reflect both the field's development and the study group's developing contributions to the field. This is followed by a discussion in the use of different methods in both the field and the study group. Here, the key message is that methodological pluralism has increased significantly over time. The third section discusses the impact on policy makers and institutions made by the study group over the past years. This is, of course, difficult to assess, but we will exemplify with typical publications and public talks made by study group members for important decision-makers. Finally, the last section addresses an even more difficult question: What will characterize public personnel policy research and practice in 40 years from now?

### 13.1 SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF EGPA'S STUDY GROUP ON PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN RECENT YEARS

Going back in time to the first period of activity, the focus on 'New Public Managers' between 1992 and 1995, the study group has both responded to and developed the topics which were and have since been discussed among researchers and practitioners in Public Administration. This section discusses how these contributions have consistently been centred on four aspects over the now long—over two decades—of activity of the study group.

#### 13.1.1 *Performance as the Ultimate Goal*

The study group's first and most important contribution has been to emphasize that personnel policies should be seen in relation to the results created in the public organizations. In the early years, this can be seen in

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the topic between 1996 and 1998 (Flexibility of Staffing and Personnel Systems) and in the emphasis on achieving results during the topic 'Competency Management' between 1999 and 2000. Recently, it has become an even more integrated part of the work in the study group. Between 2013 and 2015, we focused on how personnel policies can contribute to improving public services.

This key question relates to issues that are highly relevant and topical in various fields of research. First, it is relevant for the field of personnel policies or HRM research itself. It is now commonly accepted that HRM contributes to organizational outcomes, but the ways in which HRM impacts on organizational performance is often still regarded as a black box. Related core areas of interest concern the importance of HRM systems, the devolution of HR responsibility and the role of line managers in the implementation of HR policies. This has generated research of specific HR policies such as talent management as well as of High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) and people management. Second, the key question of public personnel policies' contribution to improving public services relates to the field of public service performance research. The recognition that public organizations have multiple, sometimes even conflicting goal, does not contradict the notion of performance if this is understood as a multidimensional concept. However, the measurement of performance is still a moot issue, not only in a technical sense but also as regards the fundamental question whether the missions of public organizations are really adequately captured by (quantitative) research. Another example is whether and how performance can be managed. This is also directly relevant to challenges for public management today: The notion of 'improving public services' has thus been the rhetoric that has accompanied two decades of public management reform and is also invoked today by government programmes that want to frame austerity measures as more than just cutbacks (Table 13.1).

The study group has explored the possibility of joint sessions with study group II on performance, and there have also been arranged joint sessions at other conferences (such as the Public Management Research Conference). It has been discussed whether public personnel policies are now more strategically oriented at achieving organizational goals, and whether employee outcomes are now merely treated as a means to an end (=organizational performance). Building on the notion of a 'balanced approach' developed by HRM studies and the related idea of multiple

**Table 13.1** Study group themes over time

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1992–1995	New Public Managers
1996–1998	Flexibility of Staffing and Personnel Systems
1999–2000	Competency Management
2001–2003	Staff Participation and Involvement in Public Management Reform
2004–2006	The Future of Public Employment
2007–2009	Leadership, Professionalization and HR Strategies
2010–2012	Managing Diversity
2013–2015	How Can Personnel Policies Contribute to Improving Public Services?
2016–2018	People Management and Public Service Performance in Different Contexts

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stakeholders which are involved in the concept of public service performance, developed by Boyne and other public management scholars, the study group has been interested in studying which personnel policies contribute to employee satisfaction and well-being, and under what conditions they do so. A related area is the systematic investigation of employees' attributes (e.g. public service motivation (PSM), job satisfaction, commitment) and the role which HR policies such as training and development play in terms of influencing these attributes. Key questions have been: Can HR policies and practices in public organizations be regarded as high-performance systems designed to impact strategic goals? Which HR bundles or mixes of HR practices are best to improve specific aspects of public service performance? What specific HR policies get prioritized with a view to impacting performance: performance management, talent management, management development programmes and/or strategic workforce planning? Does empirical evidence support that such HR policies contribute to improve public services? By investigating such questions, the study group has—and will continue to—contribute to find ways to improve public service performance through public personnel policies.

### *13.1.2 Combining Analyses of Leaders and Employees*

The second crosscutting contribution is the *combined focus on leaders and employees*. An especially strong emphasis was given on this area of the study group's work notably in the first part of the 2000s, with between 2001 and 2003 the chosen topic 'Staff Participation and Involvement in Public Management Reform' and the successive theme focused on 'The Future of Public Employment' (between 2004 and 2006).

The role of the line manager in the implementation of personnel policies has increased throughout the public sector. The actual devolution of HR responsibility to the line managers has been accompanied theoretically by a conceptual framework that differentiates between intended personnel policies, implemented and perceived personnel (or HR) practices (Wright and Nishii 2013). It is recognized that managers may implement intended HR policies in different ways and that the ultimate effect, be it organizational performance or employee well-being, of personnel (HR) policies depends on the perceptions employees have of the intended policies, the policies' aims as communicated by senior management and, most importantly, of their implementation by their own manager. A variety of factors may affect how line managers implement personnel policies, among them their knowledge and abilities, the support that HR staff offer to line managers, red tape and the discretionary room they have. Over the past ten years, researchers have paid increasing attention to leadership in public organizations (an example is the 2014 special issue of *Review of Public Personnel Administration on Leadership in the Public Sector*, edited by Vandenabeele, Andersen & Leisink, based on study group3 research).

Leadership is conceptualized as involving not just the design of mission, vision and strategy at the top level of organizations but also the style of leadership that motivates employees to contribute to achieving public service performance. In the HRM literature the term 'people management' refers to this dual aspect of the implementation of HR practices and leadership by line managers. Recognition of the important role that public managers play at different levels calls for research that focuses on their very implementation of personnel policies and leadership, as well as research of the antecedents and consequences of their people management. This is the present focus of research for many study group members, but we do not lose sight of the employees. Theoretical models converge on the idea that the contribution of HRM is mediated by its impact on the attributes and behaviours of employees. Especially the work by Wright and Nishii on strategic HRM and organizational behaviour where they integrate multiple levels of analysis has been a major inspiration. This is exemplified in the article by Jacobsen et al. in *Public Administration* mentioned in Table 13.2: It investigates how leader-perceived and employee-perceived leadership is associated with organizational performance. This is tested for transformational and transactional leadership, as both types of practices are expected to increase performance. Combining answers from 1621 teachers and

**Table 13.2** Examples of different types of study group publications**Books (examples)**

Farnham, D., & Horton, S. (Eds.). (1996). *Managing People in the Public Services*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Perry, J. L., & Hondeghem, A. (Eds.). *Motivation in Public Management. The Call of Public Service*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Symposia/special issues (examples from different journals)**

*International Public Management Journal* (volume 11, issue 1, 2008)

*International Reviews of Administrative Science* (volume 75, issue 1, 2009)

*Public Administration 2014* (volume 92, issue 4, 2014)

*Review of Public Personnel Administration* (volume 34, issue 2, 2014)

**Journal articles outside special issues (examples from different journals)**

Groeneveld, S. M., & Walle, S. van de. (2010). A Contingency Approach to Representative Bureaucracy: Power, Equal Opportunities and Diversity. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 76(2), 239–258.

Andersen, L. B., & Jakobsen, M. L. (2011). Does Ownership Matter for the Provision of Professionalized Services? Hip operations at publicly and privately owned clinics in Denmark *Public Administration*, 89(3), 956–974.

Giauque, D., Ritz, A., Varone, F., & Anderfuhren-Biget, S. (2012). Resigned but Satisfied: The Negative Impact of Public Service Motivation and Red Tape on Work Satisfaction. *Public Administration*, 90(1), 175–193.

Hansen, M. B., Steen, T., & De Jong, M. (2012). New Public Management, Public Service Bargains and the Challenges of Interdepartmental Coordination: A Comparative Analysis of Top Civil Servants in State Administration. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(1), 29–48.

Kjeldsen, A. M., & Andersen, L. B. (2013). How Pro-social Motivation Affects Job Satisfaction: An International Analysis of Countries with Different Welfare-state Regimes. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 36(2), 153–176.

Kim, S., Vandenabeele, W., Wright, B. E., Andersen, L. B., Cerase, F. P., Christensen, R. K., et al. (2013). Investigating the Structure and Meaning of Public Service Motivation across Populations: Developing an International Instrument and Addressing Issues of Measurement Invariance. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory (JPART)*, 23(1), 79–102.

Knies, E., & Leisink, P. (2014). Linking People Management and Extra-role Behaviour: Results of a Longitudinal Study. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 24(1), 57–76.

Jacobsen, C. B., & Andersen, L. B. (2015). Is Leadership in the Eye of the Beholder? A Study of Intended and Perceived Leadership Practices and Organizational Performance. *Public Administration Review*, 75(6), 829–841.

Van Loon, N. M., Vandenabeele, W., & Leisink, P. (2015). Clarifying the Relationship between Public Service Motivation and In-role and Extra-role Behaviours: The Relative Contributions of Person-job and Person-organization Fit. *American Review of Public Administration*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074015617547> (online before print).

their 79 Danish high school principals, the authors find that leader-intended and employee-perceived transformational and transactional leadership are only weakly correlated and that only employee-perceived leadership practices (both transformational and transactional) are significantly related to objectively measured school performance. The results indicate that it is important to distinguish between intended and perceived leadership and that leaders should be aware of how their practices are perceived by their employees.

### *13.1.3 Analysing Personnel Policies in Different Contexts*

The crosscutting focus on context is the third important contribution from the study group on public personnel policies. Christopher Pollitt, for example, has recently characterized context as ‘the missing link in public policy and management research’, and HRM researchers have also called for balancing contextual relevance and research rigour.

There are significant differences between countries, as the traditions as well as changes in public management and public sector employment illustrate. Sectoral contexts are also important. Ownership is one example, exemplified by the difference between the healthcare sectors in the UK and the Netherlands. Another example is the choice/voice position which the citizen/client has, and this can be exemplified by the differences between local government and police on the one hand, and healthcare and education on the other.

During the economic crisis, which has led to a growing public debt and fiscal crisis, we investigated the consequences of austerity measures for public employment and public services. Longstanding questions remain on the agenda related to demographic and labour market changes. What mix of HR practices makes the public sector an attractive employer? Are public organizations attractive for the younger generation of employees? How can public organizations adapt to the needs of older workers who have to work longer?

In study group III, we plan that future research will look at how societal developments impact on public organizations’ capacity to align their public personnel policies with the meaningful public services they want to provide. For instance, the recent influx of refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe will have a major impact on governments and public organizations that have to deal with an increasing diversity of citizens. Economic, ecological and demographic challenges affect all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and

confront public organizations with the need to change, which raises the very question again about the importance of leadership and management of change at all levels of public organizations.

A set of questions deals with the changes in the wider environment of public organizations that have made the question of public personnel policies' contribution to improving public services topical. A growing concern and public criticism can be noticed as to whether two decades of public management reform have helped to improve public services, or rather whether some reform policies such as liberalization and the introduction of market-mechanisms have actually produced negative effects in some contexts. Such concerns refer for example to the salaries and bonuses of public managers in semi-autonomous organizations (e.g. housing corporations, hospitals and higher education), the outsourcing of services and employees and the changes in the status of civil servants.

Another set of future questions deals with the consequences of the increase of public service provision in organizational networks for personnel policies: Does the status of public employees inhibit network collaboration? How does network governance impact hierarchical responsibility? What sorts of competences are needed by employees operating in organizational networks?

#### *13.1.4 Combining Insights from Different Disciplines*

Finally, the study group has—during all the years discussed here—tried to combine insight from different scientific fields. The topic 'Leadership, Professionalization and HR Strategies' (between 2007 and 2009) for example brought together key contributions from the Sociology of Professions with more classic Public Administration contributions and HRM literature.

Concentrating on the question of HRM's contribution to improving public services between 2013 and 2015, the study group also encouraged researchers to build on and integrate insights from different fields of study, that is, public management research and HRM studies, which would not otherwise have been aware of each other's work. For example, the study group investigated how particular HRM interventions impacted public service performance and discussed actively how the quality of public service can be measured in many different ways. Several problems make research of these presumptions complex, and the study group has contributed with papers that reflect on the methodological issues involved in



conceptualizing and measuring public service performance as well as explorative papers that engage with the measurement of public service performance in relation to HRM. The relationship between HRM and public service improvement has for example been approached through theoretical papers that deal with mechanisms such as public service motivation and commitment linking HRM and performance, and psychological theory (such as Self-Determination Theory) has been very useful in these types of analyses. Another type of contribution has been made in case studies of the professionalization of HRM in different types of public organizations.

Before that, our focus on ‘Managing Diversity’ (between 2010 and 2013) also drew on different disciplines when it showed that management of diversity had become an issue for public policies as well as for organizations. Scientific management approaches based mainly on standardization have been replaced by new management theories inspired by a systemic epistemology and by living systems. These new approaches hold that public (and private) organizations have to foster a diverse workforce in terms of competencies, personality traits and motivations, in order to enhance their capability to evolve and to learn. Public organizations were among the first to emphasize the importance of employing a diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the population and argued this by referring to public values of legitimacy and social justice. This was echoed in the literature on ‘representative bureaucracy’ whose central claim was that bureaucracy should represent the society it serves. Private organizations have also begun to support the importance of a diverse workforce, but for other reasons such as attracting talented employees, servicing diverse segments of clients and improving organizational performance. This type of reasoning now seems to be taken up by public organizations as well. Diversity of workforce and population is not the only origin of calls for attention to managing diversity. The diversity of organizational settings is another one. For instance, some segments of the public sector such as healthcare are confronted more acutely with a tight labour market than other segments and consequently have called for more room to design personnel policies to the needs of the (scarce) employees to be attracted. Professional service organizations prefer other personnel policies in areas such as development and pay than organizations providing mass services or public organizations that face increasing competition from private organizations. Despite the growing consensus about the importance of having a diverse workforce, research evidence is scarce and there are many

questions that call for researcher interest. What is diversity actually, what kinds of diversity [of workforce and of organizations] are important, what does managing a diverse workforce entail, to what extent will public personnel policies that used to be characterized as standardized and collective shift to arrangements that are flexible in order to accommodate diversity of employment needs, and under what conditions does a diverse workforce contribute to performance? The concept of diversity employed above refers firstly to diversity of employees. Some definitions of diversity concentrate on visible differences of employees, that is, differences in personal characteristics such as gender, age and race, while others use a broader definition that also includes invisible differences such as differences in knowledge and competencies, values, interests and motivations, career anchors and lifestyle. One of the study group findings is that defining diversity in terms of visible characteristics should be done carefully.

### 13.2 DEVELOPING SCIENTIFIC METHODS: ALSO IN JOINT PROJECTS

The study group has always appreciated the diversity of research approaches and always invites theoretical and empirical research papers based on all types qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. During the last decades, more and more innovative research methods are beginning to be used as part of the papers discussed in study group III. This is exemplified by one of the most methodologically ambitious papers (the Kim et al. paper mentioned in Table 13.2). It revisits the conceptual and operational definitions of public service motivation to address weaknesses previously noted in the literature. It takes a systematic and comprehensive approach and combines the efforts of many international scholars (including several members of EGPA study group III) to develop and then test a revised measurement instrument for PSM in 12 countries. The resulting four-dimensional 16-item measure of public service motivation provides a better theoretical and empirical foundation for the measurement of public service motivation. This paper shows the potential of cooperating on comparative research, and a new comparative project with Eva Knies as the principal investigator continues this research by investigating what management can do to facilitate that employees improve public service performance. Knies' research will enhance understanding of public service performance by studying the concept, its measurement and

its antecedents in elderly homes and secondary schools in Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These countries represent different welfare-state systems, and several study group members will participate. Also projects carried out within in a single country (such as the field experiment LEAP, Leadership And Performance, see [www.leap-project.dk](http://www.leap-project.dk)) benefits from the cooperation in the study group, given that several study group members participate in the expert group. This is especially useful, because the projects generally become bigger and the methods more sophisticated. For example, experiments (lab, survey and field experiments) have become yet another tool in the study group's methodological tool box.

### 13.3 IMPACT ON POLICY MAKERS AND INSTITUTIONS MADE BY THE STUDY GROUP OVER THE PAST YEARS

Given that the study group focuses on personnel policies and HRM, the research from the study group often draws attention from policy makers, public managers and other important stakeholders in the public sector. Several of the study group members are frequently asked to deliver public speeches or give presentations of their research as part of leadership seminars in municipalities, agencies and other public organizations. All study group members do their best to communicate their findings to a broader audience, and this can for example be seen by the fact that they—in addition to their high-ranking journal articles and book contributions (see Table 13.2)—also publish more applied pieces in their native languages.

Several of the study group members have shared affiliations with applied research institutes (such as the Danish Institute for Local and Regional Government Research). This improves their ability to combine basic and applied research and to ensure that all their research is relevant for policy makers, public managers and employees in the public sector more generally. Most of the direct involvement in policy advice happens rather informally. For example, when the Danish Agency for Modernisation (part of the Ministry of Finance) was working on a new national HRM policy, one of the study group members was consulted and relevant research was referred in the final publication. This type of involvement is typical for many study group members, and several practitioners also attend the study group sessions during the annual EGPA conferences. Although it is difficult to measure the exact impact on policy makers and institutions made

by the study group over the past years, our own estimate is that it has had some impact in terms of offering relevant research as part of important decision-making processes.

### 13.4 WHAT WILL CHARACTERIZE PUBLIC PERSONNEL POLICY RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN 40 YEARS FROM NOW?

It is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future. But if we take the present developments as departure, we can see three trends. First, the strengthened emphasis on goal attainment and performance (and the tendency to see employee outcomes such as motivation and commitments as being relevant especially if they increase performance) seems to continue in future research analysing public personnel policy. This is fully in line with the study group's perspectives and priorities and will only contribute to place the study group as a central network within the research community.

Second, methodological sophistication increases and will probably continue to increase. This year, the *International Public Management Journal* announced that they will no longer publish articles where data measuring perceived independent and dependent variables are measured using the same source (e.g. the same questionnaire to the same employee measuring motivation and performance). Again, the members of the study group are one step ahead, using both experimental methods and drawing on external performance data. Still, we are very aware that we should not go to the other extreme and focus research only on topics where objective data exists.

Third, we expect that the future will see even bigger research projects, also cross-national research collaborations. All the big research-granting institutions encourage this type of projects, and we hope that the strong research network in the study group will facilitate that study group members, separately or (even better) together, will continue to attract funding which will enable the study group to continue to improve our knowledge about how active leadership and HRM strategies can motivate employees and achieve relevant performance objectives in diverse public organizations.

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