

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION, WORK ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECTOR

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### ABSTRACT

*Over the past two decades, budget restrictions on governments affected employment levels and deteriorated many dimensions of the quality of work (Pedaci et al., 2020, p. 187). The public service motivation (PSM) is a subject that has received a lot of attention over time and is a topic that attracts many researchers (Wright, 2001). The relationship between motivation and performance in the public sector is a complex and important one. Many researchers suggest that is a positive correlation between these factors (Amoako-Asiedu & Obuobisa-Darko, 2017, Demerouti et al, 2010, Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep, 2018) but this relationship depends on several factors including job satisfaction, career development and public sector motivation. Different reports on employee's motivation show that staff are less motivated but performance-related pay (PRP) can help improve performance when it is applied properly. (OECD, nd).*

**KEYWORDS:** *public service motivation (PSM), performance-related pay (PRP), employee engagement, performance*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to prove that motivation and work engagement can increase performance in the public sector. The goals and dynamics of public sector organizations are different from those in the private sector, motivated and engaged employees can have a positive impact on performance. The article focuses on public sector motivation (PSM), employee engagement, performance-related pay (PRP). The paper is structured in three main parts: literature review, a comparative study, discussions, and conclusions.

The countries analysed in the comparative study were selected according to the following selection principles:

1. To make the comparative study as relevant as possible, only OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries were selected for analysis.
2. To have a wider view regarding motivation, work engagement, and performance we selected three types of states with different forms of government. We choose Estonia, a unitary state (parliamentary republic), Germany a federal state and Italy a regional state, very decentralized.

The personnel reward system is differently conceived and enforced in countries with a career system (Germany, Italy) versus in countries with a position system (Estonia). We chose these countries because we want to have an overview of motivation and performance from different point of views. Data were selected from different reports from OECD, European Commission and a great number of articles regarding the main concepts of this study.

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this part we will conduct a systematic review of literature on public service motivation (PSM), work motivation, employee engagement and work performance. As there is a vast literature on these subjects, we briefly explain these concepts.

### 2.1 Public Sector Motivation (PSM)

This section begins with the definition of “motivation”, “work motivation”, but the focus will be on public sector motivation (PSM). Motivation is a key factor in any organization because motivated employees perform better and this leads to increased productivity, and a high performance at the workplace. There are numerous definitions of this concept, but we will briefly present the most representative definitions for our research.

**Table 1. Definitions of motivation**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Gallerman, 1963	The result of decisions and actions taken by the whole staff of an organization to contribute (directly or indirectly) to the realization of functionality and superior performance. (Gallerman, 1963)
Mitchell, 1982	Motivation becomes the degree to which an individual wants and chooses to engage in certain specified behaviors and represents the direction, intensity and persistence of work-related behaviors desired by the organization or its representatives. (Mitchell, 1982, p.82)
Weiner, 1992	Motivation is what moves people to act and why people think and do what they do (Weiner, 1992)
Ryan and Deci, 2000	Motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality (...) people can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p 69)
Rainey, 2000	Motivation is the degree to which a person is moved or aroused to expend effort to achieve some purpose (Rainey, p.20)
Vallerand, 2000	Motivation refers to a broad disposition to engage in activities with an intrinsic or extrinsic orientation (Vallerand, 2000)
Louche, 2013	Motivation can be defined as what triggers an activity, what drives it towards certain goals and maintains it until the goals are achieved (Louche, 2013, p 104).

*Source:* elaborated by the authors

Analysing the definitions presented above, motivation is what moves people to act and refers to the internal or external factors that drive individuals to initiate, sustain, or direct their behavior toward achieving specific goals.

Work motivation refers to how much a person tries to work hard and well – to the arousal, direction and persistence of effort in work settings (Rainey, 2000, p.20). Work motivation affects the skills that individuals develop, the jobs and careers that individuals pursue and the manner in which individuals allocate their resources (Kanfer et al., 2017). Work performance has been used as a proxy for work motivation (Wright, 2001, p.560).

There have been studies on public service motivation, source of motivation, performance in public administration. Public service motivation (PSM) changes over time and differences in culture and systems in different countries can influence the dimensions of PSM.

PSM is a theoretical concept designed in 1996 by the US scholar James Perry who identified the four key dimensions that attract and retain individuals into civil service: commitment to the public interest, compassion, self-sacrifice and attraction to policy-making (Eymeri-Douzans, 2020) and is a motivation theory that explains motives related to serving society (Perry et al., 2010).

There are various understandings of public service motivation. As it can be seen in the table below, we extract the most relevant definitions of public service motivation (PSM).

**Table 2. Definitions of public service motivation (PSM)**

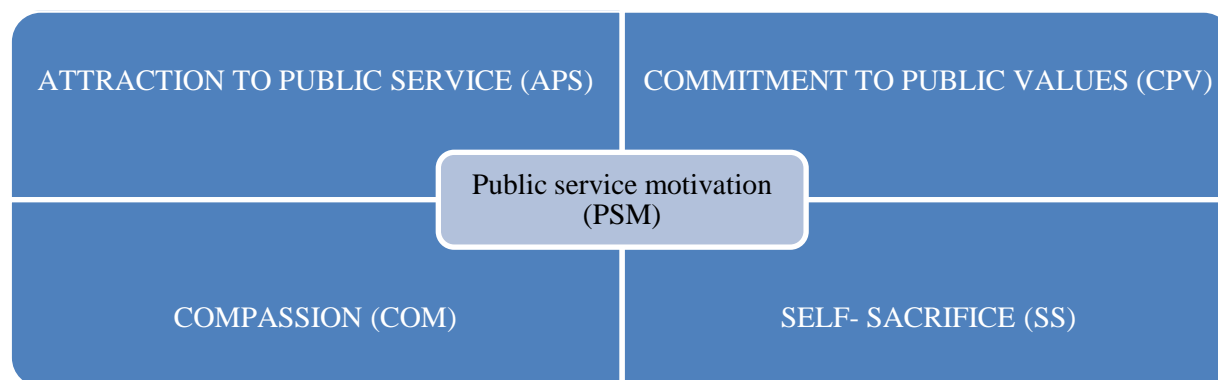
<b>Authors</b>	<b>Public Service Motivation (PSM)</b>
Perry and Wise (1990)	“An individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions (p. 368); Motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public service (p.362)
Brewer and Selden (1998)	Strong motivations to provide meaningful public, community and social services (p. 254)
Rainey and Steinbauer (1999)	A general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation, or humankind (p. 23)
Vandenabeele, (2007)	Concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate (p. 549)
Kjeldsen 2014	Describe individuals’ motivation to contribute to society and help other people through the delivery of public services (p.7 )
Breaugh, Ritz & Alfes, 2018	Duty, passion and obligation of the public sector employees

*Source:* elaborated by the authors

Analysing the definitions presented above the conclusion is that PSM is important because is related to interest in working in the public sector, organizational commitment, job satisfaction.

In public administration, motivation is an element with an increased degree of complexity due to the specificity of the activities of the state institutions. Rainey and Steinbauer (1999, p. 24) perceive this form of motivation as "a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation, or humanity." Public employees should be competent and motivated, and they must show commitment (Manole & Nica, 2018, p. 240). Researchers have shown that people choose a job in the public sector because they are guided by certain intrinsic factors: community service, the desire and interest to work for the public interest. Also, studies show that public sector employees have a greater sense of achievement compared to private sector employees (Perry & Wise, 1990).

Public service motivation is formed by four different dimensions: attraction to public service, commitment to public values, compassion, and self-sacrifice (Breaugh, J., Ritz, A., & Alfes, K, 2018, Kim et al. 2012, Perry 1997; Perry 2000;)



**Figure 1. Dimensions of public service motivation**

*Source:* adapted from Breaugh et al, 2018

*Attraction to public service (APS)* refers to the interest, desire and motivation of the civil servants to work in the public sector because they want to make a positive impact on society and they are

motivated by a sense of purpose and a desire to address social issues and public needs. APS is influenced by a combination of personal values, interests, and external factors such as job availability and societal needs. APS refers to the rational or instrumental need to provide and to improve service. *Commitment to Public Values (CPV)* means that individuals attracted to public service often share a commitment to core public values, such as transparency, fairness, equity, and accountability. It refers to an individual's normative beliefs. CPV is the desire to dedicate to the common good and is often strong for persons with a non-materialistic education. *Compassion (COM)* refers to affective motives for helping others in society, in other words, working for the others and *self-sacrifice (SS)* represents an altruistic value (Breugh et al, 2018, p. 4).

Currently, the concern of researchers is not to develop new theories, but to articulate the existing ones. The concept of PSM has traditionally been linked to beneficial outcomes such as public performance and civil servant job satisfaction. The development of a motivational system in the public sector increases efficiency of the public employees in fulfilling the tasks in a professional manner and the loyalty to the state and society (Perry & Wise, 1990). Public service motivation plays important roles in work engagement, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Lu & Chen, 2022).

## **2.2 Work engagement**

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74),

The motivational model of involvement links employee involvement directly to organizational performance (Qi & Wang, 2018, p. 750). Engaged employees are proactive, feel more challenged, and have a stronger drive (Schaufeli, 2018). Work engagement is stronger related to work performance than job satisfaction (Christian, et al., 2011). The drivers of employee engagement include the perception of leadership, management, working conditions and career progression (OECD, 2016).

Organizations with engaged employees have higher retention rates and performance. The OECD created a questionnaire for comparing aspects of work, engagement and motivation. Work engagement measures the relationship between employees and their job. Organisational engagement measures the relationship between an employee and the organisation where they work (OECD, 2019). This pilot study includes six OECD countries (Australia, Belgium, Israel, Luxemburg, Latvia, the Netherlands) and Brazil. The question with the highest rate of positive answers was that referring to public service motivation: "It is important to me that my work contributes to the common good". The ranks were between 81% in Belgium to 98% in Israel.

As it can be seen from this study public service motivation has a great impact on engagement of the public employees and on performance.

## **2.3 Performance related pay (PRP) for the civil service**

In the public sector, it is difficult to define performance of the public employees because it is hard to quantify it. The introduction of performance-related pay (PRP) represents the influence of the private sector culture of incentives and is part of the new public management repertoire of organizational innovations. PRP systems in private companies are enforced to boost employees motivation (Eymeri-Douzans, 2020). Many people and companies believe that properly designed PRP systems motivate people to reach higher levels of job performance (Eymeri-Douzans, 2020). PRP is increasingly used in public administration of OECD member countries as a way to motivate employees and to make public service perform better (OECD, nd).

Performance is considered multidimensional. Achieving performance refers to obtaining the best results, taking into account certain performance criteria: personal characteristics, competence, decision-making and innovation capacity, communication (Manole & Nica, 2018, p. 214).

In every organization there are factors that may impact on performance. A close attention of each these factors is very useful in ensuring an efficient working environment.



**Figure 2. WORKPLACE FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE**

*Source:* adapted from Chandrasekar, 2011

According to Chandrasekar (2011), creating better and higher performing workplace requires an increased attention at several factors: performance feedback, role congruity, defined process, workplace incentives, supervisor support, mentoring/coaching, opportunity to apply, job aids, goal setting. In our opinion “workplace incentives” can be related to performance-related pay and “opportunity to apply” at career development.

### **3. COMPARATIVE STUDY**

#### **3.1 Motivation, work engagement and performance of the public servants in Estonia**

Estonia is a parliamentary republic with a single-chamber parliament. Estonia’s public sector as a whole employed 118,253 people in 2015, almost evenly distributed between the government sector (47%) and the local government sector (53%). The rights and obligations of the officials are regulated by the Civil Service Law. Employment in the public service is governed by the Public Service Act, which divides public employees into three groups: officials, support staff and non-staff public servants. *The recruitment system* is high decentralised and is a position-based one.

Although the preliminary ambition was to build a career based civil service similar to Germany, the real civil service act was based on the principles of a position system (EC, 2018, 261). The management of human resources is very fragmented and the level of human resource management quality varies among institutions. The performance assessment in HR decisions is similar to that of most OECD countries. Assessment is mandatory and takes the form of an annual meeting with feedback from the immediate superior, but if performance appraisal was not undertaken there are not sanction mechanisms. (EC, 2018). Estonia uses more performance-related pay than the average OECD country and it takes the form of permanent pay increments (OECD, 2016).

Estonian civil service is open and position-based, inside and outside candidates have equal opportunity (it is possible to enter at any level, including the highest). The survey on job satisfaction in 2015 showed that there are no differences between private sector and civil servants job satisfaction. The civil service is a merit system based on the promotion and the recruitment of the employees based on their ability to perform and the politicization is low, (EC, 2018)

The Estonian civil service has career ladders with only 2-4 levels, it is difficult to design individual career opportunities because most employees reach the peak of their career very quickly (EC, 2018, 266). According to the CE there are limited opportunities for career progression and promotion (EC, 2018, p 266).

The values and principles of transparency, accountability and the focus on serving the needs of the citizens can influence the motivation of the public employees.

### **3.2 Motivation, work engagement and performance of the public servants in Germany**

Germany is a federal state with several layers of civil service and a real autonomy of management of personnel at the territorial level. There is no one single HRM authority and the personnel management is fragmented and in the civil service are not a political vision or strategy (Eymeri-Douzans, 2020). According to national statistics, government employment in 2015 was 4.6 million. Public administration is subdivided into federal, federated, and municipal levels. In the public administration are three categories of public employees with different conditions of employment: beamte (tenured), angestellte (public employees work under contract) and arbeiter (public workers). Only 30% of employees are tenured, while 70% are public employees and public workers.

Germany is the country with the largest differences between civil servants and public sector employees. Employees in the public sector are not allowed to strike; dismissal is only permitted due to severe misconduct; and they receive full funding of pensions (EC, 2018).

During the exercise of the function there are significant differences between civil servants and public sector employees, but both categories enjoy the same security. The distinction is based on the nature of their mission: only civil servants (beamte) can be involved in matters of sovereignty, legislation and promotion of the general interest. Another difference is the pension system, which only provides civil servants with a full pension, without having to pay social contributions and contributions to the public pension system during their active career. That is why mobility between the public and private sectors is very limited. Retired civil servants represent a "key burden" for the budget because their pension is paid from the state budget. (This fact led to the increase of the retirement age from 65 years to 67 years). The uniform aspects related to the specifics of the employment relationship in the federal states have been reduced. In comparison to what happened ten years ago, there are very large differences in the rights and obligations of civil servants performing similar tasks in Berlin and Bavaria (EC, 2018, p.368). Civil servants in Bavaria have a ten percent higher salary than those in Berlin. There is a close connection between the level of taxation, and salary level.

### **3.3 Motivation, work engagement and performance of the public servants in Italy**

Italy is a democratic Republic with a bicameral parliamentary system. Italy is considered a regionalized country (European Committee of the Regions, n.d). From 2010 to 2016 the complexity of the regulatory framework, the confused allocation of competencies among the different levels of government drove to a low performance in terms of transparency and accountability (EC, 2016).

Human resources management in Italy is highly centralized and this is one of the reasons why performance management has not worked out very well (EC, 2018, p.511).

According to the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), in 2015, 3.257.014 public employees worked for the Italian public sector.

In Italy during the economic and financial crisis (2008-2013) numerous instruments were used to restructure and reduce employment in the public administration such as supporting voluntary departures, outsourcing, freezing recruitment, non-replacement or partial replacement of retired people, reduction of remuneration for top managers, reducing performance-related pay (PRP), and cutting budgets for training activities. (OECD, 2018).

Employment within the central administration is regulated by a general employment framework. The status of civil servants is regulated by Legislative Decree no. 165/2001. It was reformed in 2009 through the Reform of Public Sector Employees. Employees with fixed-term contracts are consultants or experts. In the case of civil servants, the employees with permanent contracts predominate. The

pension system differs from the public sector to the private sector. Civil servants have the right to strike and to join trade unions.

The central unit in the field of human resources is the Department for Public Administration, within the Cabinet of the Prime Minister. The payroll system is managed by the central human resources unit. Allocation of budgets, bonuses, number, and type of positions are delegated to the ministries. The central human resources unit establishes, and monitors job classification and dismissals related to disciplinary violations. Recruitment is delegated among ministries. The duration of the contracts and the career management are managed at the level of the ministries, with the involvement of the central unit in the field of human resources. The head office also establishes and monitors the performance appraisal system, code of conduct and equal opportunities policy. Working conditions are set centrally and ministries have little competence in this area. There is strategic human resource management that is closely linked to performance objectives. It is up to organizations how they organize their human resources strategically, and strategic planning is developed over a 2 or 3-year time frame.

Public service recruitment is based on competition and entry into a specific institution is made at the organizational level. All positions are available for internal and external recruitment, but steps have been taken to reduce external recruitment for managers and professionals. Italy sets through its diversity policies a certain percentage for staff with disabilities. Italy uses performance appraisal in HR decisions in a way similar to most OECD countries. Performance appraisal is mandatory for all public sector employees and consists of annual feedback written by the senior line manager. Performance appraisal is closely linked to remuneration, and for career advancement it is of medium importance. A few appraisal criteria are used, including activities performed, skills improvement, values, timing and quality of results. Italy uses performance-related pay (PRP) more than the OECD average. The performance-related pay system is applied to all employees and can take the form of performance bonuses reaching 21-40% of the base salary; promotions are also used as a form of performance bonus.

The base salary is negotiated for the entire central government sector through centralized collective bargaining, with bonus adjustments being made at the departmental level. Base salary is indexed to inflation and reviewed every three years, while bonuses are reviewed annually. Educational qualifications and performance are important factors in determining base pay at all hierarchical levels, while job content is important for managers. The number of years worked in similar positions is important in determining the base salary for new employees.

Employees selected through competition receive initial on-the-job training for a period of at least one year. Continuous training is one of the priorities of the Department of Public Administration. There are numerous training centers, the most important being the National School of Public Administration, which is responsible for training senior civil servants and organizes courses for other categories of civil servants. On average, an employee benefits from 7-10 days of training per year. Opportunities for internal mobility are high and inter-departmental promotion competitions offer opportunities for relocation. Most civil servants occupy several positions in the public sector during their career. External mobility is not supported.

#### **4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

As a conclusion of this study, we will present the main aspects related to the human resources system, taking into account concepts that we consider essential for the motivation of public employees: remuneration, performance assessment, performance related pay and promotion.

**Table 3. Aspects related to the management of human resources in the analyzed countries**

	<b>ESTONIA</b>	<b>GERMANY</b>	<b>ITALY</b>
<b>HR SYSTEM</b>	Position based - Estonia uses a relatively position-based recruitment system which is decentralised. Entry into the public service is gained through direct application and interview for a specific post, with entry possible at all levels, including the highest.	Career based - The recruitment system is a career-based system. Entry into the public service is gained through a competitive examination for a specific post, with selection managed at the level of organisations.	Career based - Italy uses a recruitment system which favours career-based recruitment.
<b>REMUNERATION</b>	Base salary is established through decentralised negotiation, and collective bargaining takes place in certain sectors. Bonuses are set through decentralized negotiations only. Remuneration is not indexed to other variables and is revised annually.	Base salary and bonuses for public employees are set in a single, comprehensive agreement for the whole federal government through a collective bargaining framework. The traditional remuneration system is determined by federal laws across the 16 lands.	Base salary is negotiated for the entire central government sector through a centralized collective bargaining framework with adjustments to bonuses at the departmental level.
<b>PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT</b>	Estonia makes use of performance assessment in HR decisions to a similar extent as the average OECD country. Assessment is mandatory for almost all staff and takes the form of an annual meeting with, and feedback from, the immediate superior. A fair range of criteria is used	Germany makes as much use of performance assessment in HR decisions as the average OECD country. Assessment is mandatory for almost all employees and takes the form of a meeting with, and written feedback from, the immediate superior every two years	The use of performance assessment in HR decisions in Italy is consistent with the OECD average. Performance assessment is mandatory for almost all employees under the GEF and takes the form of annual written feedback from a superior. It is of high importance to remuneration and of medium importance to career advancement.



<b>PERFORMANCE RELATED PAY (PRP)</b>	Estonia uses more performance-related pay (PRP) than the average OECD country. PRP is used for most public employees, its application is managed by ministries, and it typically takes the form of permanent pay increments. There is no regulated maximum level that PRP can take.	PRP for civil servants (beamte) allow a bonus not higher than 7% of the annual salary (and this is limited to 15% of the civil servants employed in a ministry or agency) and PRP for public employees (angestellte and arbeiter) was set at 2% in federal and local government. PRP was intended to be based on clear and objective evaluation criteria, performance agreements and reviews and to be negotiated between HR managers and employee's representative unions	PRP is used for most employees in the form of one-off performance bonuses up to 21-40% of base salary, although promotions are also used as a form of performance bonus
<b>PROMOTION</b>	Educational qualifications and performance appraisals are relevant determinants of promotion for all levels of staff. Education levels may prove an informal restriction to promotion between hierarchical grade, in addition to other requirements specific to the post.	Performance appraisals, qualifications and years of experience are factors in promotion decisions for all grades of public servants.	Performance appraisals play a significant factor in promotion decisions for all staff other than technical support.

*Source:* adapted from OECD, 2012

The aspects analyzed above have a significant impact on the motivation system: the human resources system, remuneration, performance assessment, performance related pay and promotions. These dimensions have a direct or indirect impact on performance. Germany and Italy have career-based systems, while Estonia has a position based one. The performance assessment is annually in Estonia and Italy and in Germany at every two years. All three countries use PRP, and the highest percentage of it is found in Italy.

It is much easier to follow the relationship motivation-work engagement and performance in the private sector because the performance in the public sector is more difficult to quantify. Public employees are highly motivated by mission, cultural environment, pay or career opportunities. In terms of pay, a solution is the introduction of a bonus for the collective performance.

Another conclusion is that working patterns affect engagement of the public employees and the motivation can be improved through leadership and organizational policies which should build pride and inspire public servants.

Third, employee satisfaction and motivation, are important drivers of performance. While wages are still important for staff, non-monetary incentives – such as tasks based on greater responsibilities, missions abroad, high level training – are also essential (Curristine et al., 2007).

Human resource management practices also have a high importance. In order to have a significant impact, PRP solutions shall be introduced as a part of a much wider HR strategy in public administration – which would consist in enforcing a set of interrelated managerial tools, known-how and practices, a whole repertoire of generic job descriptions for each and every position, a face-to-face yearly appraisal interviews between superior and employee concluded by a letter of objectives setting new and renewed targets for the next year and also a training plan to help the employee to refresh or to acquire new skills or competencies. Also, a constructive, fair and transparent feedback is very important. In order to be relevant, PRP should be no less than 8 to 10% of the base salary.

The opinions regarding the introduction of PRP are divided. In workshops, conferences, survey and reports, OECD considered PRP a viable solution to increase motivation and performance of civil servants, but in many cases PRP is shown to have rather a low impact on staff motivation (Curristine et al., 2007).

The impact of public service motivation on performance has positive effects because PSM is positively related to individual performance (Perry & Wise, 1990, p.370) so individuals with high levels of PSM are expected to perform better (De Simone et al., 2016). PSM is not the only determinant of individual or organizational success. Other factors such as leadership, performance related pay, career opportunities, promotions pay a crucial role in performance. The impact of PSM on performance may vary depending on different contexts and organizational settings.

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