



CENTRE FOR INTEGRITY  
IN THE DEFENCE SECTOR

# **GLOSSARY OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

in the Public Sector

2021

## INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of the Human Resource Management (HRM) Glossary is to offer basic explanations of the terms related to the management of people in the public sector. The main objective is to create a publication that will be a quick and reliable reference material for managers and other employees in the public sector. We also hope that individuals outside the public sector, like those who come from civil society organisations or media, find this content useful in their own work and interaction with the public institutions.

We opted for a glossary format because we thought that a combination of clear definitions and useful additional points (often arising directly from our first-hand experience with HRM issues) had the best chance of being read and properly understood by the target readership. Public sector managers, and others who may find this publication useful, are typically curious to learn about (or to refresh) certain terms and concepts without necessarily wanting to explore them at greater lengths.

Public sector HRM is an evolving field and many of the entries here are subject to different views and interpretations. In that sense, this publication represents CIDS' take on the selected terms. The Glossary should be considered a living document. The first version of the Glossary is in English.

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Naturally, we also sought the views of CIDS' own experts and project team leaders at different stages of the drafting. In particular, Francisco Cardona provided an invaluable contribution to the content in the form of comments, suggestions and direct interventions, and Ahmet Alibasic read the final version of the material and spotted some 'invisible obvious' things. Finally, the publication wouldn't be the way it is without the efforts of Svein Eriksen who, apart from providing advice and encouragement, had the patience and stamina to go through the draft text and through each set of comments received.

As the Director of CIDS, I would like to express my special appreciation to Damir Ahmetovic who is the main author and put a lot of time and dedication into producing this first-ever HRM Glossary. I would also like to thank all the other contributors.



Per A Christensen  
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**Absenteeism** – an employee's regular absence from work without any valid reason.

If absences become habitual they are bound to affect performance as well as work atmosphere. Those who are absent from the job will not be able to provide their expected contribution at work thus causing managers to reorganise work, usually by tasking someone else to cover for the missing person. There are many potential causes of absenteeism, but job burnout (see **Job Burnout**) and stress are among the most common ones.

*Similar terms: Irregular presence*

**Accountability** – the obligation of organisations and individuals within them to account for their activities, accept responsibility for them and disclose results and outcomes.

The obligation of reporting the reasons and results of actions (transparency) as well as clear reporting and oversight lines are part of the concept of accountability as demanded by public administration reform.

*Similar terms: Responsibility*  
*Antonyms: Irresponsibility*

**Affirmative action** – an effort to increase the proportion of underrepresented groups (ethnic, disabled, women, etc.) in the public workforce.

The concept is usually associated with admission to public services (e.g. schools or universities), recruitment and promotion. There are many ways in which public institutions may pursue affirmative action but a typical example is giving an advantage to a candidate from the underrepresented group in situations when the results of a recruitment competition are the same (i.e. positive discrimination). The pursuit of affirmative action should not undermine the merit principle.

*Similar terms: Reverse discrimination, Positive discrimination*  
*Antonyms: Unequal opportunity, Negative discrimination*

**Appeal** – legal proceeding initiated by an individual in response to an administrative decision which they perceive as a violation of their statutory rights.

An appeal is lodged in writing to a competent authority. Typically, a civil servant may appeal a final promotion decision by bringing their case before the civil service appeal board or an equivalent body. There is usually a two-instance appeal process, i.e. competent institution (i.e. administrative appeal) + competent court (i.e. judicial appeal).

**Appointment** – an administrative decision that enables the candidate selected for a job to begin working. In the public sector a process of merit-based selection must precede the formal appointment.

Appointment acts may take the form of an appointment letter or an employment contract (see **Employment**).

**Apprenticeship** – a concept linked to early employment, designed to expose young practitioners to the new work environment (see **Work environment**) and to teach them how to do typical work-related tasks.

Apprenticeship should not be confused with the concept of probation, as the latter can be part of any new employment at any stage of a person's career (see **Probation**). For the apprenticeship to be meaningful, the HRM department – in coordination with the immediate supervisor – should develop a plan of activities designed to ensure the apprentice's gradual familiarisation with the different aspects of the job. Selection of apprentices in the public service must be done via a transparent, competitive procedure respecting the merit principle. It must not be used as a back door to full employment.

**Arbitrariness** – the use of personal whim or will (often unrestricted) in taking decisions, rather than any kind of system or principle.

Arbitrariness breeds corruption and undermines public interest. Appointment and promotion procedures, as well as performance-related remuneration, often leave room for arbitrary decisions.

*Similar terms: Whimsicality, Wilfulness*  
*Antonyms: Reliability, Principledness*

**Artificial intelligence (AI)** – a concept that refers to machines, run by software programs, performing human-like functions.

AI has the potential to radically reshape how work processes are carried out in public sector institutions. Processing big volumes of data is one of the benefits that AI can bring. AI is also growing increasingly popular with HRM professionals as it can make their work more efficient, for instance by analysing training needs based on the current and future mandate of the institution.

**Asset declaration** – submission of information by public officials/employees about their wealth and economic interests.

The main aim of asset declaration is to increase transparency, enhance citizens' trust in public administrations, and thereby reduce the risk of corruption. If set up properly, made publicly available and monitored independently, the asset declaration system can be a deterrent to financial improprieties and thus corruption.

**Attracting applicants** – a quality that refers to institution's ability to offer something of interest or advantage to potential candidates for positions in the public service.

Public sector institutions compete for talent with organisations from other sectors. Usually, government institutions cannot compete with private sector companies when it comes to salary levels but they can compensate with other advantages like merit-based and impartial

management, job stability, a predictable work environment as well as decent career prospects and development opportunities. If cleverly communicated, these factors may attract talented job seekers eager to serve the public interest or simply their country.

**Awareness raising** – a process that involves spreading or sharing knowledge for the purpose of acquainting a specific target group with a particular topic.

In the process of technical assistance (see **Technical assistance**), awareness raising is the first in the set of steps required to effect a change. For instance, the need for more transparency (see **Transparency**) in the recruitment and selection process begins with raising awareness about the harmful effects of the current practice and the benefits of the future one.

*Similar terms: Knowledge or information sharing*  
*Antonyms: Opaqueness*

**Baseline** – a reference point against which the performance can be assessed.

The definition of the term is somewhat elusive; in many instances it is used as a synonym for benchmark (i.e. a standard indicator against which performance is measured). Baseline documents usually define the minimum requirements that an institution or a country needs to meet in order for its public administration to be considered up to international standards. Naturally, the credibility and professional competence of those who develop baselines must be assured.

*Similar terms: Standard, Benchmark*

**Behavioural risk management** – process of identifying and analysing risks associated with the behaviour of individuals and organisations with the aim of minimising it.

Behavioural risks can be triggered by issues like workload imbalances, damaged interpersonal relations or stress; the causes can be internal (e.g. poor management practices) or external (e.g. political and/or economic turmoil). HRM professionals work with other managers to prevent the risks from reaching the level of a full-scale problem.

**Benefits** – a form of compensation given to an employee in addition to the base salary.

Examples of benefits include medical care, family allowance, pension contribution, vacation residences, recreation facilities and fitness, subsidised canteen service, cheap mortgage loans, cars, mobile phones, laptop computers, credit cards, etc. Benefits must be kept under tight control and their allocation should be subject to pre-defined, transparent criteria.

**Bonuses** – a variable part of the remuneration of employees, paid on an occasional basis.

Payment of bonuses always contains some element of discretion. Bonuses do not include elements of pay based on objective factors (such as longevity pay, education allowance or transportation allowance). Performance-related pay may also be seen as a form of a bonus if it is allocated at the discretion of managers.

In the public service, the allocation of bonuses has a negative impact each time it is not based on transparent and meaningful criteria.

## C

**Capacity building** – a learning process by which individuals, groups and organisations, institutions and countries develop, enhance and organise their systems, resources and knowledge (from the *Governance for sustainable human development, UNDP policy document, 1997*).

**Career management** – process of planning and executing job-related decisions for the

purpose of meeting professional and personal objectives.

Career management begins with person's own ability to objectively perceive their strengths and weaknesses – both occupational and vis-à-vis their personality – and subsequently to identify short- and long-term career goals. Whilst career moves can sometimes be the result of special circumstances, or even pure fortune, dedication to continuous professional development is generally accepted to be one of the key factors in achieving career goals.

**Career path** – refers to the set of work posts that an individual occupies at various stages of their career.

Career path is usually understood as series of vertical moves from one job to another, but it can also mean a horizontal move between functionally different work posts within the same family of jobs (e.g. expert advisor in recruitment who becomes expert advisor in training and development).

**Career-based system** – a model of public service system where recruitment happens at the entry-level positions and where vacant posts higher up the ladder are staffed via promotions.

Proponents of this approach point out that offering a clear career path to potential candidates increases the ability of public institutions to attract and retain talented individuals, creates a better climate for the development of cohesiveness among employees and makes it easier to redeploy employees according to needs. Critics of this approach, however, emphasise that it hinders responsiveness of public institutions by preventing them from recruiting competent individuals to any post within the system in response to specific requirements (i.e. **position-based system**). France, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain are among the countries that have based their civil service systems predominantly on this model.

*Antonyms: Position-based system*

**Central HRM body** – an institution in charge of management or coordination of the national civil service and, sometimes, the whole of public employment.

It can be a Ministry, a General Directorate, an Office or any other administrative unit. In countries where there is a pressing necessity for changing the state structures, a minister in charge of the civil service could be the best policy option to provide the reform efforts with the political support. Central HRM institutions are expected to provide policy direction and to take part in the development of civil service regulations covering all aspects of HRM practices. In many instances, the role of central HRM bodies is reduced to administering personnel affairs, i.e. recruitment and selection as well as training.

**Change management** – a systematic approach to the process of moving from the present to the desired state of affairs in an institution.

Not all change is beneficial. Public sector organisations, especially in transitional countries, have seen a number of ill-conceived changes which were not sustainable. Proper analysis and planning are crucial before deciding on a course of action.

**Civil service** – see **Public service**

**Coaching** – systematic interaction between a coach and an employee to facilitate the employee's learning, or a process of change deemed desirable from the organisational point of view.

The essence of coaching is not so much knowledge transfer but rather unlocking the potential of the person who is being coached to learn and, in that way, effect the desired change.

*Similar terms: Tutoring, Mentoring*

**Code of ethics** – a document adopted by public sector institutions or structures (e.g. public service) designed to inform the manner in which staff members should behave to foster integrity.

A code of ethics should ideally go beyond reaffirming the provisions in the regulatory acts; it should provide added value in guiding employees' behaviour. The impact of the code is linked to the ability of institutions to enforce it. In legalistic administrative cultures, the usefulness of codes of ethics may be questioned, as they tend to become just another piece of regulation or to reiterate what is already stated in the legislation.

*Similar terms: Code of conduct*

**Cognitive ability testing** – a method of testing candidates' ability to reason, judge and solve practical problems.

Cognitive abilities are the key to analytical, insightful employees. Often public sector institutions have entry examination methods that test both cognitive and behavioural abilities. Cognitive testing predicts a person's future performance at work; behavioural testing predicts a person's future behaviour.

**Competencies** – specific qualities related to knowledge, skills and personal attributes that public institutions want their employees to possess.

Competencies can be categorised in a number of different ways but, in the broadest sense, they are divided into technical (e.g. the ability to speak a foreign language) and behavioural (e.g. analytical thinking, team working orientation). Assessment of people's competencies is essential in most HRM functions but is particularly crucial in recruitment and selection. In competency-based selection, the focus is on assessing a candidate's actual ability to perform a particular job, not just the ability to display a theoretical knowledge of the subject.

**Competency-based interviews** – interviews where each question is designed to test one or more specific competences. The answers are matched against pre-determined criteria and marked accordingly. For example, the interviewers may want to test a candidate's ability to deal with stress by asking first how they generally handle stress and then seeking an example of a situation where they worked under pressure, i.e. the STAR technique – situation, task, action, result. Candidates are asked questions relating to their behaviour in specific circumstances, which they then need to back up with concrete examples. The interviewers then dig further into the examples by asking about specific situations (S) that occurred; the task which needed to be tackled (T); the action (A) which was undertaken by the candidate; and the result\* of the action (including the lessons learned from the experience).

**Competency needs analysis** – a process of determining the competencies needed by an institution in order to carry out current and future tasks in an optimal manner.

Assessment of competency needs is approached from the perspective of an institution as a whole, and individual organisational units or work posts. Usually, the process begins as a result of government decisions to undertake certain changes which in turn require individual institutions to acquire new competencies. In that sense, the need to respond to citizens' calls for change, or the need to meet challenges of membership in supranational organisations, affects how work is being done and, therefore, requires an assessment of competency levels. In some instances, a government may find out that a whole administrative structure is in need of certain competencies (e.g. an institution's ability to develop projects in order to access funding).

**Competitive process** – set of steps taken to ensure that a selection decision is the result of a fair and open competition among candidates.

Merit-based selection is at risk if an institution fails to conduct some form of competition

(internal or external). Competition generates choices; it makes it easier for panel members to compare candidates and come up with the right decision.

*Antonyms: Arbitrary selection*

**Complaint** – refers in the context of HRM to an employee's written or verbal statement about something that is illegal, unsatisfactory, or unacceptable.

Public institutions usually require complaints to be submitted in writing. On certain issues, however, complaints may be accepted anonymously.

**Conflict of interest** – a conflict between the public duty and the private interests of public officials, in which public officials have private-capacity interests which could improperly influence the performance of their official duties and responsibilities (OECD, *Managing Conflict of Interest in the Public Sector*, 2003).

Conflict of interest remains a very difficult matter to define and regulate. It is a highly political issue, which tends to be reduced to disclosure mechanisms. However, such mechanisms may easily become a tool for manipulation. They allow governments to showcase good conflict of interest legal practices – for example, because they have obliged everyone to declare their assets – while in reality such practices get bypassed and, as such, have very limited impact. Real or even perceived conflict of interest requires from employees the ability to assess the consequences of their actions.

**Continuous learning** – a process of constant expansion of knowledge and skills. The public sector is perhaps now more than ever before in a process of change and reform. This makes it necessary for public employees to adopt new knowledge and skills. The fervent pace of technological and other change makes the date by which knowledge becomes obsolete shorter and shorter.

**Core management functions** – a concept which advances the view that management work consists of four basic activities: planning, organizing, leading and controlling.

Core management functions hold relevance for the public sector but their application must follow the principles of good governance. For instance, managerial decisions in the public sector can imply allocation of public resources which means that planning, organising, leading and controlling should be transparent and reflective of the government's (often changing) policy priorities while at the same time respecting professional standards.

**Corruption** – abuse of public office for private gain.

Corruption in HRM usually occurs in the process of recruitment and promotion but can be found in other areas as well e.g. allocation of benefits, training and education decisions or deployment to operations or missions (i.e. to enable career advancement or get risk allowance). HR professionals have a role to play in creating an organisational climate that enables public servants to report wrongdoing (without fear of repercussions) and generally in reducing corruption risks.

*Antonyms: Integrity*

**Creative thinking** – cognitive activity that results in creation of something new and purposeful.

Dynamics of change in the public sector generate an ever-growing list of tasks for public servants; some of them are typical and straightforward, but some of them are quite atypical and thus particularly challenging. Creative thinking is key in tackling those atypical tasks. To be able to come up with a solution, in a situation where things are unclear and where data are often incomplete (or missing), requires imagination, out-of-the box thinking and inventiveness. Post-communist legal traditions often favour the logic that 'everything is unlawful unless

explicitly permitted' instead of 'everything is permitted unless explicitly prohibited'. Legal formalism, a well-rooted tradition in most East European countries, is obviously a hindrance in this regard. Likewise, blindly following instructions from above is the opposite of creative thinking.

*Similar terms: Innovative thinking*

*Antonyms: Uninventive or Unimaginative thinking*

**Credit system (training)** – a concept that refers to the quantification of training courses whereby each training course (depending on the complexity and duration) is assigned a certain value through a number of credits.

The concept is capable of generating demand for training – especially if it is linked with the performance appraisal system – but in many instances such demand is not anchored in genuine workplace needs. Instead, it is the result of public servants' pursuit of the prescribed quota which, in the end, leads to 'training for the sake of meeting the quota'.

**Counselling** – process which involves one-on-one communication between two people (i.e. counsellor and counselee) in an attempt to resolve or ease an issue which usually has an emotional component.

The main idea behind counselling is to solve or alleviate a problem to the point where it does not have a major impact on employee's performance at work. The aim is to guide a person, first by helping them understand the problem, then by discussing potential solutions and, finally, by providing encouragement and support in solving it. In other words, counselling is about helping others to help themselves.

*Similar terms: Guiding*

*Antonyms: Misguiding, Deceiving*

## D

**Delegation** – process whereby top officials (i.e. ministers, heads of public institutions, managers) entrust decision-making to lower-level staffers.

Delegation may stimulate employees' personal growth, provide them with additional motivation, and improve communication and trust among staff members. Decisions on when and to what extent to delegate depend on many factors including: the issues involved (whether they are routine or involve a balance between value-laden considerations), the nature of authority delegated (e.g. administrative, financial), to whom the authority is delegated (i.e. ability and readiness of the person to effectively use the additional entrusted authority), and the prevalent organisational culture (e.g. institutions where lower-level supervisors practice risk aversion are likely not to benefit much from delegation).

*Similar terms:* Delegation  
*Antonyms:* Centralisation

**Demand-driven training** – a concept that refers to the practice of identifying training requirements based on the actual needs of the institution/department.

The opposite concept is called *supply-driven training* and revolves around accepting training offers from various training providers (even if they are sometimes detached from the organisational needs). Training courses cost money and time; even when training is sponsored by donors, they still cause absence from work by those who participate which, in turn, disrupts allocation of human resources. It is rarely in the public interest for people to attend training which is not driven by demand.

*Antonyms:* Supply-driven training

**Demotion** – moving an employee to a work post with lower level pay and reduced status.

Demotion usually occurs in cases of prolonged suboptimal performance on the part of an individual.

*Similar terms:* Degradation  
*Antonyms:* Promotion

**Digitalisation** (see **HRMIS**) – a process of converting data into digital (i.e. computer-readable) form for the sake of making work processes simpler, faster and more accessible.

Digitalisation reshapes the way how public sector institutions work and deliver their services, but when it comes to the purpose and principles of the public sector, the effects of the process are quite neutral. As for HRM, the required job competencies in the increasingly digitalised work environment will be significantly different. HR professionals will thus have a double challenge: to adopt new HR competencies while helping others do the same in their respective fields as well. In addition, HR professionals will have a critical role to play in informing the staff about the work implications of digitalisation and the need for everyone to ensure proper use, including ethical use of new technologies.

*Similar terms:* Computerisation

**Discipline** – an individual's ability to exercise self-control and restraint by aligning behaviour with widely accepted norms and regulations.

Discipline also refers to the capacity of managers to impose disciplinary sanctions on employees who have committed a disciplinary fault. Public sector employees have an extra duty to behave responsibly – their salaries are paid from taxpayers' money and their wrongdoings could deprive citizens of their right to timely, quality services. Administering disciplinary matters is the duty of HR units. The key is to ensure an independent, thorough investigation into a matter and, if there is enough evidence, to carry out a disciplinary procedure in a transparent, impartial manner. In many cases, good managerial practices (i.e. proper, timely communication) can prevent

small issues from developing into disciplinary problems. Outcomes of disciplinary procedures must be appealable.

*Similar terms:* Self-control  
*Antonyms:* Unrestraint

**Discrimination** – any action that tends to unduly put an individual or group in an unfair, negative situation.

Discrimination usually entails a systematic, unequal treatment of situations that are equal or an equal treatment of situations that are significantly different. Public sector institutions in a democratic environment are expected not to tolerate discrimination against employees. In practice, individuals' race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, economic conditions, etc. must be regarded as irrelevant when it comes to public decision-making (e.g. recruitments, purchases of goods, services and works), except if there is an explicit, reasonable policy on positive discrimination or affirmative action (see **Affirmative action**). HRM professionals need to make a critical contribution to creating a climate that will eliminate employees' fears or concerns regarding the decision to report discrimination.

*Similar terms:* Unfairness, Intolerance  
*Antonyms:* Tolerance, Equity

**Dismissal** – a unilateral act by which an employer ends an employee's attachment to the organisation.

Public service institutions are required to carry out due process before making a decision to dismiss an employee. Dismissing an employee without proper or legal reasons constitutes a breach of employee rights and is normally overturned in the court of law, tarnishing the image of the public sector in the process. From the management point of view, dismissals are considered to be the 'last resort' when all other avenues have been exhausted.

*Similar terms:* Termination, Firing  
*Antonyms:* Hiring

**Distance learning** – any form of learning that is conducted by an instructor who is not in the same location as participants.

Distance learning is an interactive, two-way communication supported by the variety of tools – from smartphone applications to sophisticated internet-based learning platforms. Public institutions are progressively becoming used to distance learning courses for their people. Provided the issue of quality is adequately addressed, this form of learning can prove to be both lower in price than similar traditional courses and more convenient for the participants (no need to travel). At the same time, constant technological advances make the whole concept as close to the real classroom experience as ever.

*Antonyms:* Classroom learning

## E

**Efficiency and Effectiveness** – outputs an individual or organisation achieves relative to the inputs lodged (efficiency); the extent to which the desired purpose has been accomplished (effectiveness).

Efficiency does not focus on higher parameters like value or purpose. For instance, if a public servant is being assigned the wrong task, the practical value of his/her efficiency is very limited. Therefore, it is often said that efficiency is about doing the things right while effectiveness is about doing the right things. Efficiency and effectiveness in the public institutions should not be confused with the same concepts in the private/corporate sector. Public sector institutions depend on public money which must be spent in a strictly prescribed manner. Hence, a public servant can be considered effective only if they stay within the boundaries of the due process.

**Emotional intelligence** – person's ability to understand and relate to emotions – their own and those of other people – and to use that ability to foster a better working environment.

A manager's ability to read the emotions of subordinates, together with the ability to use the information gathered to guide his/her own actions and behaviour, is probably one of the most sought-after competencies in any manager. For the purpose of leading an institution, having a high degree of emotional intelligence may be more important than having a high intelligence quotient (IQ).

**Employee engagement** – the extent to which employees commit themselves to contributing to achieving proper ethical and professional standards (see **Professionalism**).

A universal definition of employee engagement is elusive, but it is generally agreed that it is a desirable condition and of benefit to the organisation. Employee engagement concerns both physical and psychological (cognitive, emotional) aspects of an individual. Physical commitment refers to the energy an employee invests in doing the job, while psychological commitment refers to the extent of internalization of the mission and norms of the public administration and public administration bodies. Employee engagement should not be confused with employee satisfaction, because a person can be satisfied by being in a position to collect a salary every month in exchange for as little effort as possible.

*Similar terms:* Employee Commitment

*Antonyms:* Employee non-devotion or indifference

**Employee retention** – ability of an institution to keep hold of its well-performing employees.

A desire to leave is generated any time there is a mismatch between an individual's interests and the institutional objectives. Today's information-age employees are tricky to retain. As knowledge workers, their interest is to have a certain degree of work diversity, flexibility and, above all, recognition. Monetary rewards are important but if the employees' loyalty hinges on the size of the paycheque alone, the

quality of work engagement is likely to suffer. In the case of many transitional countries, the ability of public institutions to retain people is often the result of time-specific circumstances (i.e. weak competition from the labour market as a result of dire economic conditions).

*Antonyms:* Employee turnover

**Employment** – refers to the formal relationship between two parties (i.e. employer and employee) which regulates paid work.

For the employment in the public sector to be legally valid, it has to be based on a written agreement in the form of an appointment decision based on prior acceptance by a candidate of an employment offer, contract or other similar arrangement. The type of formal agreement depends on the legal traditions in a particular country and may also vary based on the character of job and whether it is a fixed-term or permanent employment. Public sector institutions may employ people on indefinite-term (permanent), fixed-term and temporary bases. Indefinite-term employment is usually reserved for those who carry out the functions of the state (i.e. public or civil servants) to serve as a protection of their professional independence. Fixed-term employment implies temporary replacement of a missing incumbent in an otherwise permanent work post. Temporary employment is the result of some specific needs of the institution (e.g. outside experts or professionals) which cannot be met via incumbents in existing posts.

**Equal pay for equal work** – a principle which implies that two individuals doing the same work should be paid equally.

The principle advances the view that remuneration should be depersonalised; institutions pay for the kind of work performed regardless of who performs it. The main challenge in applying this principle is how to determine what constitutes equal work, and it is down to the relevant government institutions to determine that. Usually, the methodology revolves around different

variations of a job evaluation exercise (see **Job Evaluation**). 'Equal pay for equal work' is legally enshrined in EU treaties in almost all European countries, and in some it is even protected by the constitution (e.g. Germany, France, Poland).

**Exit interview** – a structured interview with an employee just before they leave the institution.

The purpose of exit interview is to collect data from an outgoing employee about reasons for separation (in case of voluntary separation) and things that they liked and disliked about the work in the institution. The concept itself rests on the premise that a person who is at the exit door will be more inclined to give an honest response to the questions asked. This of course depends a lot on the contextual factors – from the prevalent culture in the public sector to the specific arrangements for the interview. Responses from outgoing employees have the potential to shed new light on certain organisational issues that could otherwise remain hidden to the management. Development of the exit interview template, as well as its practical implementation, rests with the organisational unit in charge of HRM.

## F

**Favouritism** – unfairly favouring an individual for reasons other than their qualifications and work performance.

Favouritism can be present in the process of recruitment, promotion and even selection for training. It is a practice which counteracts the principle of merit and creates a culture of loyalty towards an individual rather than institution (i.e. loyalty as a form of payback). Partisanship and personal connections are among the most common causes of favouritism. Similar concepts include patronage (i.e. support from powerful person/network), cronyism (i.e. favouring an internal circle of friends) and nepotism (i.e. favouring family

members). All three terms revolve around the old saying: 'It's not what you know, it's who you know'.

*Similar terms:* Unfairness  
*Antonyms:* Fairness, Merit

**Functional analysis** – an approach to analysing an organisational function for the purpose of acquiring information and knowledge about the way it is organized and operates and the manner in which it relates to both the internal and external environment.

Functional analysis can be carried out at the level of an institution (e.g. HRM function in a particular ministry) or the whole administrative structure (e.g. public procurement function at the central government level). In the case of HRM, functional analysis focuses on the very existence of certain sub-systems, their level of development, the nature of their mutual correlations and how it all influences the work of an institution. HRM sub-systems typically include HR administration, design of work posts, HR planning, recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, remuneration, professional development, ethics and discipline.

*Similar terms:* System analysis/review

## G

**Gender balance** – a fair, equal treatment of women and men with respect to their employment and career-related matters (e.g. promotion, professional development).

In environments where social norms favour one particular gender over the other, institutions should consider adopting affirmative action policies (see **Affirmative Action**).

*Antonyms:* Gender imbalance or discrimination

**Good governance** – management of institutional and/or national affairs in an effective, accountable manner and in line

with public interests, while ensuring public participation and effective, independent mechanisms for the redress of (wrong) public decisions.

The OECD holds that the term implies: legitimacy of government; accountability of political and official elements of government; competence of governments to make policy and deliver services; and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

**Grievance** – in the context of HRM, an act or decision by an authority that causes real or perceived harm, wrong or hardship, raising a sense of unfairness in an employee (the aggrieved person). A grievance may justify a complaint or a public denunciation of the deeds.

Governments in OECD countries are putting forward policies to encourage the use of informal resolution methods and mediation as often and as early as possible to address disputes and grievances. Formal investigation should be initiated only if efforts to utilise local resolution methods or mediation have been exhausted or are considered to be unsuitable due to the nature or seriousness of the grievance (see Irish Civil Service website Dignity at Work, <https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/dignity-at-work/#> ).

*Similar terms: Complaint*

## H

**Harassment** – any kind of inappropriate behaviour displayed by someone at work (e.g. supervisor, colleague or a user).

There are lighter and more serious forms of harassment but whatever the form – be it a distasteful joke told by an office mate or an open attempt by one person to instil fear in another one (i.e. bullying) – it should be swiftly dealt with because it impacts an employee's ability to put in an optimal performance. Public service institutions are expected to

show zero tolerance for such behaviour by putting in place a set of regulations or mechanisms designed to discourage and sanction harassment.

**HR administration** – set of technical, HR-related tasks aimed at providing employees with timely and adequate information and support.

Administrative HR involves organisation of personnel files (including confidential personal data), maintenance of leave records, preparation of various personnel documents (e.g. certificates, official confirmation letters, contracts), generation of reports, administration of a database (see **HRMIS**) and addressing administrative aspects of core HR procedures (recruitment and selection, performance appraisal).

*Similar terms: Operational HR*  
*Antonyms: Strategic HRM*

**HR planning** – the process of matching the number and profile of staff with the future needs of the organisation/institution.

Modern HR planning is about anticipating and bridging capacity and competency gaps. Institutions are required to assess their capacity and competency needs based on the tasks and responsibilities they handle (or will be handling). New competencies may come as a result of new recruitments but in many instances they can be acquired through targeted training for the existing staff. Effective internal structure, coupled with solid performance management and professional development practices, often prove sufficient for an institution to meet its upcoming competency needs without resorting to new recruitments.

**Human Resource Management (HRM)** – practice of managing people and people's relations in an institution.

HRM specifically deals with personnel planning, recruitment, selection, promotion, motivation, compensation, utilisation,

professional development, ethics, discipline and termination. It deals with individuals and groups and the relations that exist between them. Modern HRM focuses on soft techniques such as strengthening team spirit, increasing employee satisfaction, forging solidarity between employees and, whenever possible, preventing conflict or defusing it before it escalates. It is increasingly evident that soft aspects of human resource management play a significant role in the overall performance of public institutions. In the public sectors settings, HRM is closely linked to the principles of meritocracy, non-discrimination and equal opportunity. In addition, the work of public servants requires an environment which affirms protection of professional autonomy, political neutrality and personal integrity. There is ample evidence of a strong correlation between meritocratic HRM and a large number of indicators of human welfare.

*Similar terms: Personnel management*

**HRM information system (HRMIS)** – a computer-based system used for storing and retrieving data on employees and jobs.

HRMIS (see also **Digitalisation**) represents a combination of HRM and Information Technology; in other words, it is information technology in the service of HRM. Modern public sector institutions depend on tailor-made software solutions for easy storage, maintenance and retrieval of data about various aspects of human resource management. Apart from enabling convenient, secure data management, contemporary HRMIS solutions come up as internet-based platforms (accessible from any device with internet access) with options for report generation (e.g. extracting the number of employees who will retire in the next five years and sorting it by profession and gender). In the context of public service, HRMIS is usually set up at the level of a central HRM institution.

**HRM network** – a group of HRM professionals (and individuals interested in HRM) whose common goal is to support each

other's professional development and the development of HRM practice in general.

HRM networks can be formal (e.g. a registered association) or informal (e.g. a community of practice). Such networks are usually developed as a combination of virtual and physical space interaction among the members. If well organised, such networks can play a role in supporting the professional and career development of their members by generating useful thematic discussions and providing timely information about available job opportunities. In addition, by establishing a channel of communication or a partnership with central HRM bodies and relevant civil society organisations, HRM networks can instigate the desired changes in the field.

**HRM tools** – a range of solutions, in the form of procedures, templates, methodologies that help an institution in managing human resources.

Typical HRM tools include HR planning forms, recruitment and promotion protocols, job analysis methodology, exit interview form, performance appraisal procedure or training needs analysis method.

**HRM unit** – a specific division within an organisational structure covering HRM-related tasks and duties.

Depending on the size of the HRM unit, it may consist of other sub-units in charge of particular HRM functions (e.g. unit for recruitment and selection). The position of the HRM unit in an internal structure of the institution is a good indicator of the overall status that HRM as a function enjoys. Some institutions are simply too small to be able to afford a separate unit on HRM; in such situations HRM tasks can be covered through a dedicated work post located within a unit that handles other generic functions of the institution in addition to HRM.

*Similar terms: Personnel unit*

**In-house training** – a learning activity put together and delivered by the institution for its staff.

Training is considered to be ‘in-house’ even if it is organised outside the institution as long as internal resources are used in its organisation and delivery. Generic training courses organised and delivered by the central civil service bodies, at the level of a national civil service structure, fall into this category as well. Advantages of an in-house training programme include better course customisation, more value for money (internal instructors charge no fees) and easier scheduling. In addition, in-house training provides an opportunity for better internal communication and forges a stronger team spirit.

*Antonyms: External training*

**Individual performance** – refers to results that an employee achieves at their workplace compared to the performance goals or expectations.

Solid individual performance may not automatically translate into organisational performance, but a lack of individual achievements or bad individual behaviour inevitably leads to poor results at the organisational level.

**Integrity** – a quality of acting in an honest, ethical manner. Institutions should endeavour to create environments and tools that support individuals who want to carry out their work with a high degree of integrity.

*Similar terms: Honesty, Impartiality*  
*Antonyms: Dishonesty, Corruption*

**Integrity plan** – an organisational tool designed to identify and facilitate an institution’s comprehensive response to internal corruption risks and other threats to public interests.

A well-designed integrity plan shows the interrelations among different functional areas as well as the impact a robust HRM can have on improving performance across the whole organisation. Like other organisational tools, the integrity plan’s quality and effectiveness depend on the willingness and resolve of the decision-makers to make it a success. If the integrity plan is developed and adopted as yet another bureaucratic exercise for showcasing purposes, or just as part of a simulated effort to build integrity, then the whole effort is futile and of little value. It may even be counterproductive because phoney shows boost institutional cynicism. The instrument as a HRM tool will fall into disrepute in the organisation.

**Interview** – a conversation between an applicant and a group of persons (i.e. selection panel or committee) to assess the applicant’s suitability for the job.

Interviews give best results if conducted in addition to written tests, especially those which probe applicants’ ability to fulfil the requirements of the work post in question. If conducted smartly, an interview can provide insight into the way candidates think and perceive a future work environment and challenges. Also, face-to-face conversation adds a human dimension to the selection process; panel members can gain insight into candidates’ verbal and non-verbal communication as well as their way and speed of thinking. In public institutions, interviews are expected to be structured and standardised to avoid arbitrariness in the decision making. Candidates are expected to be asked the same questions, given the same amount of time for answers, and assessed using the same pre-defined, transparent criteria. In cases where the public service suffers from poor public image and a lack of trust, interview proceedings can be recorded to boost transparency, forge professionalism and serve as evidence should the candidates challenge the decision legally.

**Interview rating sheet** – a tool designed to ensure that interview panel members evaluate

each candidate in a consistent manner using a set of standard criteria.

Ensuring consistency in the evaluation process is not only necessary in order to make the interview more manageable and to maximise its benefits, it is also an imperative from the ethical point of view, as public institutions have the obligation to ensure equal treatment of all candidates in the testing process.

**Interview recording** – a process of audio-video (AV) recording of the interview proceedings for the purpose of ensuring a high level of transparency.

This is especially relevant in countries where the level of trust in public institutions is low. If applied ethically, interview recordings have the potential to increase equal treatment of candidates and improve consistency in the scoring of their answers.

## J

**Job advertisement** – an announcement of a vacant work post.

The purpose of a job advertisement is twofold: a) to attract as many good applicants as possible in order to create a better range of choices for the selection panel, and b) to ensure the right of equal access of every citizen to public service positions is served. To do that, job advertisements need to be informative with respect to both the work post and the recruiting institution, and they need to be placed in the media that has the best chance of reaching the target audience. Therefore, the advertisement should be published as widely as possible using the most popular media outlets, internet platforms (especially social networks) as well as more traditional channels such as official gazettes.

**Job analysis** – a process of collecting data about work posts followed by systematic analysis of the findings.

In the case of public sector jobs, the data

collection method usually involves a structured interview with job holders using the standard questionnaire. The results of job analysis can inform a number of job-related decisions such as improvement of job descriptions, job enlargement/reduction, change in job title, job re-design, etc. Moreover, job analysis interviews may provide analysts with insight into systemic issues such as an inadequate regulatory framework, a problematic organisational culture, suboptimal management practices or unbalanced job evaluations, to name a few.

**Job burnout** – an employee’s negative reaction to demanding or stressful conditions at work displayed through a loss of motivation and the creation of distance towards job.

Burnout is said to be caused by constant exposure to emotionally charged interpersonal contacts. It is a condition that can be prevented by acknowledging its early signs (job rotation is often cited as one of the remedies) and, if it occurs, can be treated by offering various employee support programmes.

*Similar terms: Weariness, Disinterest*  
*Antonyms: Job enthusiasm*

**Job classification** – a process of positioning jobs into classes or categories based on the nature of job duties and responsibilities with the purpose of establishing fair remuneration schemes.

The classification is based on critical job duties and responsibilities found in the job descriptions of typical or representative jobs. If duties and responsibilities are not described well enough, making an appropriate classification may prove difficult; on the other hand, drafting a too-specific description makes it hard to cover all jobs.

**Job description** – a written document specifying the purpose, duties, responsibilities, requirements and other relevant information about a particular work post.

Normally, a job description should be made without regard to the person actually holding the position; incumbents are supposed to fit job descriptions, not the other way around. Good job descriptions don't attempt to list every possible task or duty, only those which are regularly part of the work processes.

**Job design** – a process of defining the content (tasks and responsibilities) of a new job.

The main aim of a job design is to improve job satisfaction while meeting functional requirements. According to Hackman and Oldham (Job Redesign, 1980), a job can be considered motivating if it features skill variety, task identity, task significance, professional autonomy and feedback. Once the job is designed, periodic review of its content is necessary – an exercise known as a job redesign which often takes place via job analysis (see **Job analysis**). Prior to beginning a job design process, it is critical for the public authorities to establish in a credible way that the new job is indeed necessary.

*Similar terms: Design of work posts, Job analysis*

**Job enlargement** – expanding the scope of job by introducing additional tasks and responsibilities.

Job enlargement is usually applied in cases in which a job is found to contain duties and responsibilities which do not justify its pay grade. In such cases, a job can be reclassified (downgraded) or enlarged. In some cases, a job may be in need of enrichment – adding to the depth of job by introducing more autonomy or more opportunities for professional growth.

*Antonyms: Job simplification*

**Job evaluation** – a systematic way of determining the rank/position of a job in relation to other jobs in an organisation.

The job evaluation results in assigning the job a special category/rank, which is linked to the

pay grade. If an organisation wants to create a new classification and pay structure, it can use job evaluation criteria to analyse jobs (or a representative number of them) in order to establish a sound, equitable salary structure. In order for the job evaluation to be credible, the job descriptions in place must be both well-written and up-to-date.

*Similar terms: Job classification, Job grading*

**Job rotation** – a management technique of moving employees between different jobs or work posts.

Generally, the aim of rotation is to expose people to different tasks and responsibilities within an institution in order to increase the level of their work engagement. In the public sector, rotations are sometimes employed as a tool for combating corruption; individuals working on corruption-sensitive posts are periodically shifted to other jobs in order to prevent the development and expansion of corrupt schemes as a result of a prolonged stay in a single job. Job rotation cannot be used to move an employee upward or downward in the hierarchy, as such moves must follow promotion or demotion procedures.

**Job satisfaction** – a person's feelings towards the job.

Some of the commonly emphasised factors that lead to positive job satisfaction include the remuneration package, professional development and career opportunities, a good rapport with colleagues and the public image of the employer. Satisfied employees tend to perform better and they are usually happy to go the extra mile in order to complete a task.

## K

**Knowledge management** – a process of systematic acquisition, dissemination and application of knowledge.

Advocates of knowledge management believe

that it helps employees and organisations to work smarter, to eliminate silos and redundancies and to preserve institutional memory. Some knowledge is resistant to codification (i.e. tacit knowledge) as it only exists in people's heads in the form of a person's cumulative experience; such knowledge is as important to the institution as captured knowledge. For knowledge management to prosper, an organisational culture that supports knowledge codification and sharing must be in place.

## L

**Leader** – a person who possesses a vision of the future and is capable of motivating others to follow that vision.

Formal authority does not necessarily make a leader. Often, leaders emerge from within an organisation. They get attention and are seen as leaders because of personal characteristics and the way they interact with others, among other factors.

## M

**Management** – the practice of directing and controlling activities to achieve a specific objective.

Public sector institutions are increasingly judged not by what they do but what they contribute to society. Good management is not sufficient but is certainly necessary for the provision of that contribution. The term management is also used for the specific structure of people that govern an institution at various levels.

**Management style** – a manager's approach to communication and decision-making at work.

Management style directly impacts both the employees and the institution. Public

sector institutions used to nurture more traditional styles of management (i.e. formal communication, issuing instructions) but the trends are shifting and, nowadays, a less formalistic approach to communication and/or frequent use of the delegation of authority is quite common.

**Manager** – a person who administers and coordinates the utilisation of resources to achieve the objectives of the organisation they manage.

Being a manager in the public sector requires, among other things, following the principles of the rule of law, professionalism and meritocracy.

**Mentoring** – an arrangement at work which makes an employee do their job under the observation and guidance of a more experienced colleague.

The mentor's goal is to support the employee in raising his/her level of work performance. It usually consists of three stages: establishing the relationship, seeking new understandings and implementing and monitoring the plan of action. Institutions should be aware of the need for such arrangements to be temporary in nature, as prolonged mentorships may lead to dependency.

*Similar terms: Coaching*

**Merit-based management** – employing, promoting and more broadly leading people based on the desire to cultivate and promote competence through non-partisan, transparent processes.

For selection to be merit-based, institutions need to organise a fair competition among candidates and ensure that the best qualified one is offered a job. The notion of public service professionalism is intimately connected to a merit-based civil service system – a system based on competence and integrity aimed at achieving public interest objectives. The merit system is the opposite of a system where

positions are allocated through cronyism, political or personal allegiances, or patronage networks rather than professional merit and capabilities. Today, it is widely accepted that professional state institutions are crucial for economic growth and performance in other policy areas. The links between the degree of professionalism of a country's civil service and good governance are increasingly regarded as indicators of a country's development, while merit-based human resource management (HRM) in public administrations is increasingly accepted as the international standard. However, while many countries acknowledge the principle of merit, it is far from being universally practised.

*Antonyms: Arbitrary management*

**Meritocracy** – a system of government (or society) where the success of an individual depends on their knowledge, abilities and efforts, and not social status, personal connections or association with certain groups.

Meritocratic government safeguards the principle of equal access to employment for all citizens that fulfil the necessary conditions; it practises non-discriminatory, open, transparent competition in which the best qualified candidate gets appointed or promoted (see **Merit-based management**).

*Antonyms: Aristocracy, Partitocracy*

**Motivation** – a desire stimulated by internal or external factors that drive human actions.

Employees are prone to oscillations in their work motivation; most people can have periods of high motivation but only the minority are capable of sustaining it over a long period of time. Identifying and retaining such individuals is very important.

*Similar terms: Enthusiasm, Drive*  
*Antonyms: Apathy*

## N

**Nepotism** – granting family members favourable treatment, especially by helping them secure employment.

Nepotism in the context of democratic governance is highly disruptive, as it damages the principles of equal employment opportunity and merit-based selection (see **Favouritism**).

*Antonyms: Merit-based decision*

## O

**Open competition** – a recruitment and selection procedure that grants all eligible candidates an equal opportunity to compete for a job.

In order for the employment procedure to be merit-based it is important, but not sufficient, to make it accessible to all those who meet formal criteria. In practice, there are cases where open competition is actually used only as a façade to cover various forms of manipulation, especially politicisation of public recruitments. For the procedure to be open and meritocratic, its results must be challengeable before external overseers such as mediators or courts.

**Organisational culture** – the way people commonly perceive things and behave in an organisation.

Attempts to reform the way things are done in a particular environment often produce changes that, though enforced by regulations, are not truly internalised by those in charge to implement it. This is because the process of changing people's attitudes, values, beliefs and expectations is a long and demanding one. In other words, strategies, policies and legal norms need to be inculcated in public officials. Only then will abstract norms and principles bring truly sustainable impact.

**Organisational design** – a process of shaping the structure of an organisation.

Defining the purpose of each organisational unit, their main tasks, responsibilities and mutual linkages as well as the number of individual work posts is critical for the optimal functioning of any institution. This process must be well regulated and prescribe, among other things, the type and hierarchy of organisational units and the conditions for setting them up. The whole idea behind the concept of organisational design in the public sector is to find a balance between the need for efficiency and responsiveness and the need for accountability and transparency.

**Orientation** – a set of activities undertaken to familiarise a new employee with the institution.

Typically, orientation is carried out jointly by an HR person and immediate supervisor. It involves an introduction to colleagues, tour of the building and handing of the most important information regarding the institution and the job. Proper orientation is the key to person's fast and smooth settling in the new environment.

*Similar term: Employee Induction*

## P

**Patronage** – the act of giving favour or protection to a person or group in exchange for their support. (see **Favouritism**)

The concept is usually associated with appointments and promotion in the public sector, where political parties in power grant jobs to those willing to lend them support.

*Similar term: Favouritism*  
*Antonyms: Fairness, Meritocracy*

**Performance appraisal** – formal assessment of employee's work performance against a set of standard criteria.

The purpose of performance appraisal is to support employees' professional development, and thus enhance the performance of an organisation, by monitoring their work and providing them with feedback on how well they are actually doing.

**Performance culture** – a culture which regards high levels of individual performance as the priority.

Employees in institutions where performance culture is prevalent feel the organisation's success as their own; they are proactive, independent and fully committed to achieving its objectives. Building such culture takes time and requires a conducive climate in the wider environment.

*Antonyms: Culture of indifference*

**Performance indicator** – a measurable value that shows the progress an individual is making against a specific target or expected result.

Performance indicators (often referred to as key performance indicators, or KPI) stem from the performance objectives. If the objectives are not well defined (e.g. unrealistic or unmeasurable), defining indicators may prove to be very hard or, in some cases, even futile (e.g. tracking progress of something that shouldn't have been done in the first place).

**Performance monitoring** – systematic efforts on the part of a manager to gain insight into the work of a subordinate employee.

There are two key reasons why continuous monitoring is crucial for an effective, credible performance appraisal: first, it increases the objectivity of the performance rating and, second, it boosts the employee's motivation (as a result of manager's interest in their work).

**Performance objectives** – time-limited targets set in a dialogue between a manager and an employee.

Objectives at the individual level are usually set in line with the higher or strategic goals of the institution. Their purpose is to enable employees to understand what they need to accomplish in order to meet expectations. Individuals who exceed the agreed performance targets may be considered for some form of reward.

**Performance-related Pay** – tying an employee's remuneration (entirely or in part) to their performance.

Measuring performance in the public service is extremely difficult. Therefore the idea of having individual performance play a major role in determining the take-home pay may lead to arbitrary decisions which are not in the public interest (see **Bonuses**).

**Political appointee** – a person who is appointed to a position on the basis of political, not primarily professional, criteria.

Ministers, for instance, are selected in a process that takes into consideration election results and negotiations within and among political parties. Subsequently, appointed ministers are usually given the right to hand-pick a number of people to serve as advisors in their cabinets. These people are also considered political appointees.

**Political loyalty** – civil servants' duty to comply with and implement signals and instructions from their political superiors.

The duty of loyalty must be weighed against the consideration of professional independence and neutrality.

*Similar term: Political servility*  
*Antonyms: Political independence/Neutrality*

**Political neutrality** – a principle that demands that public servants do their jobs professionally without favouring one political option over another.

Public servants have the right to have an

interest in politics. In many countries, they are even allowed to be members of political parties, but their neutrality means that they must carry out their duties in the best interest of the public even if doing so contravenes the views of their political party.

*Similar term: Political independence*  
*Antonyms: Politicisation, Political Loyalty*

**Politicisation** – any form of undue political pressure on people and processes within the public service.

*Similar term: Political servility*  
*Antonyms: Political independence/Neutrality*

**Position-based system** – a model of public service system where candidates are recruited to specific positions regardless of the level.

In principle, position-based recruitment allows institutions to benefit from the competition for any specific job between a wide pool of applicants. This approach is supposed to add to the responsiveness of government institutions as it enables targeted and (relatively) quick employment. Critics of this approach, however, cite stifling of career progression opportunities for existing public servants and subsequent difficulties in retaining them as its main downside. Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK are among the countries that have based their civil service systems predominantly on this model.

*Antonyms: Career-based system*

**Probation** – a process of monitoring the work of an employee who is new to the job over a defined period.

The purpose of probation is to give a manager or supervisor a chance to assess the overall ability of a new employee to meet the demands of a job. It is critical for the manager to expose a new employee to various job duties in a planned, customised manner and to monitor and assess the quality of their work

as objectively as possible. Failure of a person to meet the minimum expectations in the probation period implies serious deficiencies in the selection process. It is critical for the employer to provide sufficient assistance to the new comer so that they can properly understand their new job. (see **Orientation**).

**Professional autonomy/independence** – extent to which an employee enjoys the freedom to do the work in a way they see fit in accordance with their experience and know-how.

Professional independence is one of the pillars of professional merit-based public service. The expectation for public service to be responsive and citizens-oriented is completely unrealistic if the levels of professional autonomy are low. Furthermore, restricted freedom to express themselves as professionals can lead public servants to lose motivation for work. However, it is also true that some individuals have a rather modest need for autonomy. In such cases, allocation of autonomy can contribute to dissatisfaction and even workplace tensions and conflict. As in many other cases, the manager's ability to recognise what motivates their staff is key.

*Antonyms: Dependence or subservience*

**Professional development** – a process of acquiring new knowledge and skills relevant for a person's career.

The dynamics of change in the modern public sector require public servants to continuously upgrade their competencies. This is important for both the institution (i.e. the need to have staff capable of meeting growing job demands) and the individual (i.e. the need to retain relevance as a professional). Although professional development is often used as a synonym for training, in reality there are other ways of gaining new knowledge and skills, including mentoring and self-learning.

*Similar term: Professional learning*  
*Antonyms: Learning stagnation*

**Professionalism** – an overarching quality that includes expertise, integrity, neutrality and impartiality in the public service.

Professionalism is the capacity of civil servants to use their skilled, unbiased judgement to serve the general or public good. Civil servants' professional judgement (i.e. application of the expertise inspired by ethical standards and by the legal framework) results in informed decisions about the courses of action that are appropriate in specific and frequently ambiguous circumstances. If there is one term that encapsulates the totality of HRM efforts in the public service, it is professionalism or professional public service. Moreover, it is important that professionalism is encouraged and protected by legal and institutional mechanisms.

*Antonyms: Incompetence, Corruption*

**Promotion** – advancement to a job higher in rank and responsibility than the current one.

Public sector organisations have a duty to make the process of promotion competitive, transparent and merit-based. While the concept of promotion in the private sector implies a move up the ladder based on a managerial decision (sometimes even a creation of a job to suit a person's affinities), the process of promoting an employee in the public sector requires that a vacant job be available and de facto means filling the job via an internal employment procedure. In fact, the main difference between an internal recruitment and promotion is in the accessibility to the vacancy; promotion is usually meant only for the employees of the institution where there is a vacancy.

*Antonyms: Demotion*

**Public administration** – an organised set of institutions managed principally through merit-based mechanisms designed to plan, organise, implement and control government policies and functions. The public administration is bound by the principles of legality and hierarchical subordination.

**Public policy** – a set of guidelines for what a government intends to do within a specific administrative area, or within several areas.

A public policy does not normally have the force of law, but sets out principles and the main content of subsequent legislation. Preparation of public policies is normally a key task, especially of ministries.

*Similar term: Government strategy*

**Public sector** – a sphere of society that comprises all organisations owned and managed by the government.

Apart from traditional public administration, public sector also includes enterprises and other organisations in public ownership.

**Public service** — a permanent, professional administrative structure comprising individuals managed principally through merit-based mechanisms, whose missions range from impartially supporting the government in governing the country to producing and delivering public services in a politically neutral way. The public service is generally bound by the principles of legality and hierarchical subordination.

*Similar terms: Civil service*

## Q

**Quality management** – a continuous endeavour to improve work processes and employees' competencies in order for institutions to provide citizens with high-quality services.

The concept of quality management is inseparable from the needs of the end-user. The main purpose is to use a specific approach in mobilising all available resources to achieve a common goal: the quality of services that will meet citizens' needs. In that sense, introducing specific models of quality management is just a way of making the process of mobilising

and directing institution's resources more organised and therefore more manageable in the end.

## R

**Recruitment** – a set of activities aimed at building a pool of qualified job applicants.

In public sector institutions, the process of recruitment begins with the formal approval by competent authorities to fill a vacant post. Typically the process includes activities to advertise the vacancy and to collect and review applications (e.g. determining whether they conform with formal requirements or not). Since public sector institutions often find it very tough to compete with the private sector for qualified individuals, it is essential for the recruitment process to be designed in such way that competent candidates will see it, read it and develop an interest in it. In other words, the challenge before institutions is to make the job advertisement appear in the right place, contain the necessary information and propose an attractive set of benefits.

**Redeployment** – moving an employee to a different job, often as a result of restructuring or downsizing.

Unlike transfers (see **Transfer**), which normally take place within the same institution and pay grade, redeployment implies an offer for job that may be outside the home institution and at any salary level as long as the duties and responsibilities fit the person's professional profile. In that sense, the offer of redeployment is first and foremost an attempt not to leave a person jobless.

**Redundancy** – a situation where an employee is no longer needed in their job.

Declaring someone redundant typically follows the process of organisational restructuring, i.e. abolishing jobs, redesigning them and creating new ones. Being made redundant does not necessarily imply termination of services. In

fact, having a certain set of skills and abilities which are no longer relevant for one job does not mean they are irrelevant for all jobs (in the institution or elsewhere in the public service). It is very common for administrative structures to form a list of redundant persons and to share it across the institutions in case their HR needs match the profile of somebody from the list. If a redundant employee is indeed set to lose their job (i.e. there is no demand for such profile elsewhere), the process of separation must strictly adhere to the legal provisions in place.

**Remuneration** – set of payments made to an employee in exchange for their services.

The total remuneration package usually consists of a fixed and a variable part. The fixed part includes basic salary and various other allowances (e.g. transportation, food, etc.), while the variable part may consist of various forms of bonus payments. In the context of the public sector, remuneration requires strict adherence to prescribed procedures and a great degree of personal integrity (on the part of decision makers) in order to prevent favouritism and arbitrariness. The levels of remuneration should be sufficient to attract competent individuals to apply for a job and, once employed, to motivate them to work well.

*Similar term: Compensation*

**Retention** – refers to the ability of an institution to keep hold of the highest performing staff.

Institutions which find it difficult to retain their best employees are bound to develop all kinds of problems ranging from a dip in staff motivation (as a result of seeing the best people leave) to the loss of important expertise and institutional memory. High turnover of staff may be the result of an uncompetitive remuneration package but, in many instances, it is related to other issues such as a lack of career prospects, an uninspiring work atmosphere and unsupportive management.

*Antonyms: Staff turnover*

**Rule of law** – A principle and form of government whereby all state powers are subject to the law and arbitrariness in public decision-making is not allowed.

The United Nations refers to the rule of law as "a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws".<sup>1</sup> This is encapsulated in the saying "No one is above the law". The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe states that the notion of the Rule of Law requires a system of certain and foreseeable law, where everyone has the right to be treated by all decision-makers with dignity, equality and rationality and in accordance with the laws, and to have the opportunity to challenge decisions before independent, impartial courts through fair procedures. The Commission lists the following core elements of the concept: (1) legality, including a transparent, accountable, democratic process for enacting law; (2) legal certainty; (3) prohibition of arbitrariness; (4) access to justice before independent and impartial courts, including judicial review of administrative acts; (5) respect for human rights; and (6) non-discrimination and equality before the law.<sup>2</sup>

*Antonyms: Rule of power, Autocracy, Absolutism*

## S

**Salary** – a periodic payment made to an employee in return for their work. (see **Remuneration**)

Institutions in the public service should base salary structure on the system of job evaluations, taking into consideration the complexity of duties and responsibilities within each work post as well as other factors such as work conditions and exposure to stress. Levels of basic salary should be

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/what-is-the-rule-of-law-archived/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Rule\\_of\\_Law\\_Check\\_List.pdf](https://www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Rule_of_Law_Check_List.pdf)

transparent and must be clearly stated in the vacancy advertisement.

**Secondment** – sending an employee to work temporarily in another organisational unit or for another public institution/organisation.

Usually secondments take place as a result of the professional development needs of a particular employee, but can also be in response to the need for temporary job cover. In case of external secondments (i.e. temporary work for another organisation), the employee continues to receive salary from the original employer (depending on the arrangements made), but there may be some additional costs (e.g. travel expenses, per diems) that are covered by the host organisation.

**Self-learning** – a process of acquiring knowledge and skills by oneself without any supervision.

In the process of self-learning it is the individual who identifies what, when and how they need to learn. People who are motivated for self-learning bring added competencies to the institution (free of charge!), they set an example for other employees to follow and, in such way, they strengthen a culture of continuous learning.

**Selection** – a set of activities aimed at evaluating job applicants with an objective of choosing the one whose competencies best match the job requirements.

In some instances, the process is set up in such way that the panel/committee selects more than one candidate. Technically, the process of selection involves activities such as pre-screening of applications, conducting various forms of testing (e.g. written test, interviews), shortlisting, and verifying information. Public sector institutions have a duty to make the selection process fair, objective, merit-based and transparent.

**Selection panel/committee** – a group of individuals tasked with assessing the

suitability of applicants for a job and to rank them based on points scored. Regardless of their experience or education levels, all panel members should be trained for the task. It is important for the panels to be diverse both in terms of members' professional backgrounds as well as gender. In terms of their size, panels should strike a balance between being too small and too big; a three-member panel is the necessary minimum, while panels of more than five members may be hard to manage. It is a golden rule that at least one member of the panel should have strong HRM experience.

**Senior public service/Senior Civil Service** – top-level managerial work posts within the public service structure.

The scope of senior public service varies from one country to another and depends on general public administration arrangements but, in perhaps most instances, includes work posts one level below the minister and heads of state institutions. The significance of senior public servants is that they are experts appointed through the transparent merit-based procedure to be an independent, politically neutral structure capable of providing stability in the work of institutions, especially in periods of turbulent political developments. Depending on specific arrangements, senior public servants can bear the title of heads, directors, assistant ministers, state secretaries, etc.

*Similar term: Managerial public service*  
*Antonyms: Non-managerial public service*

**Strategic HRM** – the process of aligning management of the people of the institution with its long-term vision or objectives.

In other words, in order for long-term objectives to be reached, an institution needs (among other things) people with the right set of competencies and attitudes. Ensuring that such people are available in the right numbers and at a right time is the core task of strategic HRM.

*Antonyms: Operational/administrative HR*

**Strategic planning** – a process of setting long-term goals for the organisation, and identifying and scheduling activities that are necessary for achieving them.

Apart from defining long-term priorities and goals, there is also a need to operationalise strategic plans through governing documents with the shorter-term perspective (e.g. action plan). Strategic planning can be done at several levels of government, e.g. national and regional. The principle is for the higher-level strategic plans to be reflected in the lower-level ones. Since people are key to the successful implementation of strategic plans, HR professionals should be consulted in the process of their development.

*Similar term: Long-term planning*  
*Antonyms: Short-term planning*

**Succession planning** – a process of planning for smooth replacement of an outgoing employee.

Usually, succession planning is linked to senior public service posts, as they are the ones that affect the work of institution most. Responsible institutions operate with accurate data about potential outflow of key people and they also anticipate which individuals could end up leaving an institution as a result of labour market trends. To ensure a smooth succession, an institution should identify among the existing employees the ones which have the best potential to assume the post once it gets vacated. Of course, any succession plan in place must strictly adhere to the established rules and regulations for the promotion or transfer of employees.

**Support personnel** – employees in public institutions who do their work in support of the main functions of the institution.

Frequently it is difficult to tell support personnel apart from core personnel. The principles that guide the employment, promotion and termination of ancillary work posts should follow the same logic as the ones

that apply to core positions (i.e. the merit principle and transparency). Public money is used for financing of both categories so there should be no difference in approach.

## T

**Technical assistance** – a form of non-financial assistance provided by specialists or experts, usually in a project setting.

The aim of technical assistance is to support beneficiary countries or institutions in their quest for changes or reforms. Technical assistance makes sense only if it is demand-driven although, in some settings, a call for it can be due to the difficulties that beneficiaries face in identifying and articulating their needs.

**Training** – an activity aimed at teaching/instructing employees about specific topics for the purpose of equipping them with knowledge and skills necessary to perform work-related duties.

Employees in the public sector have a duty and a right to upgrade their professional competencies in line with the demands of the workplace. Individual career-based requests for training can also be accommodated as long as they are relevant for the present job. In any case, training should be based on real, credible demands of the institution or individual.

*Similar term: Professional development, Learning*

**Training evaluation** – a process of assessing the effectiveness of training programmes.

There are several ways of assessing the usefulness of trainings. One of the most common methods is to collect post-training feedback from the participants. The data collected in this way provides an insight into the technical aspects of training organisation, the relevance of training materials and the style and competence of instructors. However, participants' post-training feedback

is of limited use when it comes to analysing the impact of the course in the daily work. The courses that have limited or no effect in the workplace should either be modified (to better suit the needs of the organisation) or dropped altogether. In some instances the lack of impact is the result of the poor choice of training participants.

**Training needs analysis** – a process of determining the development needs of the organisation and its employees.

The term ‘needs’ refers first and foremost to the institution or, to be more precise, its strategic and operational objectives which constitute the basis of the analysis. The crux of the analysis is to identify organisational needs that can be met through appropriate training programmes. In many instances, the nature of the organisational needs rules out training as a possible solution.

**Transfer** – shifting an employee from one job to another within the same institution and pay grade (see **Redeployment**).

The decision to transfer someone from one job to another is usually motivated by organisational priorities. For instance, a legal professional working on routine matters in the department of general affairs is asked to move to the procurement department, where their skills can make a much bigger contribution. Sometimes transfer decisions are taken for professional development purposes, i.e. someone is moved to another job in order to broaden their knowledge and skills. Transfers are typically carried out after all the sides involved reach an agreement that such a move is beneficial. However, in some exceptional situations, when the interests of the institution are at stake, the person may be moved without their consent if such a possibility is provided for by the rules of the institution.

**Transparency** – a principle whereby governments are bound to promote openness of access to government-held information.

Public sector institutions should serve the public and, save for clearly specified and legally determined exemptions, for instance regarding protection of personal data and data related to state security, people should have access to data held by public institutions. When it comes to HRM, ensuring transparency means primarily giving the public insight into the processes of recruitment, selection, promotion and dismissals as well as remuneration practices.

*Similar term: Openness*  
*Antonyms: Evasiveness, Secrecy*

**Turnover of staff** – the number of people who leave an institution and the number of new employees replacing them within a certain period of time.

Institutions need to analyse the reasons why people leave. Separations that take place due to the retirement regulations, or those which are result of employees’ personal choices (unrelated to the institution), are generally less problematic than those rooted in people’s dissatisfaction with something at the workplace. In some cases, such voluntary separations may indicate an institution’s lack of competitiveness (in terms of remuneration), or its rigid style of management, or simply its uninspiring working atmosphere. It is generally good for institutions to practise some form of exit interview with those who leave voluntarily; such interviews usually offer a great deal of information about the reasons why a person chose to leave, thus enabling management to take informed decisions on ways to stop or reduce turnover.

*Antonyms: Staff retention*

## V

**Volunteer** – a person who willingly, and free of charge, gives time and services to an institution.

People may be motivated to volunteer in order to gain specific work experience, or they

may do it simply as an act of goodwill. Public institutions in sectors such as healthcare and education often provide training for volunteers and, afterwards, engage them on an ad hoc basis. In some cases, a symbolic compensation may be part of the overall arrangement. Coordination of volunteering falls within the remit of HRM unit.

## W

**Whistleblower** – a staff member who willingly exposes information or actions which they believe are unlawful or unethical.

A 2019 EU Directive states: “Persons who work for a public or private organisation or are in contact with such an organisation in the context of their work-related activities are often the first to know about threats or harm to the public interest which arise in that context. By reporting breaches of Union law that are harmful to the public interest, such persons act as ‘whistleblowers’ and thereby play a key role in exposing and preventing such breaches and in safeguarding the welfare of society. However, potential whistleblowers are often discouraged from reporting their concerns or suspicions for fear of retaliation. In this context, the importance of providing balanced and effective whistleblower protection is increasingly acknowledged at both Union and international level”.<sup>3</sup> Public sector institutions have to have a clear regulation regarding the protection of whistleblowers. Unfortunately, protection guarantees issued by governments with fragile democratic foundations, or poor track records in safeguarding basic human rights, are unlikely to instil in potential whistleblowers a sense of security and confidence.

**Work environment** – the physical conditions and social setting in which an employee works.

<sup>3</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law. Official Journal of the European Union L 305/17 of 26.11.2019.

Employees spend a major part of their time at work, and the conditions in which they work (both physical and social) are the key to their happiness and productivity. Office layout, furniture design and air ventilation are just some of the factors that can have a major impact on an individual’s motivation and attitude at work. The same goes for the social features at work, i.e. the nature of interpersonal relationships at work. HRM professionals, together with other managers in an institution, need to be mindful of their role in forging a positive work environment.

**Workload** – the amount of work an employee is expected to do.

HR departments are advised to work with unit managers on addressing possible workload imbalances. The idea is to avoid overloading or underloading an employee. Overload causes stress and in severe cases can be harmful to health; underload leads to procrastination and over time to a loss of motivation.

**Workplace negligence** – a failure to take proper care of something in the course of work.

Due diligence (i.e. the care exercised in order not to cause harm) is usually an obligation in performing professional duties. Negligent behaviour may not always constitute a breach of regulations but the consequences thereof could still be very serious. For instance, turning in a report without fact-checking the content may lead to wrong decisions being taken. Workplace negligence, especially if recurrent, indicates poor management.

*Antonyms: Workplace conscientiousness*

[illegible]

