

Maia Dvalishvili¹

*When government has the right people, and the right system,
and the right intentions, many good things are possible.*

The trick is knowing which one they are.

Alan Ehrenhalt

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the importance of employing principles of good management in personnel affairs. Although it professes new ways of managing people in public organisations, it uses several criteria and conditions to demonstrate that a transition from personnel administration to people's management practices it is rather difficult given certain existing conditions that act as impediments to moving ahead. Namely, the existence of a traditional civil service management system characterised by its hierarchical structures and centralised decision-making, and by its legacy of strict control and oversight of civil servants, seen as mere cogs rather than valuable contributors to government and administration. As a result, for people's management practices to flourish, the competency level of contemporary HR managers is questioned, as well as the ineffectiveness of the selection system and the lack of e-government tools in human resource management. The paper concludes with some recommendations for transitioning to people's management practices.

Keywords: *Personnel policy; Personnel administration; Personnel management; Civil service; Civil Servant; Competencies; strategic human resource management.*

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of having the right people, systems, and intentions in an organisation are numerous. These include increased efficiency and productivity, improved work quality, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, retention, and innovation. These outcomes are crucial not only for the government but for any organisation, whether public or private. Building a strong, resilient, and competitive organisation requires effective human management systems, with strong and independent HR managers and professionals on mid- and high-level management positions. Constant cooperation between HR specialists and management positions, and coordination and support is essential for selecting the right people, building the proper systems and reaching organisational goals.

Developing a robust Human Resource Management (HRM) policy and the system, empowering managers and developing leadership abilities is the primary goal of the Civil Service reform in Georgia as well. However, as quoted above, this is the trickiest thing to do.

Recently, during a training session with HR unit personnel, one of the topics discussed was the KPI of managers. One HR colleague confidently stated that the main task of managers is to check the work done by team members. After a few clarifying questions, it became clear that by "check," he meant re-reading, revising, rewriting, and re-doing the same task that had already been completed — but this time by the direct supervisor.

This made me realise that sometimes even HR managers may not fully understand how significant their role could be in supporting people to understand their roles, building a culture of trust, creating a positive atmosphere, promoting learning and sharing, and driving organisational change. If HR managers themselves do not believe that helping organisations grow is possible through proper HRM systems, how can they support every line manager to become people managers?

¹ Deputy Director, Civil Service Bureau of Georgia. Email: makodvalishvili@yahoo.com

In Georgia, this transition is particularly challenging due to the inherited traditions of command-and-control systems from Soviet times, the lack of delegation, and the concentration of power within the workplace. There is an absence of trust, underestimation and misunderstanding of the role and responsibilities of HR units, lack of coordination and communication between HR specialists and line managers, a widespread control mentality and micromanagement, and, often, overconfidence paired with a lack of professionalism.

These issues may explain why Georgia is unable to fully reap the benefits of reform initiatives and numerous training and development activities, ultimately preventing from achieving the main goal: transitioning from personnel administration to people management.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES AND HRM REFORMS

In Georgia, traditional management practices have been heavily influenced by hierarchical structures and centralised decision-making. This legacy of control and oversight has shaped a work environment where power is concentrated at the top, and employees are often seen as mere cogs in a machine rather than valuable contributors. As a result, a culture of mistrust has developed, where employees feel their roles are limited, and their potential is stifled.

The global shift towards people management emphasises recognising employees as key assets who drive innovation and growth. People management focuses on fostering a positive organisational culture, enhancing employee engagement, and developing leadership capabilities at all levels. Adopting these practices is essential for attracting and retaining talent, improving productivity, and achieving sustainable growth.

After the Rose Revolution, there were attempts to modernise the civil service in Georgia. However, these reform initiatives were often fragmented and lacked the comprehensive approach necessary for a systemic transformation of the entire civil service. The fragmented nature of these reforms meant that, while there were pockets of improvement, the overall system did not undergo the necessary structural changes to ensure long-term sustainability and modernisation. This piecemeal approach led to inconsistencies and a lack of coherence in the legislative framework and legal procedures, ultimately hindering the effectiveness of the civil service as a whole.

The civil service reform in Georgia, particularly after the parliamentary elections in 2012, focused heavily on legislative changes. A critical part of the reform process was establishing a strong legal basis in accordance with the European Principles of Public Administration and SIGMA/OECD guidelines. The main aim was to address an inconsistent and outdated legal framework that was riddled with contradictory provisions and unable to meet the contemporary challenges faced by the civil service at that time.

Since 2014, the Georgian Civil Service Reform has become a significant part of the broader Public Administration Reform, with a major focus on strengthening human resource management units and modernising HRM procedures to ensure more transparency, objectivity, and integrity in the civil service. The idea behind the legal changes was to create stronger HR units, clearly define their roles and responsibilities, and empower those employed in them to align with the principles and values prescribed in the Civil Service Law. Additionally, the scope of the civil service has been clarified, a clear distinction has been made between the political and administrative parts of the administration, competition procedures have been updated to align with the career system, and a new classification system has been introduced, affecting all public institutions, including local self-governments.

One of the main achievements of the reform was the enactment of a new Law on Civil Service, the Law on Remuneration, and relevant secondary legislation, creating a robust regulatory framework. These efforts aimed to establish a stable, unified civil service based on the principles of career promotion, merit, integrity, political neutrality, impartiality, and accountability. For the first time, the Government of Georgia adopted uniform legal rules in the form of a Code of Ethics,

providing a detailed description of ethical and unethical behaviours in civil service, as well as the values and principles that civil servants should uphold.

The Civil Service Bureau (CSB), as the Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL), was tasked with leading and coordinating ongoing Civil Service Reform in Georgia. It was also entrusted with monitoring the fulfilment of the requirements of the Civil Service Law (CSL) across Public Administration. Since 2014, the CSB has made significant efforts to modernise Georgia's HRM system and support HR units in strengthening their capacity through various awareness-raising measures and skills development activities. Additionally, the CSB itself has evolved into a powerful learning organisation, providing resources on HR-related topics and offering consultative support to public entities during the reform implementation process.

IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Following the introduction of the new legal framework, the urgent need to implement innovative approaches became a priority for governmental institutions. With extensive donor support and coordination from the Civil Service Bureau, critical interventions were introduced. As a result, emphasis was placed on building the capacity of civil servants to better implement the national development agenda and increase public awareness of ongoing reforms.

In response to these interventions and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Civil Service Bureau continued to foster a unified approach to applying the civil service regulatory and policy framework, enhancing human resource management practices, and further strengthening its capacity to effectively monitor and support ongoing reforms. The Bureau focused on establishing new, innovative re-skilling and capacity-building initiatives, such as mentorship programmes, coaching, and talent management.

To increase the capacity of civil servants, trainings, workshops, and Civil Servant Forums were systematically conducted. The Civil Servants' Forum served as a communication platform, bringing civil servants together to discuss emerging issues, share best practices, and develop a common vision for future development. These interventions contributed to establishing a network of qualified and motivated civil servants, fostering a collaborative culture within the civil service, and offering high-level support to civil servants working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the primary goals of the reform was to enhance managerial effectiveness and leadership capacity. This involved several training initiatives for both central and local managers, as well as the creation of a management mentorship programme. The programme aimed to develop a pool of mentors to provide individualised support to line managers in addressing their daily challenges.

Additionally, significant emphasis was placed on developing a data analytics system to support evidence-based decision-making. Guidelines were established to help HR managers identify key indicators, determine information sources, and collect relevant data. To reinforce strategic planning, research, and analytical skills, various materials were created and disseminated through training sessions and working meetings. These resources aimed to improve the ability to conduct organisational surveys and better prepare for future planning.

Despite these efforts, there are still common questions such as, "Why do we need these analyses? What should we do with the results? Whom should we approach to address the challenges?" These questions highlight ongoing issues with HR self-confidence and a lack of understanding among management about the potential benefits of professional HR expertise within an organisation.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Competency level of HR managers

However, the self-confidence and capacity of the HR units are not enough to convert it from an operational role to a strategic one. It is common that members of the HR units are not HR specialists *per se*, as they do not possess an academic background in the HR field. Nevertheless, they possess practical experience, however without the theoretical background; hence requiring extensive training often. In this context, lack of expertise and field knowledge prevents them from freely exercising the advisory role they should provide to line managers and other staff members to support them in various HR processes. In general, the Georgian public sector lacks high-level HR professionals, especially at the local level. Consequently, HR units mostly hire lawyers and specialists who can perform administrative tasks. Despite the increasing acknowledgment of HR specialisation and proper HRM as the basis for organisational effectiveness, the mantra of “lawyers can do everything” still dominates.

Lack of e-governance tools in HR

Additionally, over the past few years, attention has increased towards HR e-tools and management. Under the auspices of the CSB, a special Human Resources Management Software was developed and implemented. The purpose of this system is to support evidence-based decision-making at the organisational and national levels, as well as encourage the development and implementation of tailored HR programmes and interventions and reduce the burden of personnel administration and paperwork for HR specialists. Yet, the system is not fully operational, different HRM electronic systems are used by different public agencies, which are not interconnected, and data is not exchanged between these systems. As a result, the reports produced are not comprehensive or complete.

Lack of cooperation with managers

In Georgia, there is a prevalent belief among managers that human resources should be managed solely by HR specialists. As a result, when line managers are asked to participate in selection procedures, develop job descriptions, evaluate performance, or engage in other HR activities, these tasks are often seen as additional burdens and are frequently avoided.

Consequently, HR processes are largely implemented with minimal involvement from line managers. While this approach may initially seem acceptable to them, it often leads to dissatisfaction with the outcomes. The notion that every manager should act as an HR manager and be more engaged with their team is far from being a practical reality or embedded in the culture.

When HR managers lack strength and professionalism to exert significant influence, they may hesitate to take decisive actions. This results in managers remaining disengaged, and the collaboration needed to drive meaningful change suffers as a result.

Ineffective selection system

The lack of HR professionalisation and cooperation with line managers leads to challenges in the recruitment/selection process. Most of the time, HR units organise competitions on an *ad hoc* basis when the need to fill a vacancy arises. Staffing plans, based on prior identification of staffing needs, are not prepared.

The selection methods used in competitions vary according to the announced positions. Verbal tests and interviews are widespread practices, but competition commissions may choose one or the other in some cases, regardless of the level of the vacancy. The length of the recruitment procedure is the most challenging aspect. According to the legal framework, it must not exceed three months, which is not enough to select the right candidates professionally. Moreover, in most cases, even these three months are not fully utilised in practice. The general understanding that one month and a bit more is enough to technically manage the process from vacancy announcement to candidate appointment prevails in reality. Assessment centres are not

involved in the process due to budget limitations, so competencies and the motivation of candidates are checked intuitively by the competition commission. Managers are not trained in competency-based interview skills. Consequently, due to the absence of prior plans, uncalculated expenses, and the damage caused by selecting and appointing the wrong candidates, the time limits to properly and professionally prepare for the interview and the usual urgency to fill vacant positions hamper the effectiveness of recruitments.

STEPS FOR CHANGE

1. Survive

Since Human Resource Management is more developed in the private sector, it poses a high risk for public organisations to outsource HR functions and rely on local or international HR experts when HR strategies have to be developed. Instead, HR should be the soul of the organisation, not just a one-time task. It needs to be integrated throughout the organisation, continuously monitoring its pulse. HR units should offer the best policy advice, as they need to be thoroughly knowledgeable about the organisation, gather all relevant data, conduct organisational analyses, and consistently provide evidence-based policy recommendations to top management. This approach ensures that HR proves its value and secures its long-term role within the organisation.

2. Independence of HR units

The presence of strong and independent HR units is essential for both public and private organisations. The 2014 reform initiative mandated that every public organisation must appoint an HRM responsible individual. This person should not only handle technical personnel administration tasks but also manage recruitment, identify staff needs, evaluate performance, plan, and support professional development, and assist managers in enhancing overall organisational effectiveness.

Unfortunately, budgetary constraints often limit the ability to invest in costly long-term training for HR specialists. However, numerous opportunities exist for collaboration with peers, sharing best practices, utilising freely available resources, and accessing the CSB library. Following these guidelines can help HR specialists stay current and build confidence in their independent roles.

3. Partnership with HR Units

One of the goals of the HR units should be to build partnerships with other public and private HR entities. Enhancing the capacity of central-level HR managers and advanced HR partners can be beneficial for less advanced local self-government HR units. Conversely, the unique experiences from local units can provide valuable insights for central-level HR specialists, fostering new projects and innovative ideas. This partnership could also serve as a platform for knowledge sharing, where common issues can be discussed and resolved. Such collaboration would contribute to a unified implementation of the law and the establishment of consistent practices across the civil service

4. Data capacity

Edward Deming's famous quote, *"Without data, you're just another person with an opinion"* underscores the importance of building HR data capacity for collecting and analysing information on HR indicators. One of our HR colleagues often emphasises that HR specialists must engage with data and craft compelling stories for managers using HR metrics. Only through this approach will managers be persuaded of the value of HR and foster strategic collaboration. However, achieving this objective hinge on data accuracy and technological excellence.

Improving people management is impossible without understanding who your employees are, what drives them, whether adaptation procedures impact retention rates, or if key performers

frequently leave. Therefore, establishing robust data collection tools and developing effective “storytelling” reports and skills should be top priorities for HR units.

5. Human Capacity

The development of the HR unit's capacity must be integral to the top management's vision and organisational goals. If the HR unit is currently focused primarily on daily personnel administration rather than strategic HRM, the vision should shift towards prioritising strategic planning and policy-level consultancy. This change will help build human capital with the relevant skills and knowledge.

Additionally, greater emphasis should be placed on attracting HR research specialists and data analysts. These professionals can enhance the HR units' capabilities by providing evidence-based recommendations and enriching the overall policy development process.

6. HR Branding

As the role of the Human Resource Manager in driving organisational success and creating value through HR becomes increasingly recognised, developing a robust communication campaign and establishing a strong HR brand as a key partner for public managers would be highly beneficial. Often, HR managers in the public sector are not involved in the strategic planning process and may be unaware of their organisation's strategic objectives. The importance of the HR role must be clearly communicated, and public managers need to be more aware of the benefits that HR professionals bring to the organisation.

7. Leading Research on HRM

Policy changes in Georgia are often politically driven rather than informed by research and the best available evidence. To counter this, HR units need to demonstrate their capability to provide evidence-based policy advice within the civil service. This can be achieved by conducting ongoing organisational research, situational analyses, and engagement surveys. Such activities will help HR units understand what works best for their corporate culture and reality, allowing them to offer timely and relevant recommendations when the organisation faces the need for change.

CONCLUSION

Despite significant progress in enhancing the legal framework for establishing modern and effective human resource management in public sector organisations, in Georgia, efforts have largely focused on technical compliance with the new Civil Service Law. This focus has often come at the expense of building robust, future-oriented systems.

The primary challenge remains the lack of a strategic approach, compounded by the limited capacity of HR units to fulfil their advisory roles effectively. Overcoming this issue is essential for progress.

Thus, transforming the Georgian civil service from a legacy of personal administration to a model of strategic people management requires a comprehensive approach. This includes integrating strong HR systems, fostering cultural change, supporting professional development, and effectively utilising data and technology. By addressing these areas, Georgia can create a more dynamic, responsive, and effective public sector, capable of meeting contemporary challenges and promoting sustainable growth.