

A FORWARD-LOOKING VISION RETHINKING HR STRATEGIES AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEE ROLES

Adapting to evolving work dynamics is critical to effectively managing transformational change. In this context, reactive approaches risk becoming a source of crisis and missed opportunities. Driving change in the public sector therefore requires investing in a forward-looking strategic vision, implementing strategies to reinvigorate the role of public servants, and guiding organizations towards resilience in the face of accelerating change.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION//PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT//PERSONNEL POLICY//HR STRATEGY//HR MANAGERS



GIOVANNI VALOTTI

is Full Professor of Public Management at the
Department of Social and Political Sciences at Bocconi
University in Milan.

People are an organization's most adaptable asset, embodying a diverse set of skills, roles, expectations, and motivations that evolve over time. The organization can choose to be a passive bystander to this change, or it can play an active role by facilitating and managing change: in the former case, organizations that are slow to respond to contextual demands risk being unprepared for crises and missing many opportunities. Conversely, administrations that invest time and resources in developing a forward-looking vision, as in the second case, are ideally positioned to drive essential change.

The strong roots in the past and the focus on the present that characterize human resource policies in public administrations can lead to a lack of foresight about the future. It's the ability to look ahead – which is precisely what distinguishes more advanced public administrations from situations where backwardness

prevails – that enables organizations to prepare for the future in the present. This is particularly critical in times of great discontinuity (such as the last decade) and will be even more so in the years to come.

Indeed, a framework of significant, accelerating change is emerging on the horizon. On the one hand, technological evolution is dramatically reshaping access to information, work methods, services, and the skills required at all levels within administrations. This makes it unrealistic for individual entities to concentrate all necessary skills internally, necessitating increasing interconnectedness between organizations. On the other hand, demographic dynamics and the rapid rise in life expectancy are driving an expansion and transformation of citizens' needs, combined with a general expectation of superior quality typical of mature socio-economic systems. From another perspective, these dynamics pose entirely new challenges within administrations, as these organizations are historically populated by employees with a high average age, who are now getting older. This means that administrations will be called upon to manage significant generational gaps between operators raised in traditional contexts and newcomers.

Strategic objectives focused on lowering the average age and seniority of public sector employees could prove instrumental in driving forward this transformative process, thereby facilitating the influx of younger individuals who possess new skills and cost less in terms of remuneration.

Given this context, is it conceivable that the traditional public servant will persist as a professional role amidst this whirlwind of change, maintaining its original form as we have come to know it through its evolution to the present day? Undoubtedly, certain noble traits of the old school bureaucrat will continue to be important in the future: impartiality, autonomous judgment, meticulous adherence to standards, and a profound

ethical compass with institutional allegiance as the true north. However, it is hard to envision the persistence of the rigidity and constraints of an employment system born in bygone eras and tailored for outdated activities.

Moreover, the loosening of traditional constraints is not enough. It must be coupled with the implementation of a forward-thinking people strategy, a modern and effective personnel management system, a shared transformational design and a full commitment to nurturing and empowering individuals, particularly among top and middle managers. Indeed, to foster innovation, it is essential to recognize the need to optimize every available opportunity to design pathways for both organizational and personal growth and enhancement. It is through this approach, rather than through grand reform designs alone, that we can elevate and revitalize public employees, transforming them from conventional bureaucrats into dedicated professionals committed to serving the public interest.

Within this framework, the articles that follow aim to meaningfully advance the innovation of HR strategies in the public sector by adopting an evidence-based approach. This methodology entails the systematic collection of primary data from a survey sample consisting of nearly 300 public organizations¹. The goal is to gain a thorough understanding of the current state of affairs and develop consistent proposals for changing people management practices within the Italian public sector. Specifically, the following contributions delve into the characteristics of HR functions and managers, who are responsible for effectively designing and implementing HR management tools. Also addressed are the main challenges of people management systems that cover the entire employee life cycle, ranging from strategic workforce planning to the recruitment and selection of prospective candidates, and ultimately the retention of current civil servants.

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