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APPLICABILITY OF THE VIE-MODEL IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

Demographic change poses considerable challenges for the public sector when it comes to recruiting and retaining qualified junior staff. In order to ensure the long-term viability of public institutions, the focus is increasingly shifting to strategic personnel development. Against this background, this article examines the extent to which employee motivation in the public sector can be explained by Vroom's valence-instrumentality-expectancy model (VIE model) and the importance of individual motives and situational incentives. As part of a systematic literature review, motivation is understood as a dynamic, context-dependent process that arises from the interplay of personal needs and external incentive structures. The VIE model offers a differentiated theoretical frame of reference by describing motivation as the result of cognitive trade-offs between valence, instrumentality and expectation. The analysis shows that motivation in the public sector can be promoted in particular when both individual preferences, such as security, recognition or development prospects, and structural framework conditions, such as transparent target systems, feedback mechanisms and modern management concepts, are taken into account. The results show that the VIE model is a suitable instrument for explaining motivationally relevant decision-making processes. In addition, there are practical implications for human resource management in public organizations, for example with regard to the design of reciprocal incentive systems, the promotion of work-life balance and the establishment of life-phase-oriented personnel development. Motivation is thus understood not only as an individual characteristic, but also as a strategic resource for administrative modernization.

Keywords: Leadership strategies, public administration, motivation, VIE model.

INTRODUCTION

Demographic change is leading to a shift in the age structure of the population. (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2025). The younger generations currently represent a numerical minority, making it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain young talent in the long term. As a result, there is a change in the balance of power on the labor market. Employers are increasingly competing for qualified and well-trained staff (cf. IW 2025). The public sector is not exempt from these developments. In order to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of public institutions, strategically oriented personnel development is essential (cf. KDZ 2025). Personnel development and its organization are therefore key instruments for ensuring and promoting employee motivation. (cf. SD Worx 2024).

This problem gives rise to the following questions, which this article aims to address: To what extent can employee motivation in the public service be explained by Vroom's VIE model, and what role do individual motives and situational incentives play in this? These questions link

the theoretical model to the specific context of the public service and take into account the interaction of valence, instrumentality and expectation in the motivational process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scientific study of motivation looks back on a long tradition, whereby its systematic investigation initially began in the context of philosophical considerations and was later developed further in psychology (cf. Plato 380 BC). Even in ancient times, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle were concerned with the motives behind human action. Plato understood motivation as an interplay of reason, courage and desire, while Aristotle emphasized the goal-oriented nature of action, which is geared towards the realization of a successful life (*eudaimonia*) (cf. Aristotle 350 BC). Psychological research into motivation began in the 19th century, with William James being one of the first to systematically investigate motivation. He interpreted it primarily as behavior controlled by instincts (cf. Mames 1890). At the beginning of the 20th century, Sigmund Freud expanded this understanding by focusing on unconscious drives such as sexuality (*libido*) and aggression (cf. Freud 1923). Abraham Maslow made a decisive contribution to modern motivational psychology in 1943 with his theory of the hierarchy of needs. This postulates a hierarchical structure of human needs and is still considered a fundamental reference model in motivational research today (cf. Maslow 1943).

Motivation encompasses the totality of inner motives that trigger, guide and maintain human behavior (cf. Hindman 2025). It describes the inner drive that motivates a person to make an effort and pursue certain goals. Individual factors such as personal characteristics and experiences as well as current life circumstances play a key role in this. For this reason, motivational processes differ from person to person and are heavily dependent on the respective situation (cf. Amadou et al. 2025).

Employee motivation is a key success factor for public administration (cf. Lintunen et al. 2025). However, it is not a stable personality trait, but is subject to dynamic, situation-dependent changes. As a theoretical construct, motivation is neither directly observable nor objectively measurable, but is inferred from a person's behavior (cf. Rothmund Eder 2025). For example, purposeful action is often interpreted as an expression of high motivation, although the same person may exhibit significantly different behavior in other contexts (cf. Kiefer 2025).

Motivation arises from the interplay of intrapersonal and external influencing factors. The central components of this process are individual motives and situational incentives. If a personal motive, such as the pursuit of achievement, recognition, security or social affiliation, meets a suitable environmental stimulus, such as an attractive working environment, a career opportunity or social esteem, the individual's willingness to act increases significantly (cf. Lidayan et al. 2025).

While motives drive behavior from within the individual, incentives act as external stimuli that encourage or reinforce certain behaviors. Motivation is therefore not determined by one of the two components alone, but results from their interaction. This relationship can be illustrated using a multiplicative model. If either the personal motive or the situational incentive is not present, motivated behavior will not occur. It follows that both individual dispositions and contextual conditions must be fulfilled in order to generate and maintain motivation (cf. Rothmund Eder 2025).

Motivation is a multi-layered process that is strongly characterized by individual differences in terms of needs, goal orientations and situational assessments (cf. Skripak & Poff 2024).

Victor H. Vroom's VIE model (1964) takes this individuality into account by understanding motivation not as a fixed characteristic, but as the result of a cognitive decision-making process. Central to this model is the assumption that people plan their behaviour rationally by relating subjective expectations about action outcomes to their individual attractiveness (valence) and the probability of their realization (instrumentality and expectation) (cf. Vroom 1964). The VIE model consists of three core elements (cf. Ruppert 2024):

1. **Valence:** The subjective assessment of the attractiveness of a possible outcome (e.g. salary increase, recognition). A positive valence means that the result is desirable for the person.
2. **Instrumentality:** The conviction that a certain performance or behavior will actually lead to the desired result (e.g. "If I successfully complete project X, my chances of promotion will increase").
3. **Expectancy:** The assessment of the probability that one's own behavior will lead to the required performance (e.g. "I trust myself to complete this task successfully").

If one of the three variables is zero, the resulting motivation is also zero. The model thus explains why people may not be motivated despite attractive goals if they do not believe in achieving the goal or do not see a connection between performance and outcome. The three components have a multiplicative relationship (cf. Conte 2025):

$$\text{Motivation} = \text{Valenz} \times \text{Instrumentalität} \times \text{Erwartung}$$

Formula1 : Motivation formula
Source: Own representation

The VIE model is particularly important in public administration, as it shows how motivation can be influenced by the targeted design of target systems, feedback mechanisms and incentive structures. Managers can use this model to better understand how employees perceive incentives and what actually motivates them to perform. Vroom assumes that motivation only arises when all three components of the VIE model (cf. Hoffmann-Miller 2024), valence, instrumentality and expectation, are positive. If one fails, there is no motivation. The multiplicative link emphasizes their interdependence (cf. Skripak & Poff 2024). As a cognitive decision-making model, the VIE model provides a differentiated explanation of work-related motivation and is still central to the design of incentive systems and target agreements (cf. Conte 2023).

Human resource management represents the link between strategic corporate management and operational human resource management. The aim is to align HR policy measures in such a way that corporate goals are achieved without jeopardizing the well-being of employees (cf. ISEG 2025). The success of the company depends to a large extent on their willingness and ability to perform (cf. Deloitte 2025). Against the backdrop of demographic change and increasing staff shortages, employee retention is gaining strategic importance. It contributes to lowering fluctuation rates and reducing costs caused by staff departures. Initial contact is often made via personnel marketing measures, which can already build emotional loyalty (cf. Topping 2025).

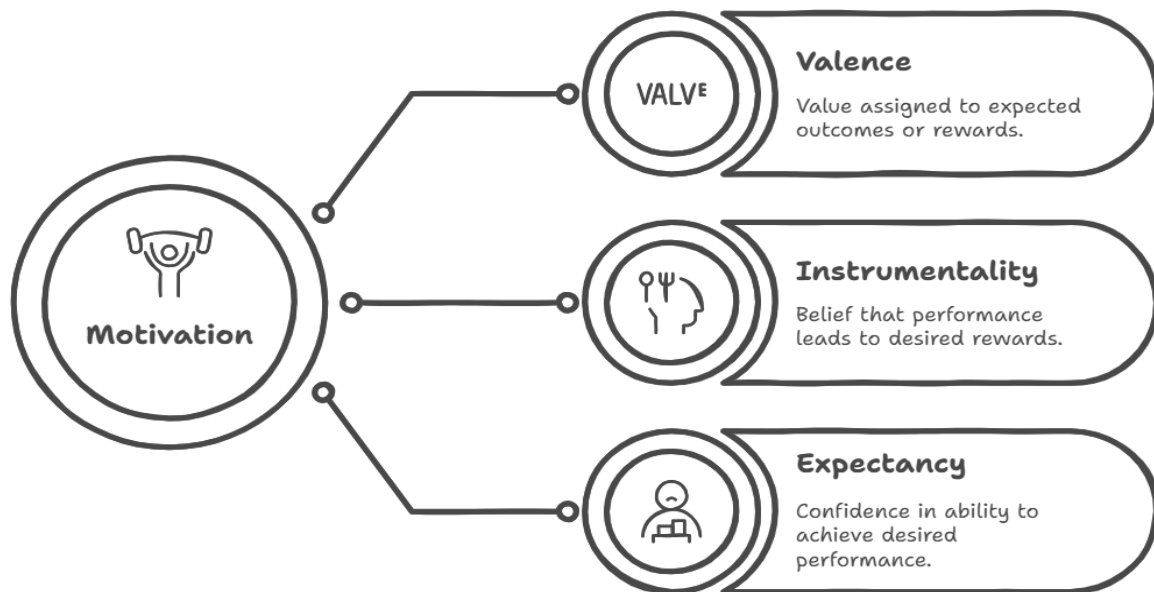


Figure1 : VIE model
Source: Own representation

Reciprocal incentive systems that take individual needs into account are effective for sustainable motivation and retention. Generational change in particular requires a differentiated understanding: values and decision-making principles sometimes vary considerably between younger and older employees (cf. Karimi & García 2025). Leadership styles are subject to cultural change. Hierarchical models are becoming less relevant, while transformational leadership behavior is increasingly preferred. It promotes autonomy, goal orientation, inspiring communication and regular feedback. Work-life balance is considered a central megatrend in the world of work. It describes the striving for a balance between professional demands and private needs. In view of the staff shortage, it is essential for companies to establish appropriate concepts in order to remain attractive and competitive in the long term (cf. Haar & Roche 2025).

The chart below illustrates that a good balance between professional demands and private areas of life is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable job satisfaction and performance. Neither the professional nor the private sphere should dominate, as an imbalance can lead to symptoms of stress and dissatisfaction in the long term (cf. Mayrhofer, Furtmüller & Kasper 2023). The figure illustrates the central dimensions of work-life balance and shows how different areas of life can be reconciled.

It is graphically structured as a semicircle and consists of five thematically structured segments, each of which depicts an aspect of work-life balance. The figure addresses central dimensions of work-life balance and illustrates the interplay between different areas of life that need to be kept in balance in order to promote holistic well-being

- **Stress** is described as the result of mental and physical strain caused by professional demands and family obligations. Chronic overload in particular can lead to an imbalance and significantly impair quality of life.
- The area of **work** refers to professional responsibilities, time pressure and organizational requirements. The need to consciously structure work tasks is emphasized in order to create space for relaxation and private commitments.

- Another relevant aspect is *caregiving for relatives*, which includes the care and support of family members - for example in the event of illness or old age. This form of care work often represents an additional, often invisible burden for gainful employment, especially in societies with an ageing population.
- The area of **family** refers to the importance of emotional closeness, family support and time spent together. Stable and supportive family relationships are considered an essential protective factor for emotional well-being.
- **Leisure activities** also play a central role in the diagram. They include recreational activities such as hobbies, sporting activities or travel, which contribute to regeneration and strengthen the ability to cope with stress.

Finally, at the center of the illustration is a stylized person on a scale, a symbol of the desired balance between work and private life. This visual metaphor underlines the overarching goal of harmoniously integrating all areas of life in order to achieve a sustainable and healthy work-life balance (cf. Deci & Ryan 2025).

Achieving Harmony Between Work and Personal Life

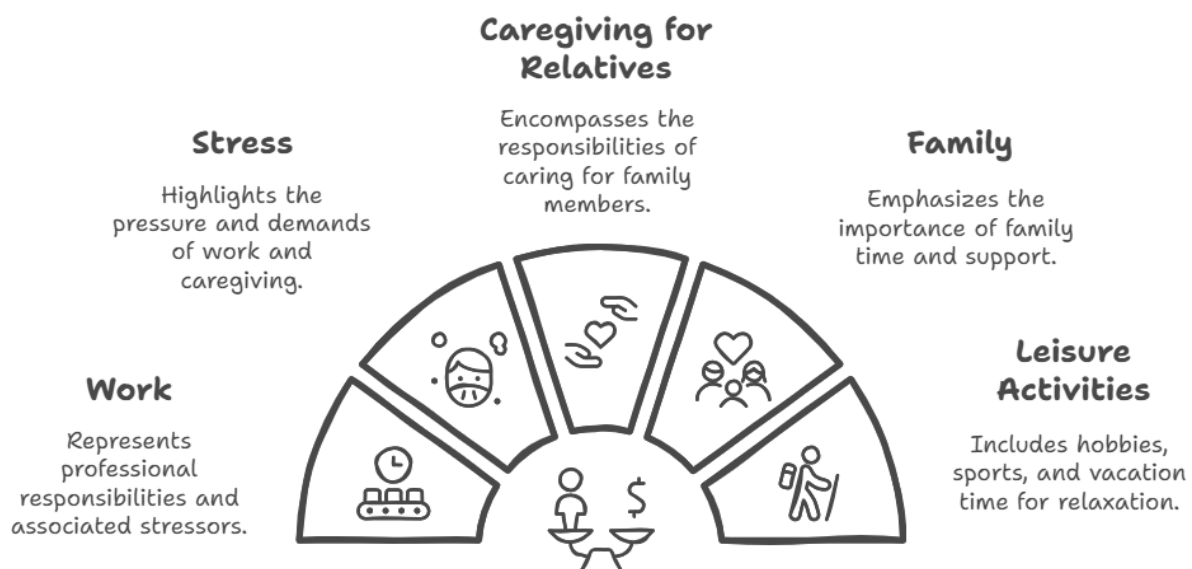


Figure2 : Harmony between Work and Personal Life
Source: Own representation

As part of human resource management, it is the task of personnel management to reconcile the different needs and expectations of the various employee groups, in particular long-term employees and career starters (cf. Robinson 2025). Life-phase-oriented HR development is particularly relevant here, as it takes into account the individual development needs and biographical life situations of employees (cf. Deci & Ryan 2025). The aim is to create a framework in which employees can develop their full performance potential. In the course of dynamic social and technological change, the knowledge and skills of employees are becoming increasingly important.

The term HR development is not uniformly defined, as it is interpreted in different organizations specifically with regard to their strategic goals (cf. Noe et al. 2024). In principle, however, personnel development encompasses all measures aimed at systematically expanding

the professional, methodological and social competencies of employees with the aim of securing and expanding organizational performance (cf. Hansen & Amabile 2024). The public sector occupies a special position compared to the private sector, as it fulfills a role model function as an employer. While job security is perceived as a central feature of attractiveness, the limited opportunities for promotion in particular are seen as a disadvantage. This discrepancy makes it difficult to attract highly qualified specialists (cf. Amoadu et al. 2025). However, the majority of employees show a high level of interest in targeted personnel development, not only to improve their career prospects, but also as an expression of appreciation by the employer, which has a positive effect on motivation and willingness to perform (cf. Hays 2024).

In the past, political conditions have contributed significantly to staff reductions in the public sector by not filling vacant positions. The resulting age homogeneity makes it difficult to innovate and requires targeted strategies for recruiting young talent. Continuous investment in personnel development is the only way to counteract structural ageing. In view of the staff shortage, public administration is also increasingly competing with private providers. A sustainable strategy for employer attractiveness therefore includes both ambitious training and further education programs as well as the development of modern work and organizational structures (cf. Becker 2025).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this article is based on a systematic literature review that focuses on relevant scientific publications in German and English. The aim of this approach is to systematically review the current state of research on employee motivation, particularly in the context of public administration, and to provide a theory-based answer to the research question formulated at the beginning.

Primary data collection methods such as interviews, surveys or case studies are deliberately avoided, giving the study a purely theory-based and descriptive-analytical character. As part of the analysis, an extended model is developed that conceptually complements the VIE model. The findings obtained are critically reflected upon and interpreted using scientific quality criteria. The paper concludes with a theory-based discussion in which the results are classified with regard to their implications and limitations.

RESULTS

Motivation is a key determinant of individual work performance and is closely linked to perceived job satisfaction. However, this satisfaction does not result from isolated moments of dissatisfaction, but is primarily based on a long-term, cumulative assessment of the working environment. Temporary negative experiences are therefore not necessarily representative of the overall feeling of satisfaction, which is rather characterized by the continuous perception of work-related framework conditions.

The question posed at the beginning can be answered as follows: The motivation of employees in the public sector can be explained in a broadly differentiated way by Vroom's VIE model. Vroom sees motivation as the result of a cognitive decision-making process in which individuals weigh up on the basis of subjective assessments whether an effort is worthwhile with regard to an expected result. Three central factors play a role here: valence, instrumentality and expectation. The three components have a multiplicative relationship - motivation only occurs if all three are positive. Especially in the public sector, which is characterized by specific structures such as limited promotion opportunities, high job security and increasing staff

shortages, the model offers a valuable basis for analyzing motivational processes. For example, job security can have a high valence, while at the same time the instrumentality is low if performance is perceived as having little effect on career advancement. Expectations can also be dampened if employees doubt their effectiveness due to structural hurdles or a lack of support

The VIE model is particularly applicable when it is combined with findings on the effect of individual motives and situational incentives. Accordingly, motivation does not arise solely from objective framework conditions, but from their subjective evaluation against the background of personal dispositions. For example, an employee with a strong need for further development will react more strongly to development programs than someone who is primarily looking for stability. The VIE model provides a theoretically sound basis for explaining motivation in the public sector, provided that individual differences and situational contextual conditions are adequately taken into account. It also offers concrete starting points for human resource management, particularly with regard to the design of targeted incentive systems, development measures and management concepts that not only presuppose motivation, but also specifically promote it.

DISCUSSION

At the center of the analysis is the concept of employee turnover, which in the present context primarily includes employee terminations, i.e. terminations for which employees leave the company of their own accord (cf. Amoadu et al. 2025). The reasons for such resignations are varied and range from dissatisfaction with working conditions to personal or career-related motives (cf. iHire 2024).

Fluctuation should not be seen as negative per se. To a moderate extent, it can be seen as an expression of organizational dynamics. It offers the opportunity to break up entrenched structures, provide new impetus and supplement existing teams with new perspectives (cf. Valet et al. 2023). However, fluctuation takes on a problematic dimension when it goes beyond a healthy level and qualified specialists in particular leave the company. In such cases, not only do substantial costs arise from recruiting and training new employees, but company experience is also lost, the reconstruction of which is associated with considerable time and personnel costs. The term "*retention management*" is often used in the context of staff retention. The aim of this concept is to bind employees to the company in the long term in order to ensure staff continuity, reduce costs due to fluctuation and increase operational performance. Proactive and strategic retention management can also have a positive influence on the perceived value of the workforce.

Normative loyalty is based on employees' inner sense of duty towards the company and their colleagues. Affective loyalty arises when there is an emotional identification with the company, for example through the alignment of values and goals (cf. Fiske 2024). Calculative retention reflects a weighing up of the costs and benefits of a potential change of employer and includes aspects such as remuneration, job security and development prospects (cf. Hays 2024). Effective retention management requires systematic consideration of the six central dimensions of employee retention, as these are considered to be the key factors influencing the long-term loyalty of skilled employees to the organization (cf. Maturson 2024).

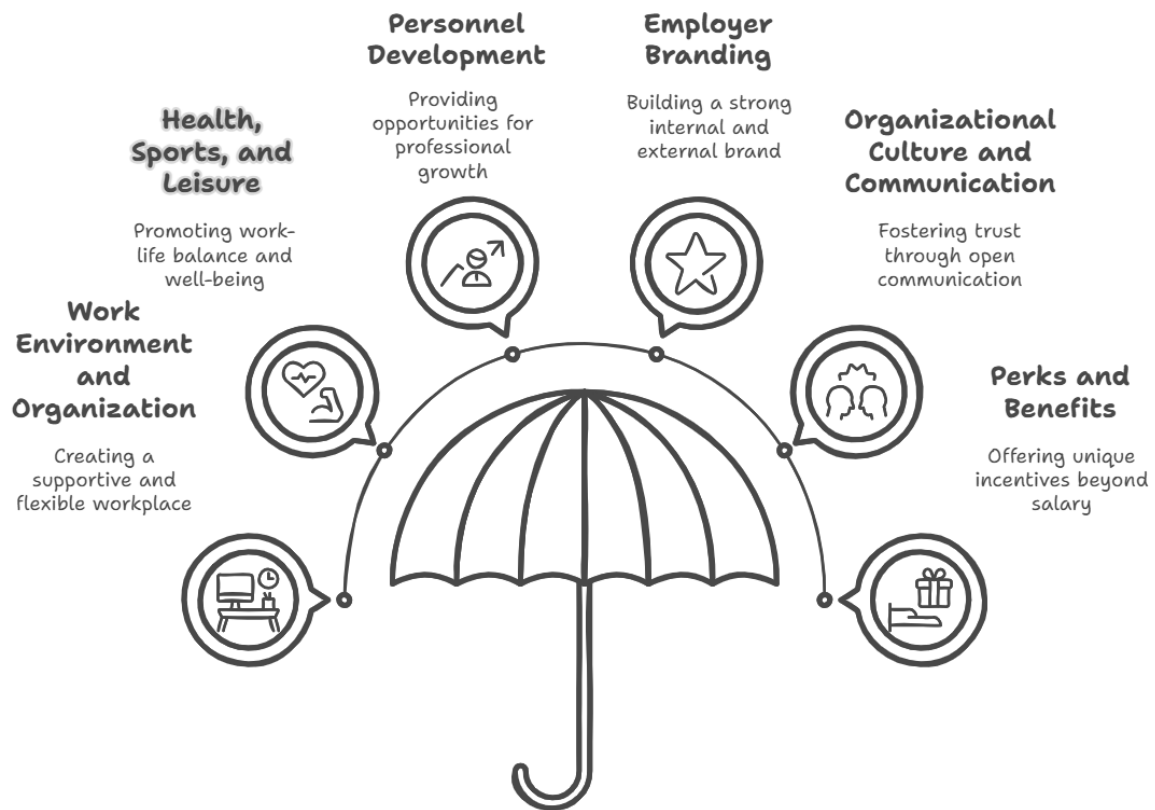


Figure3 : Enhancing Employee Experience

Source: Own representation

A supportive working environment, health-promoting measures and opportunities for personal development are key factors in increasing employee satisfaction. Strong employer branding and open communication promote loyalty and trust. Flexible structures and attractive benefits also strengthen employee retention. Together, these elements form the basis for an effective employee retention strategy.

A Gallup study conducted in November 2024 impressively illustrates the relevance of this issue: only 9% of employees in Germany showed a strong emotional attachment to their company, while 18% had already internally resigned (cf. Diehl 2025). According to this, around 78% of employees merely perform the necessary tasks without committing themselves beyond the required level. Over 20% are actively looking for a job, while 41% are at least open to new career prospects. These figures have risen sharply compared to 2022 and emotional attachment is once again at an all-time low (cf. Onderka 2025). These figures underline the urgency of understanding employee retention not just as a "soft skill", but as a strategic success factor (cf. WIKO 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis makes it clear that motivation in the public sector must be understood as a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional and structural factors. Vroom's VIE model provides a sound theoretical basis for this: it shows that motivation only arises when employees rate the benefits of a possible outcome (valence), the connection between performance and outcome (instrumentality) and their own effectiveness (expectation) as positive. In the public sector in particular, which is characterized by limited opportunities for advancement but high job security and increasing stress, it becomes clear how fragile this balance can be.

A key finding is that job satisfaction and motivation do not arise selectively, but develop as a long-term, subjective assessment of work-related conditions. Temporary frustration does not necessarily lead directly to demotivation, but a permanently experienced lack of development opportunities, recognition or impact does. Motivation is therefore not a *state*, but a dynamic, context-dependent process. The phenomenon of employee turnover is closely related to this. This is not only an expression of individual dissatisfaction, but also an indicator of organizational deficits. High staff turnover among qualified specialists is particularly problematic, as their departure not only jeopardizes knowledge, but also innovative strength and stability. The Gallup figures make it clear that emotional attachment is a critical lever of organizational resilience and that there is currently a massive need for action.

Retention management must therefore be strategic, systematic and personalized. It is not enough to retain employees through salary or benefits. Rather, emotional, normative, calculative and behavioral retention factors must be given equal weighting and integrated into a holistic strategy.

Motivation is not a by-product of organizational structures, but rather their strategic goal and a central prerequisite for motivation, employee retention and the ability to innovate. Only by consciously designing motivating framework conditions and actively promoting individual development potential can emotional loyalty be strengthened and staff turnover sustainably reduced. Loss of motivation is no longer a marginal phenomenon, but a systemic risk factor. The following recommendations for action can be derived.

The regular implementation of cognitive motivation analyses based on the VIE model offers the public sector an effective strategic HR tool. This involves recording employees' subjective assessments of valence, instrumentality and expectation. This data enables the development of targeted measures to promote motivation and commitment as well as long-term loyalty to the organization. This makes motivation analysis a central element of a modern HR strategy. Individual development and career concepts must be implemented. Development prospects are often limited, especially in the public sector. Individual career paths, mentoring programs and further training opportunities can promote a feeling of effectiveness and appreciation, key factors in the VIE model.

In order to systematically strengthen the emotional loyalty of employees, the targeted promotion of emotional intelligence among managers is of central importance. They should be trained to use emotional skills consciously and effectively in everyday management. In particular, appreciative communication, transparent information behavior and participative management approaches make a significant contribution to strengthening affective attachment. This form of emotional connection is an important protective factor against phenomena such as internal resignation and increased staff turnover and is therefore a key element of sustainable personnel management.

Establishing effective retention management requires it to be recognized as a strategic management task. Employee retention must not be seen exclusively as the responsibility of the HR department, but must be an integral part of management behavior at all levels. Managers are responsible for actively contributing to the development, motivation and long-term retention of their employees. This requires that they are specifically strengthened in their role as retention shapers and trained accordingly. Only through a common understanding and coordinated action can employee retention be implemented effectively and sustainably.

Key figure-based management of motivation and staff turnover is a central element of modern HR strategies. This requires the regular collection of relevant indicators such as motivation levels, fluctuation rates and psychological retention components. This data should be systematically transferred to an integrated HR dashboard that enables managers and HR managers to continuously monitor the situation based on data. In this way, critical developments can be identified at an early stage and targeted HR strategy measures can be derived to ensure motivation and retention in the company in the long term.

The literature research conducted as part of this thesis shows that the importance of employee motivation for ensuring the performance of public administration in the public sector is generally recognized. A central guiding principle is the concept of *lifelong learning*, which is relevant for both employees and management.

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