

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15678669>

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT: EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN A PUBLIC AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

Employee motivation is a key success factor in public administration. It not only influences employee performance and satisfaction, but also the quality of public services. Public authorities face specific challenges: limited resources, bureaucratic structures, an often negative image and the consequences of digitalization make it difficult to create a motivating working environment. New Public Management (NPM) transfers principles from the private sector to the public sector in order to strengthen efficiency and citizen orientation. NPM can promote motivation, for example through performance incentives, flexibility and recognition, but also harbors risks such as increased pressure to perform, stress and demotivation. Theoretical principles such as Maslow's pyramid of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory and the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation make it clear that motivation is based on a variety of individual and organizational factors. One-sided performance-oriented approaches often fall short. Measuring employee motivation in public authorities requires both quantitative methods and qualitative instruments. Continuous and differentiated recording is crucial for targeted measures. The central recommendation is that public authorities should understand motivation holistically, take individual needs more into account and establish measures for work-life balance and appreciation. This is the only way to sustainably increase employee motivation and effectively counter the staff shortage in public authorities.

Keywords: New Public Management, NPM, employee motivation, motivation, public authority.

INTRODUCTION

Employee motivation is a key success factor for organizations of all kinds (McKinsey 2024), including public institutions and authorities. It directly influences the performance, productivity and satisfaction of employees and has an indirect effect on the quality and perception of public services by citizens (Pierenkemper 2024). However, promoting employee motivation in public authorities often proves challenging in practice. The reasons for this include structural limitations such as scarce resources, pronounced bureaucratic requirements and a working environment that is often perceived as rigid and rule-bound in public discourse (Falck et al. 2024).

In addition, advancing digitalization is fundamentally changing the framework conditions for administrative work (Lehmann & Beckmann 2024). The integration of new technologies and digital processes requires a high degree of flexibility, willingness to learn and motivation on the part of employees, which in turn can have a direct impact on their motivation (Bitkom 2024). The social perception of public administration also plays a role that should not be

underestimated. A perceived lack of public esteem can have a negative impact on the self-image and intrinsic motivation of employees (McNair 2025).

Against this backdrop, the central question arises as to how the motivation of employees in public authorities can be systematically promoted and maintained in the long term (Pierenkemper 2024). This question becomes particularly important in the context of NPM, a reform approach that aims to strengthen efficiency, effectiveness and customer orientation in public administration by adopting business management principles (Technische Universität Deggendorf 2023). It remains to be seen to what extent NPM principles influence the motivation of administrative staff and what implications this has for strategically oriented personnel management (Choo et al. 2025).

RELEVANCE OF THE CHOSEN TOPIC

Employee motivation is a key success factor for an efficient public administration. It influences job satisfaction and performance as well as the quality and citizen orientation of government services (Avantgarde Experts 2024). In times of growing demands, digitalization and staff shortages, the topic is becoming increasingly important. (Müller & Schmidt 2024).

At the same time, public administration faces structural challenges: limited resources, rigid hierarchies, a high density of regulations and an often negative image make it difficult to create motivating working conditions. The NPM reform model attempts to counter this through business principles such as efficiency, goal orientation and performance incentives (Avantgard Experts 2024). Motivation can be strengthened as a result, but at the same time there is also a risk of overwork, pressure to perform and demotivation. (Weber 2024).

Theories such as Maslow's (1943) pyramid of needs, Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory and concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Fischer 2024) make it clear that motivation is based on a variety of individual and organizational factors. One-sided performance-oriented approaches usually fall short. Employee motivation must be measured continuously and holistically (Ahmed et al. 2024). This is the only way to derive differentiated, needs-oriented measures. Aspects such as appreciation and work-life balance are particularly important. These not only promote motivation and loyalty, but also increase employer attractiveness and help to counteract the staff shortage. (Schneider & Bauer 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public administration plays a central role in the social fabric (Jung 2024). It not only ensures essential services and infrastructure that enable public life to function, but also has a significant influence on citizens' quality of life and trust in state institutions. Employee motivation is a key prerequisite for the efficiency and effectiveness of public administrations. As the supporting pillars of every organization, their motivation and productivity are highly dependent on motivational factors (Rahman & Akhter 2024).

The relevance of employee motivation is just as high in the public sector as it is in the private sector (Ahmed et al. 2024), as it has a direct influence on the quality of the services provided and therefore on citizen satisfaction. At the same time, public administration is confronted with structural challenges that can inhibit motivation. These include limited financial and human resources, pronounced bureaucracy, hierarchical structures and an often negative public image. Cooperative office design, results-oriented administration and the enormous potential of digitalization continue to be strong motivators (Falck et al. 2024).

Against this background, the systematic analysis of motivationally relevant influencing factors is becoming increasingly important. The aim of this work is therefore to develop strategies to sustainably promote these influencing factors. In particular, the focus is on the concept of NPM, which aims to increase the efficiency of the administration by adopting private sector management practices (OECD 2021). The central research question is to what extent NPM principles influence employee motivation and how this potential for motivational optimization can be used in the best possible way (Gagne & Hewett 2025).

Established motivation theories are used to provide a theoretical foundation. Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes motivation as a hierarchical structure of needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to self-actualization (Bakker & Demerouti 2024). In an organizational context, this means that basic needs such as security and material security are a prerequisite for higher levels of motivation, such as recognition or self-development (Jung 2024). Another key approach is Herzberg's two-factor theory, which distinguishes between hygiene factors (e.g. salary, working conditions) and motivators (e.g. recognition, responsibility). While hygiene factors merely prevent dissatisfaction, it is the motivators that actively promote job satisfaction and motivation (Herzberg 1968).

The differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is of central importance. Intrinsic motivation arises from the subjective experience of meaning, interest and fulfillment in work. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is based on external incentives such as monetary rewards or promotion opportunities (Becker & Hoffmann 2024). Both forms are relevant, although intrinsically motivated employees tend to show a higher level of commitment and identification (Kumar & Singh 2024). The sources of motivation are complex; extrinsic factors include salary and career prospects as well as job security and organizational conditions (Attraktive Verwaltung 2024). Intrinsic factors, on the other hand, relate to a personal sense of purpose, enjoyment of the job and the feeling of making a contribution to society, a key aspect in the public sector in particular (Technische Universität Deggendorf 2023).

Social and cultural elements also have an impact on motivation. An appreciative organizational culture, collegial cooperation, respectful treatment and supportive management behavior can have a motivating effect (Germer 2023). The degree of autonomy and self-determination in the work process also has a positive influence on intrinsic motivation (Krauss 2023). In order to promote motivation effectively, it is essential that managers develop a differentiated understanding of motivational psychological relationships (Goldbach 2023). Only a consciously designed working environment that addresses both extrinsic and intrinsic incentives can ensure sustainable employee commitment (Germer 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this article is to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of employee motivation in the context of public administrations, with a particular focus on the implications of NPM. The first step is a systematic presentation of central motivation theory approaches, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory and the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These theoretical foundations form the basis for the subsequent analysis of transferability and applicability to the administrative sector under the paradigms of NPM.

It examines how employee motivation in public authorities can be recorded and which methodological instruments are available to gain a differentiated picture of motivational dynamics. Concrete strategies and measures are presented with which administrations can systematically promote and sustainably strengthen the motivation of their employees.

RESULTS

Employee motivation is a key determinant of success in any organization. However, in the context of NPM, which aims to increase efficiency, performance orientation and citizen satisfaction in public administration by adopting private sector management mechanisms, it becomes particularly relevant (Welt 2025). From the perspective of the NPM, employees in public authorities are no longer seen merely as functionaries, but as active co-creators who contribute significantly to the achievement of institutional and social goals (Bundesministerium des Inneren 2024).

At the same time, the implementation of business management tools in public administration is being discussed critically. In particular, the strong emphasis on performance monitoring, target orientation and efficiency pressure risks undermining employee motivation if it conflicts with the normative values of the public service and its public service orientation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund 2024). However, the effects of NPM on employee motivation are by no means homogeneous, but depend largely on contextual factors such as organizational culture, management style and the specific implementation of reform measures (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund 2024).

Nevertheless, the NPM certainly offers potential for motivational support, for example through performance-based remuneration systems, participatory decision-making processes and a stronger focus on the satisfaction of internal and external stakeholders. An efficient and citizen-oriented public service can contribute to increasing employee satisfaction and motivation as well as improving service quality (Bundesministerium des Inneren 2024).

Recording employee motivation is a methodologically challenging task. It requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to provide a holistic perspective on employee motivation, satisfaction and individual needs. Employee surveys are a widely used instrument (Hakanen et al 2024) to capture aspects such as job satisfaction, leadership experience, fit between individual values and institutional goals as well as organizational commitment (Priotas 2024). Performance-related indicators can also be used to assess motivation, although their significance must be qualified by external factors such as the availability of resources and the working environment (OECD 2021).

In addition, regular feedback meetings are a valuable opportunity to understand individual motivational situations and derive targeted measures (Priotas 2024). Empathetic, attentive and respectful managers who are able to respond to individual needs and promote a culture of appreciation and participation play a central role here (Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände 2024). The measurement of motivation should be understood as a continuous and reflective process that requires ongoing evaluations and strategic adjustments (Factorial 2025).

A well-designed motivation process can also promote a culture of open dialog that gives employees the space to contribute their professional experience, concerns and development potential. This not only contributes to an increase in subjective well-being, but also

strengthens organizational commitment and the willingness to help shape the company (Sparkbay 2025).

With regard to NPM, it is clear that the focus on performance orientation can have both beneficial and detrimental effects. On the one hand, performance-based incentives and customer orientation can generate positive impulses for motivation, commitment and social purpose (Deutscher Beamtenbund 2024). On the other hand, there is a risk that a one-sided emphasis on key performance indicators, target agreements and competitive thinking can lead to demotivation, stress, burnout and to the detriment of collegial cooperation (Priotas 2024).

In addition, changes in structures and processes can lead to uncertainty, rejection and resistance, especially if they are not designed in a participatory manner or are inadequately communicated (Nahrgang 2024). This is particularly true with regard to younger generations such as Generation Z, who place great importance on a good work-life balance (FAZ 2023), self-realization and stability in their professional lives (Deutscher Städtetag 2023). In view of a predicted staff shortage of up to 840,000 jobs in the public sector by 2030, it is essential to meet these demands in order to maintain the attractiveness of the sector (Handelsblatt 2023).

The figure below illustrates various strategies for employee motivation within the public sector. While each strategy is conceptually distinct and categorized individually, interdependencies and overlaps between them are evident. These interrelations suggest that motivational approaches in the public sector should not be viewed in isolation; rather, they function as elements of a broader, interconnected framework. The effectiveness of one strategy may depend on the presence or reinforcement of others, highlighting the need for an integrated and holistic approach to public sector motivation management.

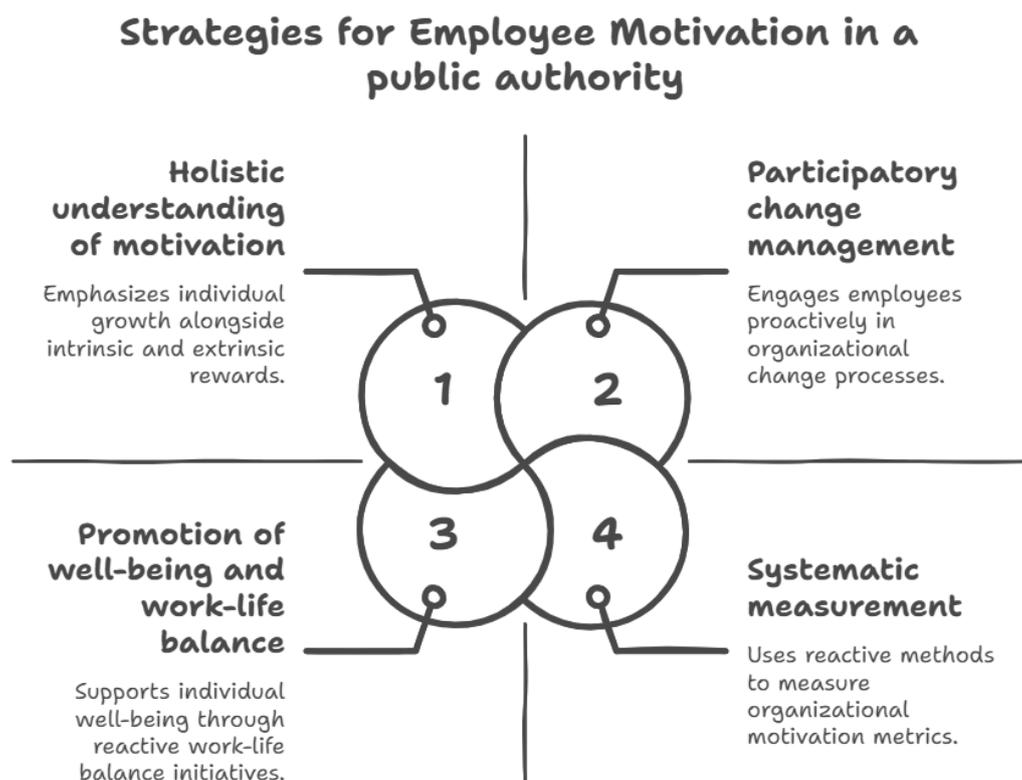


Figure1 : Strategies for employee motivation in a public authority

Source: Own representation

Four specific recommendations for action for a sustainable motivation strategy in public authorities under NPM conditions (Gallup 2024) emerge from the critical analysis. The four fields can be presented in a simplified manner:

- Holistic understanding of motivation: both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives should be taken into account. In addition to performance-related remuneration, individual meaning, social recognition and opportunities for self-realization should also be promoted.
- Systematic measurement: The implementation of continuous monitoring of employee motivation is essential. In addition to traditional performance indicators, this should also include qualitative feedback formats and indicators for satisfaction and psychological well-being.
- Participatory change management: Structural changes should be designed in a transparent, dialog-oriented manner and with the active involvement of employees in order to ensure acceptance and commitment.
- Promoting well-being and work-life balance: Flexible working time models, family-friendly structures and physical and mental health measures are key elements in ensuring long-term motivation and retention.

Overall, it is clear that the design of employee motivation in the public sector under the auspices of NPM requires a differentiated, culturally sensitive and employee-oriented approach. Motivation can only be successfully used as a strategic management tool through an integrated approach that takes both structural framework conditions and individual needs into account (Gajendran & Harrison 2024).

DISCUSSION

The results presented clearly underscore the central role of employee motivation in achieving efficient and citizen-oriented public administration under the paradigm of NPM. However, the application of private sector logic to public institutions must be critically questioned. While performance orientation and efficiency can increase motivation in some contexts, they may also erode core public service values such as stability, solidarity, and long-term public welfare.

A key risk of NPM lies in the instrumentalization of motivation: employees may be reduced to mere performance units, measured by key indicators that often fail to reflect the complexity and societal impact of public service tasks. This narrow focus may lead to the erosion of intrinsic motivation, particularly among employees who are driven by normative ideals such as public value or social contribution. Moreover, the discussion must account for contradictory empirical findings. While participatory approaches and performance-related rewards can enhance motivation in flexible organizational cultures, these same measures can provoke resistance in hierarchical, change-averse environments. This suggests that context sensitivity is essential when applying NPM elements to motivation strategies.

Another point of critique concerns the ambiguous role of leadership under NPM. While managers are expected to drive efficiency and enforce accountability, they are also supposed to foster appreciation, trust, and autonomy, expectations that may conflict in practice. This tension often leads to role overload among public managers, ultimately weakening motivational outcomes. Finally, the social dimension of public service is frequently underemphasized in NPM-driven reforms. Particularly in times of demographic change and generational shifts, public institutions must not only retain skilled personnel but also address changing values and expectations regarding meaning, flexibility, and well-being. A one-size-

fits-all NPM strategy risks alienating precisely those employee groups whose motivation is key to sustaining future administrative capacity.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, this article illustrates the central importance of employee motivation in the context of NPM. Central motivation theory approaches, in particular Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory and the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, are systematically reviewed and reflected on with regard to their relevance for the public sector. It is shown that a high level of employee motivation contributes significantly to the productivity, efficiency and performance of public administrations. The conscious consideration and promotion of motivational factors makes it possible to create a working environment that not only increases employee commitment, but also promotes their identification with their tasks and the organization as a whole.

Measuring employee motivation proves to be a complex challenge that goes beyond traditional performance indicators. Instruments such as employee surveys, structured feedback formats and individual discussions can help authorities to develop a differentiated understanding of motivational dynamics and derive targeted measures. Despite the numerous potentials, the examination of the topic also reveals existing areas of tension. For example, there is no universally applicable solution for increasing motivation, as individual differences, organizational framework conditions and external influences must be taken into account in a differentiated manner. In addition, a one-sided focus on measurable performance targets can entail the risk of neglecting aspects such as job satisfaction and psychosocial well-being.

As a central recommendation for action, it is emphasized that public administrations should promote a culture of appreciation, recognition and participation. In addition, measures for continuous professional development, the creation of a positive working climate and the systematic and ongoing survey of motivational influencing factors should be implemented. Overall, the NPM concept offers a theoretical and practical frame of reference for promoting employee motivation in the public sector. The challenge is to select the strategies available within this framework in a context-sensitive manner and to design them in such a way that they meet both the institutional objectives and the individual needs of the employees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None

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