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CONDITIONS OF SERVICE FOR SENIOR EXECUTIVES IN LITHUANIAN AND ESTONIAN CIVIL SERVICE AND THEIR RELATION TO PUBLIC VALUE CREATION

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ABSTRACT¹

Public value management theory treats public institution managers as leaders who create organisational value through the engagement of citizens, politicians and stakeholders, and implement public value through co-creation and innovation. As the institutionalisation practice of higher civil service expands, the need to understand how the implementation of reforms, the formation of

¹ This project has received funding from the Research Council of Lithuania (LMTLT), agreement No. S-PD-24-172. Finansavimą skyrė Lietuvos mokslo taryba (LMTLT), sutarties Nr. S-PD-24-172.

service conditions and the formation of leadership identities impair their ability to create public value becomes apparent. The aim of this article is to examine these processes in two young democracies – Estonia and Lithuania. The study is based on qualitative data collected from interviews with academic experts and individuals who participated in overseeing and/or implementing civil service reforms in the studied countries, and officials responsible for the implementation of higher civil service policy. The results reveal close links between the reforms being implemented, service conditions and the formation of leaders' identities, which influence their ability to create public value. However, the study also identifies factors that may limit these opportunities – gaps in the ethos of political neutrality, the involvement of politicians in the selection processes of leaders and informal rotation practices. The findings of the study contribute to broader discussions about the directions of civil service reforms and the creation of conditions to increase the attractiveness of these systems and their ability to generate public value in young democracies.

KEYWORDS

Civil service, senior executives, public value, service conditions, Estonia, Lithuania.

INTRODUCTION

The corps of senior executives is one of the most important elements of public policy implementation in solving societal problems². The study reveals that the leadership skills and the needs of today's senior civil servants depend on the context of location and progress and differ significantly from previously set expectations. Old systems need to be adapted to new leadership skills. Today the main challenge for higher civil service officials is to improve outcomes for society by building a value-driven culture³.

The perspective of creating public value emphasises a new approach to public leaders and suggests the need to search for a new identity of leaders that would be characterised by strategic and entrepreneurial abilities in creating public value⁴, understanding modern entrepreneurship as a certain way of acting and thinking that allows leaders to notice ideas and implement them by creating new systems and initiating changes. This topic is very relevant for new democracies that do not have deep systemic traditions of civil service, but are gradually creating civil service systems that need to be quickly adapted to the changing needs of society and its expectations for civil service.

This article focuses on the impact of the service conditions created for heads of institutions on the ability of heads of institutions to create public value in Estonia and Lithuania. After the restoration of independence, Estonia and Lithuania found themselves in similar developmental circumstances and set themselves the same goals – to create a professional corps of senior civil servants and the accompanying consistent administration of their human resources. However, despite similar developmental circumstances, the results sought were not similar. Estonia has paid great attention to the corps of top-level civil servants, especially to the development of their competencies,

² Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis – into the Age of Austerity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 165–166.

³ Daniel Gerson, "Leadership for a High Performing Civil Service: Towards Senior Civil Service Systems in OECD Countries", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance No. 40* (September 2020): 8–17 // <https://doi.org/10.1787/ed8235c8-en>

⁴ Martin Westlake, "Developing the concept of consequential senior European Union civil servants as sub-political policy entrepreneurs", *European Politics and Society* Vol. 26, No. 2 (2025): 515–523 // <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2024.2418954>

for several decades⁵, while in Lithuania this attention has been fluctuating. Attempts have been made to increase it since 2010, but with very modest results, and some practical steps have been implemented only since 2024. Therefore, a comparison of the Estonian and Lithuanian cases becomes relevant, primarily in the context of changing environmental requirements and societal needs, and expectations placed on top-level civil servants. This article does not examine the Senior Civil Service as a whole institutional system. Rather, it focuses on one specific segment within this broader category: heads of institutions operating in the executive branch. The article therefore proceeds by developing the conceptual framework, explaining the rationale for the case selection, presenting and interpreting the empirical findings, and bringing these strands together in the concluding discussion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theory of Public Value. The recently-dominant New Public Management and New Public Governance doctrines were focused on the risks facing governments and suggested that they take into account the strategic practices of private business in order to help increase the value created by the public sector. However, the aspect of public value was not included in the public sector agenda formed by these doctrines. According to M. H. Moore, the goal of managerial work in the public sector is to create public value, just as in the private sector managers create private value for clients, which consumers are inclined to purchase. In essence, the theory of public value in the initial stages of its development was mainly focused on thinking about public administration as a continuous process of improving public services, the value created by the public sector through services, legal regulation and other factors and the public value framework offered by Moore consists of “the strategic triangle”: public value/strategic goals, the authorising environment, operational capability⁶. As scientific discussions about public value deepen, insights have emerged that the content of public value is, in essence, a constant subject of dispute, which is why policymakers, analysts and heads of institutions must constantly focus on what constitutes public value in society at the present time and possible ways to implement it in practice. R. Bozeman argued that it is necessary to establish criteria for public values and define a scale of values that should be followed by heads of institutions.⁷ In later works, M. H. Moore argues that the creation of public value essentially means the creation of social value focused on all citizens, the ability to identify their needs, i.e. to determine what kind of public value creation result taxpayers want, and how to achieve it through the activities of public sector agencies⁸.

It must be noted that in the recently-dominant New Public Management and New Public Governance doctrines, the aspect of public value was not clearly and separately included in the public sector agenda formed by these doctrines. Thus, the entire “burden” of creating public value fell on the heads of institutions, who became intermediaries between the provision of efficient and procedurally fair public services and the

⁵ Külli Sarapuu, Merilin Metsma, Tiina Randma-Liiv and Annika Uudelepp, “Estonia”: 73–88; in: Montgomery Van Wart, Annie Hondeghem and Erwin Schwella, eds., *Leadership and Culture. Comparative Models of Top Civil Servant Training* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁶ Mark Harrison Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁷ Barry Bozeman, *Public Value and Public Interest. Counterbalancing Economic Individualism* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007) 100–113.

⁸ Mark Harrison Moore, *Recognizing Public Value* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

inclusion of citizens in the provision of public services⁹. Considering that the corps of heads of institutions is one of the most important elements of the implementation of the political process, it is relevant to study the changes in this segment of the public sector, as the roles of the public sector change or are changing. Public Value Management, like New Public Governance, emphasises the inclusion of interested and affected parties in decision-making, but positions it as a matter of responsibility for institution managers in creating public value¹⁰ and significantly expands the role of institution managers. "As long as public managers perceive their role as "rule-enforcers" (bureaucracy) or "efficiency drivers" (NPM) <...>, the public sector will remain trapped in its traditional, inward-looking focus on administering its policy programme portfolio. To stimulate the shift toward a more outward-looking focus on the production of social purpose together with societal actors, public managers must begin to see themselves as "value-driven team captains" <...>. A new mindset focusing on how to identify and realise potentials for public value creation and how to do so together with relevant and affected actors is also essential"¹¹. Public Value Management theory treats heads of institutions as leaders who define the value of the public organisation they lead through the involvement of citizens, politicians and stakeholders and implement public value through co-creation and the application of innovation¹², particularly public values innovations, the significance of which is evaluated according to their effects on specific public values¹³. The public value perspective emphasises a new approach to heads of institutions and suggests searching for a new identity of leaders that would be characterised by strategic and entrepreneurial abilities in creating public value¹⁴. Heads of institutions are encouraged to become entrepreneurs and strategists, which also implies a certain freedom of action at their discretion guided by their political acumen/insight, which refers to the skills, knowledge and decisions of public leaders that help heads of institutions recognize and create public value in interaction with politicians. J. Hartley, J. Alford, O. Hughes, S. Yates distinguish such managerial skills that characterise political acumen/insight as strategic thinking and future forecasting, negotiation and mobilisation skills, analysis of interested people and the situations they create, interpersonal relationship building skills, and personal skills such as self-control, openness to other opinions and proactivity¹⁵. Finding practice in the civil service, it is important to distinguish the corps of senior civil servants and, with the help of reform, to form an appropriate human resources administration system for this corps, as well as to form expectations for this corps, it is important to study how service conditions contribute to the opportunities of heads of institutions to create public value. The institutionalisation of the corps of experienced managers and human resources administration (in the form of reform) can

⁹ Petri Virtanen and Harri Jalonen, "Public value creation mechanisms in the context of public service logic: an integrated conceptual framework", *Public Management Review* Vol 26, No. 8 (2024): 2331–2342 // <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2023.2268111>

¹⁰ Jacob Torfing, Lotte Bagh Andersen, Carsten Greve and Kurt Klaudi Klausen, *Public Governance Paradigms. Competing and Co-Existing* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020).

¹¹ Jacob Torfing, *Rethinking Public Governance* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 71–72.

¹² Martin Westlake, "Developing the concept of consequential senior European Union civil servants as sub-political policy entrepreneurs", *European Politics and Society* Vol. 26, No. 2 (2025): 515–523 // <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2024.2418954>

¹³ Nelson, Johan, P., Bozeman, Barry. *Advanced Introduction to Innovation and Public Values* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025).

¹⁴ Martin Westlake, "Developing the concept of consequential senior European Union civil servants as sub-political policy entrepreneurs", *European Politics and Society* Vol. 26, No. 2 (2025): 515–523 // <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2024.2418954>

¹⁵ Jean Hartley, John Alford, Owen Hughes and Sophie Yates, "Public Value and Political Astuteness in the Work of Public Managers: The Art of the Possible", *Public Administration* Vol. 93, No. 1 (2014): 198–200 // <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12125>

change the prevailing features of the public management system and the nature of civil service transactions¹⁶. As transactions change, the identities of managers also change. The identities of managers can determine the public value created, which can inevitably affect both the service conditions of managers and the entire public governance system. This study aims to examine the distinctive features of the studied corps of heads of state institutions in the civil service, and also, using the interview method, to investigate the de facto existing facts/practices about the service conditions, identities and their impact on the public value created.

Main features of the Senior Civil Service Reform. The conditions for identifying with one or another role identity of heads of institutions in the civil service are partly created by human resource management, which is defined by the reform of the civil service system itself, directly related to the improvement of human resources/career administration, which can have an impact on changes in the identity of managers. In the civil service, the corps of senior civil servants consists of heads of ministries, departments, offices, agencies, administrations and other senior officials appointed by the central government of each country¹⁷. Creating public value through a group of senior civil servants requires a harmonious administration of this group, coordination of their development in order to achieve common values and assumed responsibilities. The mobilisation of this group is often treated as a means of overcoming division and solving wicked issues¹⁸. The question arises, to what extent is attention now paid to new management ideas and practices in improving the chain of institution managers, going beyond the boundaries of the New Public Management? The study aims to answer this question by examining officially-formed expectations for today's institution managers and organising the human resources administration of this corps, i.e. forming service conditions, in the context of the Public Value Management theory.

Service conditions. Service conditions in the context of this study are understood as factors that can affect the activities of managers de jure and de facto. These are factors that limit or liberalise the activities of managers legally or practically, with practice understood as certain operational possibilities, traditions, and rules of the game that are followed. Since the role of managers as leaders is important in the context of creating public value, a clear distinction between the role of the leader and the manager. Senior managers are expected to balance and respond to the expectations of many interested groups, involve employees in the goals of the organisation, and inspire them to be part of the processes. In order for managers to have the opportunity to become leaders and identify with certain roles of a civil servant, it is necessary to create appropriate service conditions. First of all, the competency profile becomes an integral part of the senior civil service. The aim is to select candidates for senior management positions who already possess leadership and other necessary competencies. Secondly, continuous development of competencies during service is necessary. This requires appropriate conditions, such as mobility opportunities, internships and offered training programmes. In the context of public value, the formulation of managers' performance

¹⁶ Jacques Bourgault and Karolien Van Dorpe, "Managerial reforms, Public Service Bargains and top civil servant identity", *International Review of Administrative Sciences* Vol. 79, No. 1 (2013): 62–63 // <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852312467739>

¹⁷ John Halligan, "Leadership and the senior civil service from a comparative perspective": 100–114; in B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration* (London: SAGE Publications, 2012).

¹⁸ Tiina Randma-Liiv, Annika Uudelepp and Külli Sarapuu, "From network to hierarchy: the evolution of the Estonian senior civil service development system", *International Review of Administrative Sciences* Vol. 81, No. 2 (2015): 373–391 // <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852314566001>

goals, the assessment of their implementation and service performance, and motivational measures for managers are important.¹⁹

Top Public Managers role identities. In scientific discussions on changes in the identity of heads of institutions in the context of the Public Value Management theory, the question of possible practical changes due to the activities of politicians and administrators is often raised.²⁰ This may be related to the evolution of the bargains of politicians and heads of institutions. Based on the typology of public service bargains, relations between civil servants and politicians are defined as bargains, i.e. certain agreements on cooperation between civil servants and those served – politicians, political parties, clients, society, etc. Civil service bargains are bargains on competencies, remuneration and loyalty. By observing the changes in these three dimensions, we aim to determine whether they can be linked to changes in the role identities of senior civil servants, recognising that identity is not constant and is constantly transforming²¹. Role identity refers to self-assessment as the performer of a certain role. Theoretically, five role identities of heads of institutions are distinguished: leader – manager, policy implementer, professional, specialist in their field, leader in providing services to citizens, political advisor²². Research conducted so far shows that the identities of public leaders can be identified according to their political analysis skills, the nature of the duties performed, and the types and sources of information used in daily work²³.

The identity of the role of the policy implementer is directly related to the managerial nature of the duties performed, the nature of the evidence-based information types and sources applied at work, and the economic nature of political analysis skills. The identity of the role of the policy implementer is characteristic of heads of institutions who identify with a broader understanding of their role, i.e. have widely applicable knowledge, skills and interests. They are characterised by the nature of steering activities, the institutional nature of the types and sources of information applied at work, and eclectic political analysis skills. The identity of the role of the political advisor is characteristic of heads who are characterised by the nature of the policy maker's activities, in their work they mainly use legal information sources, analysis of official documents and are characterised by political analysis skills²⁴. A professional, i.e. a specialist in their field, is responsible for activities requiring specific knowledge, but does not cross the boundaries of the political dichotomy, and does not transition to the identity of an advisor, which can contribute to the formation or implementation of policy.

The role identities of institutional leaders and their combinations (hybrid variants) are important in the context of public value because institutional leaders are encouraged to become entrepreneurs and strategists, which also implies a certain freedom of action

¹⁹ Herma Kuperus and Anita Rode, "Top public managers in Europe: Management and working conditions of the senior civil servants in European Union member states", *European Institute of Public Administration* (December 2008).

²⁰ Jean Hartley, John Alford, Owen Huges and Sophie Yates, "Public Value and Political Astuteness in the Work of Public Managers: The Art of the Possible", *Public Administration* Vol. 93, No. 1 (2014): 195–211 // <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12125>

²¹ Christopher Hood and Martin Lodge, *The Politics of Public Service Bargains. Reward, Competency Loyalty – and Blame* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

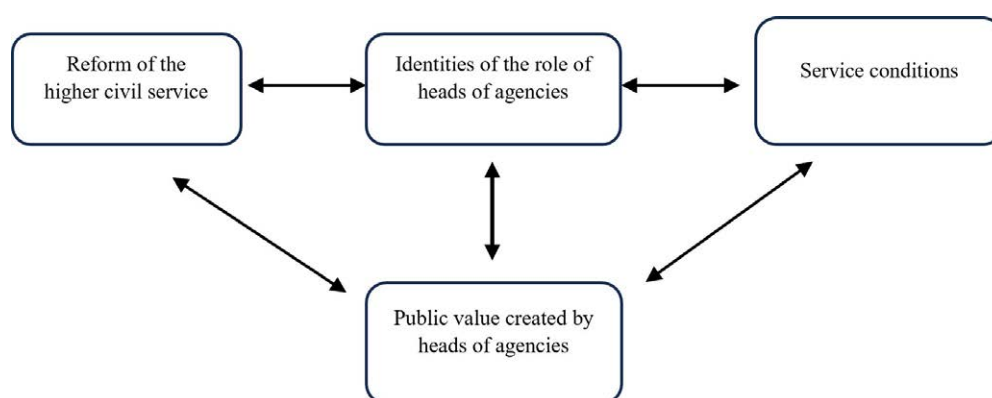
²² Jacques Bourgault and Karolien Van Dorpe, "Managerial reforms, Public Service Bargains and top civil servant identity", *International Review of Administrative Sciences* Vol. 79, No. 1 (2013): 50–52 // <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852312467739>

²³ Giliberto Capano, Alice Cavalieri and Andrea Pritoni, "The triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis and the professional types of high-level civil servants: Empirical evidence from Southern Europe", *Policy Studies Journal* Vol. 53, No. 1 (2025): 72–75 // <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12577>

²⁴ Jacques Bourgault and Karolien Van Dorpe, "Managerial reforms, Public Service Bargains and top civil servant identity", *International Review of Administrative Sciences* Vol. 79, No. 1 (2013): 58–63 // <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852312467739>

at their discretion guided by their political acumen/insight, which refers to the skills, knowledge and decisions of institutional leaders that help institutional leaders identify and create public value in interaction with politicians²⁵. This requires bureaucratic competencies that are broader than just knowledge of administrative processes, but also detailed knowledge of specific policy areas, details of politics and political dynamics, covering different stages of policy formation. This must include a knowledge base of all legitimate and feasible ways that can be used to achieve a specific goal. Focusing not only on the result, but also on the process, as well as political analysis skills, helps bureaucrats to engage in policy formation, and not just engage in policy implementation²⁶. For this reason, it is important to investigate whether heads of institutions have the motivation and conditions to identify with the role of political advisor.

Figure 1. Conceptual research model



CASE SELECTION

Estonia and Lithuania are Baltic states that have experienced similar historical events, having been part of the Soviet Union, having regained their independence at a similar time, and having become members of the European Union and NATO in 2004. These two young democracies had to build their public administration system and civil service from scratch.

In Estonia, until 2004, no special attention was paid to a special category of civil servants – the top civil servants. The first Civil Service Act (1996–2012) did not stipulate the existence of top officials as a distinct category except their recruitment and selection through the Selection and Evaluation Committee of Top Civil Servants at the Government Office. Although top executives became treated as a special group for training and development purposes since 2004 and a rather complex system evolved incrementally, including a competency model and a voluntary development programme under the leadership of the Government Office, it existed without any statutory basis until 2012. The Second Civil Service Act (2012) formalised the top civil service by distinguishing it as a separate civil service category. The positions covered in the top civil service include the Secretary of State, Secretary Generals and Deputy Secretary

²⁵ Jean Hartley, John Alford, Owen Hughes and Sophie Yates, "Public Value and Political Astuteness in the Work of Public Managers: The Art of the Possible", *Public Administration* Vol. 93, No. 1 (2014): 201–207 // <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12125>

²⁶ Giliberto Capano, Alice Cavalieri and Andrea Pritoni, "The triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis and the professional types of high-level civil servants: Empirical evidence from Southern Europe", *Policy Studies Journal* Vol. 53, No. 1 (2025): 84–86 // <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12577>

Generals of the Ministries, and Director Generals of the Executive Agencies (such as boards and inspectorates).²⁷

In Lithuania, until 2024, Senior Managers were not defined as a special group of civil servants in the Law on Civil Service. However, their positions were considered exceptional – the management of top positions is differentiated from the rest of the civil service only with respect to their recruitment, performance appraisal and training. Despite a few attempts to create a professional senior civil service, no sufficient political support has been mobilised for this reform in the Seimas, the Government and the President's Office. For instance, a proposal to establish a senior civil service in 2013—while the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party was in government—was dismissed on the grounds that it would have created a new nomenklatura in the country's administration,²⁸ although the initiated reform received obvious approval from senior management.²⁹ After the 2020 Lithuanian Seimas elections, the Government Programme provided for the centralisation of the corps of heads of institutions³⁰, and from 2024, Senior Managers are defined as a special group of civil servants in the Law on Civil Service.

RESEARCH DATA AND METHODS

This article uses qualitative data on the working conditions of senior civil servants in Estonia and Lithuania. The study relies on semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants in Estonia and Lithuania. During the empirical study, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with Estonian and Lithuanian academic experts, as well as individuals who participated in the preparation and/or implementation of civil service reforms in the countries under study, and individuals who were involved in the implementation of senior civil service policy at the time of writing. The respondents were selected through snowball sampling. The respondent pool includes two analytically distinct groups, the interviews provide both insider and expert perspectives on that object. In March 2025, five semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted live in Estonia (Tallinn). Three semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted online via video call in April-May, and one semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted live in Slovakia (Bratislava), all these three with Lithuanian respondents. Bratislava was only the location where the interview could be arranged in person during the scientific conference. The interviews lasted approximately one hour on average. An interview guide was prepared in advance on the basis of the theoretical literature. Respondents were assured that the interview data would be used anonymously. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the intended use of the interview material. Participation was voluntary. Respondents gave consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded and were assured that their identities would not be disclosed. In the article, respondents are presented using anonymised interview codes, and identifying

²⁷ Tiina Randma-Liiv, Cerlin Pesti and Külli Sarapuu, "Public Service Development in Estonia: From Patronage to Meritocracy": 154–155; in: Alichan Baimenov and Panos Liverakos, eds., *Public Service Evolution in the 15 Post-Soviet Countries. Diversity in Transformation* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

²⁸ Vitalis Nakrošis, "Lithuanian Civil Service Reform 1990–2018: From the Communist Legacy to a Professional Administration": 356; in: Alichan Baimenov and Panos Liverakos, eds., *Public Service Evolution in the 15 Post-Soviet Countries. Diversity in Transformation* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

²⁹ Remigijus Civinskas, "Lietuvos aukštesniosios valstybės tarnybos sistemos reforma: aukštesniųjų vadovų požūriai ir laikysenos": 164–165, in: Sailius Pivoras, Remigijus Civinskas and Ernesta Buckienė, eds., *Valstybės sistemos tobulinimas Lietuvoje: pasirinkimai, požūriai, sandėriai* (Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas: Versus aureus, 2014).

³⁰ Simona Statneckytė, *Lietuvos valstybės tarnybos tobulinimas europeizacijos perspektyvoje*, (Klaipėda: Klaipėda University Press, 2022), 120–121.

details are limited to broad characteristics such as country, gender, years of experience, sector, and general professional profile. The interview data were used only for the purposes of this research. Data analysis was performed using thematic coding and keyword searching. Coding was carried out by marking appropriate parts of the text and naming them with appropriate words, assigning them to such categories as Senior Civil Service Reform, Features of the Public Administration System, Top Public Managers role identities, Service Conditions, Public Value.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Nickname	Country	Gender	Years of experience	Job level	Sector
INT 1	EE	F	25	Senior specialist	Higher education/research
INT 2	EE	F	23	Top management	Central government
INT 3	EE	F	17	Top management	Central government
INT 4	EE	F	25	Senior specialist	Higher education/research
INT 5	EE	F	33	Senior specialist	Higher education/research
INT 6	LT	F	14	Top management	Central government
INT 7	LT	F	26	Top management	Central government
INT 8	LT	M	27	Top management	Central government
INT 9	LT	M	27	Senior specialist	Higher education/research

This is a comparative study, as it compares the regulation of civil service human resources administration in Lithuania and Estonia, but also in this article the informants' responses are analysed in a generalised manner, as the aim of the study is to understand the relationship between service conditions and public value creation opportunities in the higher civil service. Particular attention should be paid to the case of Estonia, because in this country the higher civil service as a separate corps of managers in the civil service has been formed and consolidated for almost several decades, therefore the Estonian case is analysed as a starting point for assessing the latest reforms in Lithuania and their possible consequences in the future.

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the number of interviews is limited, and the findings should therefore be interpreted as exploratory. Second, the respondent pool combines practitioners and academic experts, which strengthens contextual interpretation but does not allow all findings to be attributed exclusively to office-holders. Third, the interviews provide perceptions and expert interpretations of reform processes rather than direct measurement of institutional performance or public value outcomes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS: CONDITIONS OF SERVICE FOR SENIOR EXECUTIVES IN LITHUANIA AND ESTONIAN CIVIL SERVICE

Viewpoints on the Main Features of Senior Civil Service Reform

The beginning of the reform of the higher civil service in Estonia was directly related to the changes in the Government in 2003, because the new Secretary of State was a person who strongly believed in the vision of a good bureaucracy, he had a background in a public law unit as well as a strong background in the German legislative system. He can be called the main catalyst of the process, who put forward the idea that this specific group of civil servants would be singled out and that special attention would be

paid to the administration of human resources of this group and their leadership development. He managed to remain in the position of Secretary of State for a fairly long time, which helped to guarantee the continuity of the processes. This process was accompanied by generous support from the European Union structural funds at that time.

In principle, two main reasons for these processes in Estonia can be distinguished. The first is to set certain standards for the recruitment and development of top civil servants and maintain overall coordination of the system, as this group stands out from the rest of the civil service, has specific needs, and is potentially the group responsible for policy implementation and leadership. Secondly, in addition to certain purely pragmatic aspects of the reform, it should be emphasised that the processes related to the reform were also aimed at creating a culture for the senior civil servant group:

INT 5: "In the early years, they really had kind of more like social events or something like sort of teambuilding events, like, I don't know, making sushi together or something like that. Got to know each other. <...> in the background that as a good way discussing things with each other and learning, vacuum culture and the top civil service".

As mentioned earlier, at the time this reform was launched in Estonia, the trend of creating such a corps was popular in Europe. Lithuania also had intentions to create a higher civil service, but they were not implemented. This was due to concerns that this would create a closed caste in the Lithuanian civil service, which no one from outside it would be able to enter. Thus, the idea was shelved for a long time. Political will and fundamental changes were only achieved in 2023–2024. Based on these changes, it was stated that the main priority was to improve the quality of the activities of heads of institutions in the civil service. This was made necessary by the emerging old and new environmental challenges. In Lithuania, the positions of heads of institutions were uncompetitive in the market, few candidates applied for management positions, and those who applied did not have the necessary competencies. This led to the aim of reviewing the social guarantees offered to managers and taking rather unpopular decisions, as a huge gap in salaries was identified compared to the private sector. It was also aimed to regulate many other aspects of human resources administration related to this group of civil servants. When assessing the changes made, it can be said that the intentions of the reform authors in creating the transformation really resonated with the premise of creating public value – attracting competent and innovative managers, but the changes can only be treated as the first steps.

In recent years, cases of managers in the Lithuanian civil service institutions who, under certain circumstances, want to be more oriented not to commercial results, but to benefits for society, are interested in the possibility of implementing changes in public administration institutions have appeared in the community. Despite the insufficiently attractive image of the civil service or the less competitive remuneration, there are candidates who want to come and make changes. However, the existing features of the civil service and politics can create certain signals that are inappropriate and can cause disappointment. There are many examples in Lithuania where:

INT 9: "Managers come to the top positions from the private sector and they do not adapt to a different environment, because there are many differences. They can bring entrepreneurship, they can bring some managerial models or methods, but they have to adapt, because the differences are very significant,

you know, when there is no single owner, there is a multi-level management environment, you have to work with various interested groups to achieve something. There are regulations that you have to follow, etc. <...> His exit, slamming the door (author's remark - one of the managers in the Lithuanian civil service) sends such a negative signal that this is such a quagmire, which it is difficult to get out and maybe it is better not to get in it at all. We need to show more good examples, because there are good examples out there."

A similar situation was recorded during an interview in Estonia.

Top Public Managers role identities

When it comes to the role identities of heads of institutions in the civil service and their relationships with politicians, the qualitative research data revealed that there is no dominant role identity for managers in Estonia, i.e. in practice, various types of deals arise:

INT 5: "<...> depends very much on the politician and depends very much on the top civil servant. It's both ways. <...> there is no, like, very clear culture of this public service bargain, it's very individual. We don't have collective public service bargain. <...> So it's always this public service bargain is sort of founded from scratch in each combination".

The formation of identities of public leaders is determined by several circumstances. One of them is the openness of politicians to relations with their leaders, i.e. the extent to which leaders are inclined to accept them not only as policy implementers or specialists and professionals in their field, but also as advisors. This often depends on the politicians' environment and political party. If politicians do not have experts in their environment or do not invite them to their ministry team, they have to rely on the knowledge of civil servants. Another important aspect is the politicians' own abilities and competencies to engage in political activity. If politicians set unachievable goals for leaders or go beyond the limits of legal acts, then mutual confrontation may arise.

In the case of Lithuania, politicians have always participated in the selection of heads of institutions in the civil service before and after the reform, which is why the practice is being formed that leaders respond to the political line, even without being members or ideological supporters of a specific political party. Another important aspect in Lithuania, as in Estonia, when it comes to the formation of leaders' identities – everything depends on the Government, on the minister, on the policy being implemented: some politicians focus on results and choose a management model and implement management instruments.

Another important circumstance is related to heads of institutions in the civil service – in not all cases in Estonia must they have specific knowledge, i.e. be specialists in their field. Often, senior managers are professional managers, especially in cases where persons who previously worked as managers in the private sector become managers, because competitions for positions in Estonia are open. The need for more expert knowledge is characteristic of the position of Deputy Secretary General. Thus, the identity of the role of managers is partly determined by politicians themselves when preparing the conditions for selecting managers.

A slightly different approach has been formed in Lithuania – the dominant tendency to search for managers/specialists, which has been formed in practice. Although

a specialist here should be understood not only as a professional in his field, but also as an administrator, executor and guarantor of legal order. This is an old type of “generalist”, although not quite corresponding to the classic generalist with a general broad humanitarian education, but more of a functionary-type generalist. A “generalist” in Lithuania is still understood not as a professional manager, but rather as a specialist with an education in law or economics or simply practical experience in administrative management work³¹. Obviously, when a manager is hired for a specific field, it can be expected that he will have some knowledge of it, for example:

INT 7: “<...> if he is hired to any kind of forestry, it is expected that he has some appropriate knowledge. But again, it must be understood that this depends on the specific institution that announces the competition. The competition is initiated by a specific minister.”

According to the Lithuanian Law on Civil Service, formal candidates for the position of head of an institution in the civil service must have obtained a master’s degree, and specific knowledge may be required when the ministry announces the competition or become an advantage during the selection process.

Estonian heads of institutions are characterised by an ethos of political neutrality, the ability to work with various political leaders, which is why politicians usually trust the knowledge of their civil service leaders. Another important aspect is that during the selection of senior managers, candidates must present their vision of the direction in which the institution’s policy should move while representing the interests of society during the manager’s term of office. Therefore, managers are the strategic leaders of the institution and are expected to play the role of policy implementer, which requires the ability to cooperate with politicians, rather than simply follow their instructions:

INT 4: “They’re supposed to be negotiators, in some sense, between the political level and the ministry or the agency. They are supposed to protect the interests of the organisation. <...> It’s definitely not about saying “yes, sir,” to the politicians. They have to come up with their own ideas, but at the same time, they have to advise the politicians as well, so they are expected to do everything basic.”

Initiatives in Estonia for creating public value often come to the political arena from the “bottom”, i.e. from the institution managers. Often, managers become informal advisors to politicians and understand their role as helping politicians, if only they are able to accept it. The creation of initiatives together with politicians or the ability to transfer them to politicians is related to the entrepreneurial skills of managers, i.e. the skills and willingness to do something more than specified in the manager’s selection description. First of all, these skills are identified during the selection process, when candidates present their vision of the direction in which the organisation should move, what goals should be achieved, etc. It is always expected that managers will “inject fresh blood into the system” and create public value. The second stage, in which the ability of managers to create public value becomes apparent, is manifested through their relationship with politicians, through their understanding of how the civil service

³¹ Saulius Pivoras, “Ar aukštesniosios valstybės tarnybos kūrimas įtvirtina vadybinį valstybės tarnybos sandėrį Lietuvoje?": 181–188, Saulius Pivoras, Remigijus Civiškas and Ernesta Buckienė, eds., *Valstybės sistemos tobulinimas Lietuvoje: pasirinkimai, požūriai, sandėriai* (Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas: Versus aureus, 2014).

system works, and through their ability to lead in overcoming certain crises. Respondents said that such personalities among the leaders include:

INT 2: "For example, this manager in this agriculture and food board, he actually surprised us, creating dedicated, I would say rescue, deep for those animals who are mistreated, so that he decided to create a rescue team who travels around Estonia and basically on the spot deals with those different kinds of animals <...> Takes them away from their owners, if necessary and kind of interferes in these situations, because there was very strong public disappointment in how this board has acted over the years like animals, elect with the owners and the situations getting worse and then the animals died and things like that. So, he immediately decided to address it. So, it was a little bit like, hmm, okay, you really need something keeping in mind that kind of common good."

The Top Civil Service Excellence Centre, which is engaged in the selection of heads of institutions in Estonia, engages in "head hunting" in the private sector and is trying to attract as many professional managers as possible to the system. However, bearing in mind that leadership in the civil service and the ability to achieve certain goals while creating public value are directly related to their relationships with politicians and understanding of how the civil service system works, this sometimes becomes a challenge and causes disappointment for managers who have come from the private sector.

In Lithuania, the Public Management Agency, which is engaged in the selection of heads of institutions, also engages in "head hunting", in certain cases outsources the service, but the main difference identified during the interview between the selection of managers in Estonia and Lithuania is that in Lithuania, during the selection, a booklet is prepared for candidates, which lists the expectations for the manager's five-year term of office in relation to the Government's programme and the plan for implementing the programme's measures. Then, the plan is agreed with the candidate and it is planned that an annual discussion of the results achieved by the manager will take place. The main difference is that during the selection process, candidates are not required to present their vision of the direction in which the institution's policy should move, representing the interests of society during the term of office of the head, which is why the heads are not in practice strategic leaders of the institution, and do not have the systematic tools to emerge in the role of a policymaker. However, if we are talking about individuals who bring their own ideas and intentions to create public value in Lithuania, then in certain circumstances it is possible:

INT 9: "It depends on the person's ambition: if a person has a strategic ambition, then you need to pay close attention to whether the Government's plan corresponds to that ambition. If it corresponds to it and there is contact with the minister, then I would say you can boldly proceed, because in terms of public policy and management you can achieve a result."

Senior executives' service conditions

It should be noted that the object of this study is small countries, which are characterised by certain specificities, i.e. the number of senior managers in both the civil service and the private sector is not very large and managers often acquire a certain reputation and that unofficial messages travel through the system. Therefore, the Estonian management selection centre sometimes conducts an unofficial "head hunting" in the

management market by inviting managers to the selection. However, the selection process is open, formal and standardised. The selection is implemented by a selection committee consisting of six people: the Secretary of State, the Head of Top Civil Service Excellence Centre, the Secretary General for the Ministry of Finance, the Secretary General with the longest length of service, the Secretary General for the Ministry that is looking for the Top Manager, and a recruitment expert and a leadership expert. When a ministry starts looking for a manager for a position and presents basic competencies and other guidelines, the committee discusses this, what kind of manager is needed for a specific position, and what kind of personality would be most suitable. The further selection process is standardised: candidate documents are analysed, interviews are held with selected candidates in the ministry, standardised interviews, psychometric tests, practical tasks, simulations, behavioural assessments, language and other skills tests, questionnaires, and background checks are conducted, and committee meetings are held with the candidate. Then the committee makes a decision, which is submitted to the minister for approval. There have been several cases when the minister rejected a candidate, but such a practice is extremely rare.

The selection of heads of institutions in the civil service in Estonia is based on a competency model, at the first level three competencies are important: organisational management, personnel management and communication/relationship management, and these competencies have specific directions. However, in addition to these general managerial competencies, in some cases specific work experience is also requested, sometimes a specific master's degree is requested. Whether specific or more general knowledge is given priority depends on the level to which the manager belongs:

INT 1: "Like there are big differences, because basically there are three groups (managers – author's remark). <...> first Secretary General <...> mostly they have civil service background, but it's always by negotiation and invitation to become Secretary General, and then the government office gives its opinion on the candidate. Mostly they have strong civil service backgrounds like, for example, now the government changed, have a new Secretary of State who has very long civil service expertise. He used to be Secretary General of the Minister of Climate and the new Secretary General of the Minister of Climate, who was appointed he's a long-term serial servant who was diplomat for last twenty year, or something like that.

So these are Secretaries -General, then the Vice Secretaries General, their job is relatively different because they are responsible for the general administration of the ministry of managing this political administration interface, basically making sure that the apparatus is working, and supporting the minister, but Vice Secretaries General, they are all responsible for certain policy field, so there is difference, because they are general managers, they are responsible for specific policy field, so very often they have backgrounding in this field. <...> if you have to manage energy or anything else normally you should know something about. And, also then the third group are the Directors General of agencies and they usually also need to have some policy knowledge."

In Lithuania, there is a practice that the selection commission for heads of institutions in the civil service consists of two or three civil servants of the Public Administration Agency, the head of the structural unit that coordinates that area, a representative

of the Government from the Government Chancellery may also be included, and the chairman of the commission is the vice-minister or chancellor of the Ministry. In Lithuania, the latter two positions are positions of political trust, which, given the features of the Lithuanian public administration system, may imply the dependence of the head on the political situation. During interviews with respondents, cases of a lack of political neutrality in Lithuania were recorded:

INT 7: "But politicians should not hunt and interfere in the daily activities of institutions. Institutions must operate according to the law, not according to the instructions of politicians – do this and do it this way. Who must win the public procurements and the like. We still have those telephone rights".

After the candidates submit their documents, the competence assessment begins, which is carried out by experts from the Public Management Agency. After the agency evaluates the documents and the candidates' competences, the best candidates are filtered out and passed on to the commission for assessment. During the competence assessment, three general competences (analysis and reasoning, organisation, communication) and three managerial and leadership competences (strategic approach, performance management and leadership) are assessed. The commission has a choice of how to assess candidates – semi-structured interviews and homework assignments are possible. The organisation of the process depends on the number of candidates. Sometimes a search agency is engaged as a "head hunter" through public procurement. In Lithuania, institution managers include heads of agencies under ministries and government institutions. Formally, they are required to have a master's degree and have managerial experience, which is defined by the recruiting ministry.

There is no officially-established system of rotation of heads of institutions in Estonia, it can be more accurately called de facto supported and encouraged mobility of managers between the civil service and the private sector and within the civil service. Heads of institutions can officially run for a second five-year term in the same institution, but most often heads work in the same institution for an average of seven to eight years:

INT 2: „We provide them with career coaching so that they can start to think, where to move <...>. We encourage them to apply to other positions as well, our main concern or what we try to take care of is that they are not kind of left entirely on the road or somehow vulnerable in the employment market or something like that. Okay, so we are interested as well that those people who have served the country. They will find the next position or solid job".

INT 3: "The centre is actually doing career management. <...> And if the competition starts, or if the vacancy appears, than they say, listen, you see, there will be a competition, you should think about it. So, the rotation actually exist".

INT 4: "Not official, but they do change that positions. The Secretary General of economics and communications became the Secretary General of the Minister of Finance. The previous secretary general of economics of communications, went to the ministry of source social affairs, and so that *is, there is, this rotation*'.

Lithuania also does not have an officially established system of rotation of heads of institutions. If the current head is satisfactory to the ministry, he can remain in office for a second term and no competition is announced. If rotation takes place, it is

unofficial and unregulated, taking place on the same principle of “head hunting”, which, according to some respondents, does not create the conditions for creating a higher civil service system in principle:

INT 7: “<...> it should not only be education. There should be attraction, onboarding. Then their career guidance. Then, when the term of office is ending, working with them to help them find another position, in that sense, it should be a full-profile job, but that was not regulated in principle.”

When it comes to the assessment of the performance of senior managers in Estonia, it can be stated that there is no specific system for assessing the achieved goals, and if assessment does take place, it takes place depending on the practice of the specific ministry, because the Secretary General of the Minister is accountable to the minister, the Secretary General Deputies are accountable to the Secretary General, and the Directors General of agencies are subordinately accountable to the ministry.

In Lithuania, the new performance management resource for heads of institutions in the civil service aims to create service agreements with heads of institutions in the civil service and to conduct an annual assessment of performance and tenure results based on a service agreement, which is signed when the head of the institution is appointed. This practice has only just begun to be implemented in the civil service since 2024.

In Estonia, at the beginning of the reform, when the European Union structural funds were mainly used, intensive improvement of the competences of managers took place, they had common management training programmes, and also had opportunities to improve individually according to their needs, for example, they learned foreign languages or went to Harvard Kennedy School summer camps, etc. When appointing a manager to a position, expectations were expressed as to what competences they were expected to improve. Today’s situation is based on the voluntary desire of managers to improve their existing competencies and acquire new ones. The Top Civil Service Excellence Centre provides such opportunities, but does not force anyone, nevertheless, the vast majority of managers improve their competencies voluntarily:

INT 2: “Actually, altogether, we have approximately 95 top civil servants. It’s less than 10% who are never showing up, so the majority is interested and we have three different kinds of activities”.

One of the learning directions is related to their individual career, the second is related to core competencies, where workshops are organised, with the main focus being on leadership competencies and the competency model that underpins the civil service in Estonia. The third set is related to creating a similar mindset and knowledge in specific topics. For example, this year and the year before that, the focus is on innovation management, how to create innovative solutions, what are the models used in the world. Development programmes have been prepared where managers can together solve certain problems and then come up with solutions by applying then these methods that they learn. Conferences are organised for senior civil servants once a year. When it comes to individual development, a “work cycle” is used: when a new manager starts his position, he is assigned a mentor, after two or three years of the manager’s term of office, a 360-degree feedback is applied, and later managers become mentors.

In Lithuania, competence development is mandatory for managers who have taken office for their first term, and an individual development plan is drawn up. In

addition to this obligation, the Public Administration Agency organises various formats of competence development events for managers: networking events for managers, a mentorship project, a leadership academy and a manager club format, where managers share their experience.

When it comes to the salary system for public managers in Estonia, it can be stated that it is highly decentralised. Legally regulated salaries exist for civil servants, such as the Secretary of State. The salary amount for agency managers varies. This depends on several aspects. One of them is the ability of the ministry to negotiate with the Ministry of Finance on the amount allocated for salaries. The second reason is related to the size and importance of the agencies; the salaries of some agency managers may be higher than those of other agencies. However, when analysing the salary system as a whole and without highlighting some individual examples, salaries for heads of institutions in the civil service are lower than in the private sector, bearing in mind that the system is open and persons holding managerial positions can also work in the private sector. According to many respondents, the choice to work in the civil service is associated with the leaders' desire to serve their country and create public value:

INT 3: „Yes, but another motivation might be, I think, the mission. <...> to do something interesting, to do something for Estonia“.

INT 2: “Come and serve your country. And I think when you are staying in your 50s or 60s, often these people, they already have some, you know, some finances or investments for some while they can afford to give something back to the country”.

New civil service regulations in Lithuania have expanded the possibilities for new managers to offer higher salaries, which has essentially encouraged greater interest in competitions among candidates from the private sector. The new salaries are not yet fully competitive with the salaries of company managers in the private sector, but opportunities have been created for this and the situation is changing rapidly.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that attracting leaders who are both willing and able to create public value for society may be facilitated by service conditions that contribute to the formation of leadership identities. Such conditions can be established through civil service reform aimed at developing a senior civil service. The comparative analysis of reforms in Lithuania and Estonia showed which service conditions are more conducive to responding to the public value framework of the strategic triangle. First, with regard to public value creation and the strategic goals of senior civil servants — which emerge as leaders consider how best to create value for society through services, projects, programmes, and other public interventions — the analysis of the two cases demonstrated the particular importance of leadership selection. In this respect, it is important to treat candidates in the selection process as strategic creators of public value, allowing them to bring their own vision, rather than approaching them merely as professionals capable of implementing a pre-defined programme. Second, in relation to the authorising environment, the study showed that the Estonian case is characterised by political trust in neutral professionals, who are perceived not only as administrators, but also as negotiators capable of engaging with the contested nature of value and acting as value-driven

leaders. The conditions of political astuteness in interactions with politicians is more possible with a strong ethos of political neutrality. As the interview data showed, one of the most striking and relatively unexpected differences in the terms of service of senior managers between Estonia and Lithuania is the much more pronounced possibilities for the politicisation of the selection of senior managers in Lithuania. Therefore, in the context of creating public value, it is important to assess how it is possible to create a more apolitical system for the selection of heads of institutions. The participation of politicians in the selection process of heads of institutions should be eliminated in order to ensure the political independence of managers, so that the head of the institution is free to act and create public value and is not constrained by political connections. The study also revealed that in both countries there is no officially regulated system of rotation of managers and the agencies responsible for the administration of human resources of heads of institutions do it unofficially. This fact also allows for a discussion about the possible manifestations of certain protectionism and creates prerequisites for further scientific research on the practical possibilities of creating and implementing such official rotation systems. Operational capacity in both young democracies examined in the study is strongly expressed through the development of senior civil servants' competencies, long-term competency-building systems, mentoring, and networking. However, it should be noted that, in Lithuania, at the time of writing, the new system was only beginning to operate and had not yet reached institutional maturity.

A specific aspect of service conditions — the selection process for senior civil servants — plays a crucial role in shaping leaders' role identities. The theoretical analysis showed that the political adviser role identity is particularly characteristic of leaders whose work is closely linked to policy formulation. In the context of public value creation, this form of identity is especially important in relation to political astuteness. The study revealed that the design of the selection procedure may, in advance, privilege the recruitment of leaders who identify primarily as professionals or sectoral experts. By contrast, a depoliticised selection process creates greater space for leaders' role identities to develop more organically, depending on the specific relationship that emerges between individual leaders and political actors. Under such conditions, leaders may be more able to assume the role identity of a political adviser and, through this, contribute to the creation of public value.

The comparative analysis of reforms in two young democracies revealed that the relationships between the theoretical elements identified in this article are also observable in practice. The reforms under examination encouraged innovative thinking among senior civil servants and supported the creation of public value. However, they also revealed certain limitations that merit further discussion. For example, although improvements in service conditions for senior civil servants are viewed positively, the civil service in both Estonia and Lithuania has not yet acquired a distinctive attractiveness of its own. In these countries, senior civil servants are currently motivated to enter and remain in the civil service not only by service conditions, but also by personal social maturity, opportunities to gain new experience, and the possibility of implementing change in order to create public value. Moreover, the exercise of entrepreneurial leadership in interactions with politicians appears to be more feasible where a strong ethos of political neutrality is in place.

Future research could examine in greater depth whether more depoliticised selection systems create more favourable conditions for senior civil servants to act as strategic creators of public value and as politically astute leaders. Another important

avenue for future research concerns the institutionalisation of rotation and career development systems for senior civil servants. Since neither Lithuania nor Estonia has a formally regulated rotation system for senior civil servants, future studies could explore whether such systems might strengthen professional mobility, reduce informal protectionism, and contribute to the more coherent development of a senior civil service ethos.

Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in the Lithuanian case, where the new senior civil service system remains at an early stage of implementation. Finally, future comparative research could extend the analysis beyond Lithuania and Estonia by including other young democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. This would allow researchers to assess whether the relationships identified in this study between politicisation, political neutrality, leadership identity, and public value creation are specific to the Baltic context or reflect broader patterns of administrative system development.

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