

Influence of line management on public servants' motivation

by

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ABSTRACT

Line management practices are paid a vast amount of attention in the private sector and in international organizations in many countries, as it has a strong impact on employees' motivation. Whether line management is also important in motivating public servants in Kazakhstan? The research team conducted a survey of the private and public sector employees to answer this question. The research was focused on line management practices and their influence on employees' motivation in both sectors. As the results of the research showed, there is a strong correlation between line management practices and employees' motivation and at the same time, there are differences in those practices between public and private sector, with private sector international companies being more effective in terms of line management. By outlining purposes or stating the nature of the present research the qualitative data analysis was used in this project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|--|
| LM | Line Management |
| PMK | Philip Morris Kazakhstan LLP |
| WBCO | World Bank country office in Kazakhstan |
| MNE | Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan |
| GPO | General Prosecutor's office of the RK |
| MJ | Ministry of Justice of the RK |
| MF | Ministry of Finance of the RK |
| ME | Ministry of Energy of the RK |
| MI | Ministry of Interior of the RK |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been growing interest in the civil service of Kazakhstan and issues of attracting more professional employees in public services delivery. The evaluation of the quality of services provided by civil servants is conducted by citizens. Dissatisfaction with the product received may result in losing trust to the government as civil servants do represent the country as the main service provider. Thus policy-makers express a high interest in delivering better public services to the population by improving civil service via initiating and conducting reforms. According to Knox and Janenova, currently, Kazakhstan is on the stage where quality and motivation of the civil service, better recruitment and promotion systems, and ultimately improving service delivery are the main focus of the civil service reforms (Knox and Janenova, 2019, p. 423). In this regard, in the latest Address to the Nation First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev demonstrates the importance of attracting specialists from the private sector that have work experience in the best foreign companies or graduated from leading universities of the world.” (OSPRK, 2018)

Thinking about what would attract strong professionals to public sector, it should be highlighted that not only does salary or any kind of material motivation matter, but also there are many other motivating factors as corporate culture, development opportunities, relations with colleagues that may make public service more attractive for potential job-seekers and those who are already part of the civil service system. Having worked in international organizations, our research group members noticed how much attention is paid to line management practices in the private sector. Interaction with line managers is one of the very important building blocks in employees’ motivation at many international companies all over the world. The general understanding of line management revolves around a person who performs the role of a linking bridge between junior, middle management staff and top-management by providing supervisory functions of their workload and professional aspirations. An important role of managers abroad in the country prompted the idea of analyzing to what extent line management influences the motivation of public servants in Kazakhstan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to write a literature review of the conducted research as useful as it possible and give a better notion to a reader of the research topic, we first go through the main and basic concepts of line management. Articles and books by scholars who focused their studies on management and motivation spheres was used to assist us in identifying such concepts as “line management”, “motivation”, and “good and bad line management styles”.

Several scholars have at times expressed a variety of definitions for line management. For instance, Manchester Community Central defines a line manager as a person between employees and top managers, who usually report on the current performance and wellbeing of workers to senior managers. Line managers are commonly known as supervisors or managers. As stated by Reh line management means managing employees who are responsible for the production or delivery of goods, services or products. As the connection between workers and an organization, line management is described as the lowest level of management in the corporate hierarchy. The author contends that good line managers or direct managers are very supportive of their employees, they give feedback on current job performance daily, and they even stimulate the subordinates. Compared to project managers, line managers do not make direct interference in workers’ administrative performance, which means that career advancement and salary increments or vice versa are not usually included in supervisors’ functions. (Reh, 2019) Meanwhile, in human resources terms, the concept of line manager also covers areas of handling and facilitating issues related to hiring personnel, as LM has a good understanding and clear vision on what people will suit the team the most (MBS, 2008). Larsen and Brewster highlight the fact that recently line managers are assigned HR responsibilities increasingly more. (Larsen and Brewster, 2003, p.232).

Having a general understanding of what line management is, we see that management is an essential part of a good and productive organization. Good management is the foundation of productive and successful companies. Successful management of an organization means getting things done by motivating people to achieve targets and objectives (MSHQ, 2019).

Several studies pay special attention to the lack of training to evolve management skills in human management as a cause of not well-performed line management. For instance, Hutchinson (2018) implies that the lack of relevant skills in the form of absence of support and training to perform human management aspects in the most efficient way is proved to explain the poor quality of line management. Another research on line managers also observed that the principal barriers for effective line management include lack of management courses, resources such as staff, time and money, work overload, training, and inadequate support from the side of top managers. (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2008 p. 57)

Although it seems to be a common-sense that motivation directly affects performance, we have found some studies supporting this idea. For instance, according to the findings of (Osabia, 2015), there is an evident contrast between not motivated workers and well-motivated individuals. Sense of belonging, recognition, and achievement are inherent to the latter group. While being highly motivated compared to the non-motivated group, they tend to carry out their functions in a more efficient way, having a sense of responsibility and modesty.

Some researchers studying motivation imply that direct supervisors do not adequately encourage subordinates by providing them new status and higher wages. Commonly, workers are being motivated by their inspirations to be successful at new challenges. Several authors mention that motivation is a principal perception that initiated employees 'desires and 'motives'. Ngima and Kyongo point out that you can be the best line manager – make easy plans, praise your subordinates and be nice to them, but hire inappropriate people or not be a leader for the subordinates. Motivation aims to build good working conditions and to develop personal management skills that will help to increase the level of performance of subordinates. The good conditions for working consist of fair pay, sane atmosphere at workplace, new possibilities for subordinates to make new acquaintances and companions, clear strategic directions, goals and KPIs, training sessions with professional coaches and transparent career opportunities. (Ngima and Kyongo, 2013, p. 234)

It is also necessary to make sure that employees are aware of the significance of their work efficiency to the team's goals and the organization's core activities. According to Festre and Garrouste employees working in a sociable company or organization where they are being motivated have a higher performance level than the other employees. Other researchers confirm that allowing employees to feel as if they are big and important part of organizational goals reduces disappointment demotivation. The authors also mention that private and public sectors' working styles are different: 1) public sector workers are more motivated by a working environment, and 2) public sector employees show less desire to show effort on behalf of the organization they work in (Festre and Garrouste, 2008, p. 38)

The study by Alfes et al. provided us with some evidence about how line management is linked with motivation and engagement: "Using a social exchange framework, we argue that employee experiences of human resource management practices interact with perceived line manager behavior to impact on levels of employee engagement and individual performance". (Alfes et al., 2013, p. 841) The authors connect the impact to the perception of one's input acknowledgment. It is proven that subordinates are motivated to show positive behavior patterns and attitudes when they see recognition and appreciation from the side of their employers. The strong influence of line management on work performance and its impact on employees' health was highlighted by Alterman. He draws a direct connection between the working environment and employees' health condition, stating that stress provokes Cardiovascular diseases by developing mal habits such as alcohol consumption, passive physical activity, smoking, etc. Also, as a result of studies, individuals who reported inadequate support from the side of their managers tend to fume cigarettes in excessive amounts. (Alterman et al., 2019, p. 9). The same study highlights the necessity to change managing style in order to decrease the risk of cardiovascular diseases as a result of stress at the workplace. In other words, improvements in the work atmosphere and social support will contribute to a healthier employee.

Because of the common historical path of Kazakhstan and Russia, that resulted in cultural proximity it would be useful to take into consideration at studies of line management influence within the Russian context. Graves gives special attention to the role of direct supervisors in employees' social behavior. "Although top management is

important, employees' direct managers are immediate organizational representatives and have an impact on their pro-environmental behaviors.” (Graves et.al, 2018, p. 55)

We have found interesting studies, highlighting the distinctive features between the level of desire to work in private and public sector employees. (Re'em, 2011, p. 18) claims that civil servants are mainly driven or incentivized by internal motives, such as job satisfaction, fairness, ethical standards, etc. While the author claims that private-sector employees are more externally stimulated. Professional growth, recognition, and monetary incentives are a good example of extrinsic motivation. What we also found worth analyzing in this article is the assumption about people versus goal orientation of public sector employees: “Public sector employees are generally assumed to favor people-oriented leadership style more than do private employees. They are also believed to consider their peers and supervisors significantly more important.” Summarizing all the materials we will be using in our work, it is obvious that the authors acknowledge the influence line management has on employees. This influence makes the subordinate's work motivation either rise or fall. What we will be considering during our research is the best practices within the public and private sector in terms of line management style.

Although considerable research has been devoted to line management in a number of countries, rather less attention has been paid to the influence of line management on public servants' motivation in Kazakhstan. Therefore, the results of this research will be filling the gap in the literature.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The project represents the analysis built on the comparison of employees' motivation in private and public sectors in terms of line management. Therefore, the research question of the study is "How does line management influence public servants' motivation?" *Dependent variable of the research conducted* is public servant's motivation, which is influenced by independent variables such as line management, the interaction with subordinates and top management, salary, social package, bonuses, acknowledgement, praise, and other factors. There are three *research hypotheses* that are baseline of our project, they are: "Private and public sectors have the same line management style in Kazakhstan", "Private and public sectors are both good at motivating the employees by line management in Kazakhstan", "Line management style influences employees' motivation".

In order to answer these research questions, a qualitative research method was used. Primary data collection was implemented via conducting semi-structured interviews based on a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. Depending on the availability of the interviewees for an interview, we conducted them in person, as well as via distributing it via e-mails.

Must have criteria for respondents was to have at least 3-5 years' work experience in their organization, in order to make sure that they understand the corporate culture of the organization they work in. In addition, the employees of respective organizations who both have a manager and are managers themselves were invited for interview because we analyze the way how they motivate employees and how they are motivated. The scope of respondents includes employees of public and private sectors, and representatives of international and multinational organizations. The representation of a big variety of sectors was provided in order to make sure the obtained results are more precise and reliable. Data were collected from twenty interview participants, ten of them were representing the public sector and the other half are employees of the private sector and international organizations.

Interviews were conducted among organizations such as Mars, Philip Morris Kazakhstan LLP, World Bank office in Kazakhstan, private consulting organizations, Astana Akimate, Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, General

Prosecutor's office of the RK, the Ministry of Justice of the RK, the Ministry of Energy of the RK, the Ministry of Finance of the RK, and the Ministry of Interior of the RK.

Table 1. Interview questions

1. How do you usually interact with your boss? (describe last interaction in personal and professional terms)
2. Tell us about the recent interaction with your subordinate.
3. How do you interact with your boss and subordinates in a project work?
4. Does your boss influence your work motivation? How?
5. How do you sustain or increase your subordinates' motivation?
6. What are the factors demotivating you in your line manager's interaction with you?
7. What are the factors in your interaction with subordinates that demotivate them?
8. Has your line manager talked to you about your career within the last 3 months? (Yes/No)

Source: own elaboration

Having conducted interviews, we gathered enough data for our analysis to find the answer to the main question of the research and disprove or prove the hypotheses made. *The coding method* was used as a tool to categorize primary data and thus to find and understand similar patterns. Theron contends that while coding the data there might appear repetitive patterns and similarities that will assist to formulate ideas into groups and categories. It is important to understand, that the process of coding is not only putting labels on data, but the linking the latter to an idea. (Petria M. Theron, 2015)

We put the data into an Excel file along with questions, and highlighted some key words from each answer. For instance, respondents in the private sector described the interaction with their bosses as: "We have a very open relationship. He can ask me questions both job-related and any other questions since he is a foreigner and new to the town. We can openly discuss operational and administrative issues, and we both know that our conversations are confidential if the matter is sensitive." Identified key words were "open relationship", "open for discussions". Based on the found key words, we grouped them into categories and was able to define repetitive patterns.

The research methodology is mainly based on the *Comparative method of data analysis* within the case study in Kazakhstan. Among diverse approaches available to analyze data, the comparative method was considered as the best suitable option for our research. Having compared data from public and private sectors, our approach incorporates focusing on similarities and contrasts in both sectors. As outlined by Lijpart, the method that is the most useful while conducting research based on small resources is the comparative method of analysis. (Finifter, 1993, p.115). It should be taken into consideration that internal cross-sectoral comparison was made from the perspectives of line management in the public and private sectors. The comparative method of analysis not only underlines distinctive and similar patterns, but also assists in identifying reasons why they are different. On the basis of connections and correlations found, the analysis is conducted on levels covering broader geographical locations based on specific domains of interest. (Adiyia and Ashton, 2017, p.1). In light of the data collected, comparison was conducted on the cross-sectoral level.

It is worth mentioning, that the results of the survey were analyzed and compared, without judgments and claims that one sector is better or worse than another. Eventually, a better and clear vision on the way of working in both sectors will be drawn and based on those recommendations for the public sector either to continue managing employees the current way or to make a change.

FINDINGS

Having gathered and analyzed the data, we have divided the main findings into two categories: motivating and demotivating factors (as seen in Table 1) – that was the first step of our analysis.

Table 2. Motivating and demotivating factors

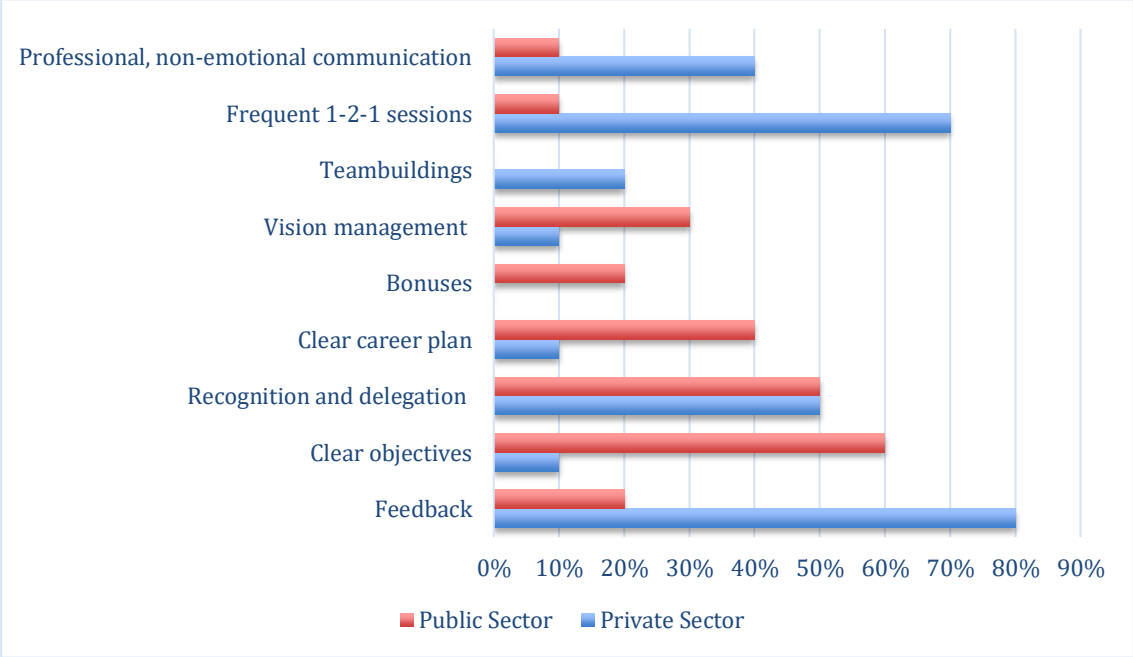
| Motivating factors | Demotivating factors |
|--|---|
| Feedback | Lack of dialogue |
| Clear objectives | Lack of clear objectives and performance indicators |
| Recognition, delegation and empowerment by line managers | Micromanagement |
| Clear career plan | Emotional and irrational decisions |
| Bonuses | Emotional communication |
| Vision management | Salary |
| Teambuilding | Work overload and tight schedule |
| Frequent 1-2-1 sessions | Bureaucracy |
| Professional, non-emotional communication | Double standards |

Source: own elaboration

Considering motivating and demotivating factors, which employees of both sectors highlighted, let us to identifying the thirteen main insights (second step of the analysis), that we derived from the data, and gathering the insights into three categories made it easier to see the main challenges in motivation that public sector employees face (third step of the analysis). We have noticed, that over 70% of challenges were connected with communications between line managers and their subordinates (see Figure 3). This fact supports our initial third hypothesis and we state, that line management influences employees' motivation in Kazakhstan. Thus, the results of our research support the conclusions drawn by Ngima and Kyongo. The authors highlight that enhancement of positive managerial behavior and, in the contrary, decreasing the level of unfavorable

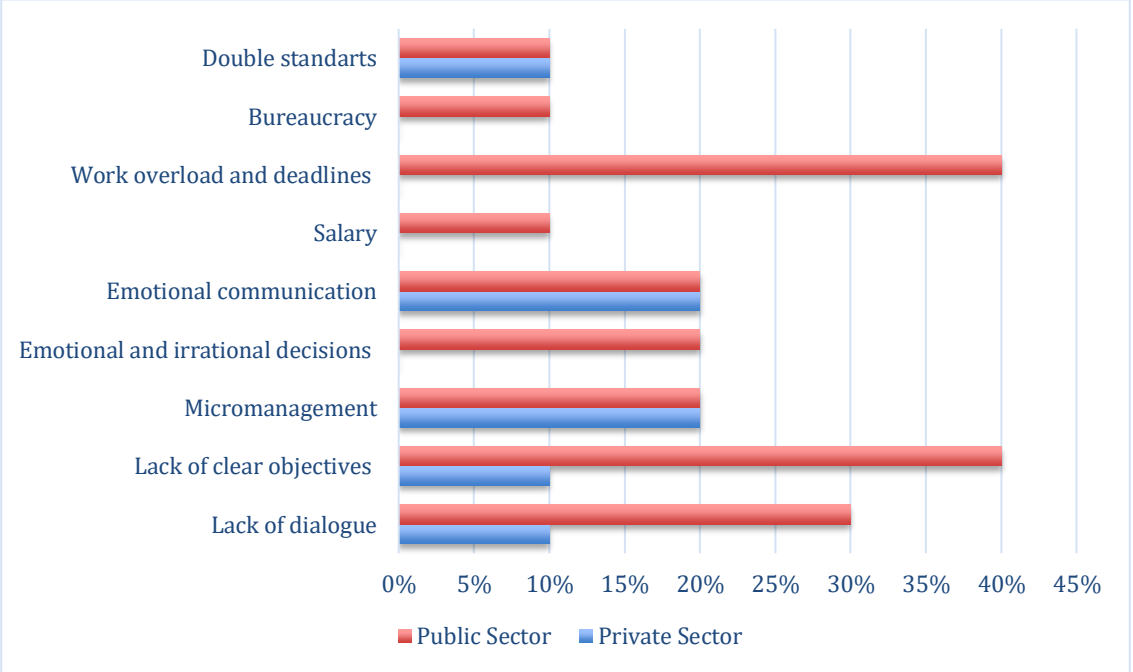
and adverse managerial attitude towards employees there is a possibility for subordinates to engage and commit to a higher extents. (Ngima and Kyongo, 2013)
 Figures 1 and 2 provide information on the percentage split among the respondents' answers.

Figure 1. Motivating factors



Source: own elaboration

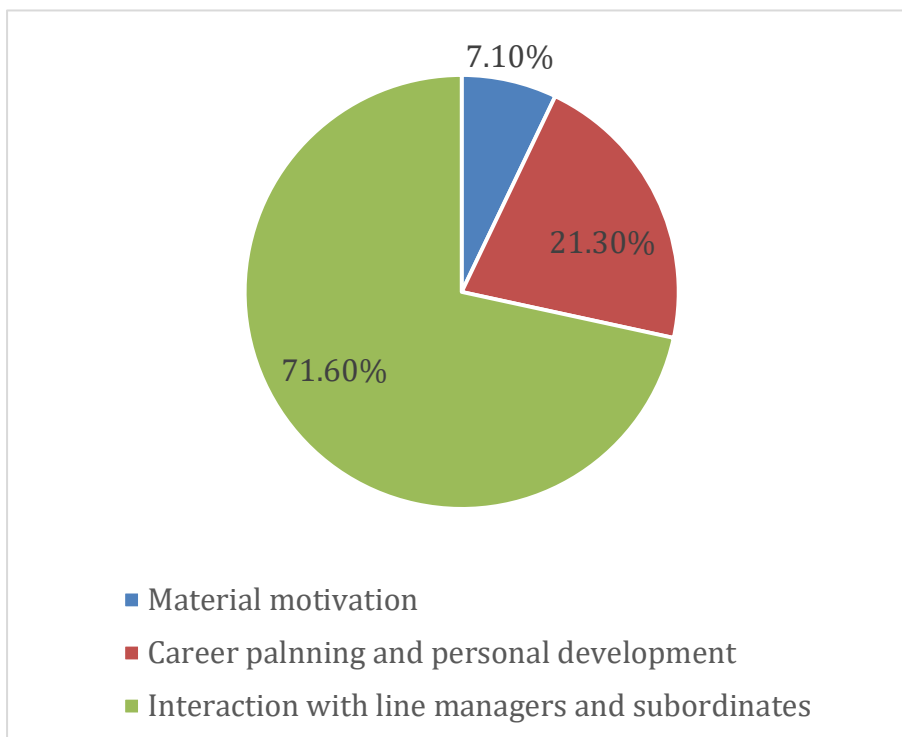
Figure 2. Demotivating factors



Source: own elaboration

Every staff member desires to be respected by people they work with regardless of their position in the company. Meanwhile, immediate supervisors are considered to be a person whom they want to follow and led by example. At the same time, we cannot support the first and second hypotheses, as we have noticed that line management practices in public and private sectors are different: the private sector is more effective than the public sector in motivating employees. It was obvious, and we will discuss it further in discussion part, that private sector managers are more aware that their communication practices have a strong influence on subordinates' motivation. That is why a lot of focus is placed on frequent discussions of people's development and motivation, by means of both official one-to-one meetings and unofficial chats.

Figure 3. Insight categorization



Source: own elaboration

DISCUSSION

As we have noted earlier, the thirteen main insights were categorized into three main challenges – interaction with line managers and subordinates, career planning and development and material motivation. In order to dive deeper into what the three categories were formed with, let us look at the main insights one by one.

Table 3. Insights

| | |
|-----|---|
| 1. | Interaction with line managers is much more unofficial and open in the private sector than in the public sector |
| 2. | The private sector respondents are more supportive of their direct reports in than in the public sector |
| 3. | Both sectors mention recognition from line manager as a motivating factor for themselves and their direct reports |
| 4. | Calm, friendly and positive communication from line managers is a motivating factor for Public sector employees, while in the private sector it is taken for granted |
| 5. | Communications between line managers and their direct reports tend to be longer in the private sector, due to their unofficial nature, while in the public sector communications are short and to the point |
| 6. | Most private-sector employees mention giving and receiving feedback as a motivating factor |
| 7. | 20% of both sectors employees mentioned micromanagement and emotional communication as demotivating factors |
| 8. | 70% of private-sector respondents showed awareness of their communicating patterns correlation with their subordinates' motivation, while 80% of civil servants consider other factors as demotivating ones (salary, deadlines, etc.) |
| 9. | Interaction within projects is similar within both sectors |
| 10. | 20% of the public sector employees consider bonuses a motivating measure, while only 10% of them mentioned salary as a demotivating factor |
| 11. | 40% of public servants are demotivated by lack of clear objectives and career plans |
| 12. | 40% of civil servants are demotivated by tight work schedule and deadlines |
| 13. | In 40% of cases in both sectors line managers have spoken with respondents about their careers |

Source: own elaboration

Starting from the first finding, we may say, that the biggest difference in communication is that the private sector tends to show much more unofficial and open discussions between LMs and their subordinates. Moreover, it tends to be a motivating factor for the employees, as seen in Figure 1, as free conversations are called one-to-one meetings. Also, more open access to managers' results in sharing feedback, which private sector employees consider to be another motivating factor and which we do not see in public servants' answers so often. We see from Table 2, that recognition and non-emotional communication is equally important for both sectors, once again strengthening the point about the importance of high-quality interactions between managers and their subordinates.

Unlike differences in regular communication, interaction within project work tends to be the same in both sectors – it is official, to the point and usually short, there reason for that is a limited time, which is why project teams have clear objectives and less unofficial communication. Both sector employees showed their being demotivated by managers' micromanagement, which leads us to a conclusion about the necessity of delegation and trust from line managers. Osabiya came to the same conclusion that granting responsibility and some sort of authority motivate staff. With the aim to fully realize and enhance their potential employers are advised to provide their subordinates more autonomy. (Osabiya, 2015, p. 74) All the mentioned facts are from the group of challenges, which we call interaction with line managers and subordinates, however, there is an opportunity to improve career and personal development practices in the public sector. As seen in Table 2, a lack of clear KPIs and objectives is a strong demotivating factor. At the same time, respondents from the public sector noted, that they have had conversations with their bosses about a career within the last three months. We hypothesize that such conversations took an unofficial character and we provide our proposals on this matter later in the policy recommendations part. Attitude from the side of subordinates towards top management is interrelated with experience in management of human resources as noted by Hutchinson and Purcell – our research supports the opinion of the authors (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2008, p.15).

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of our project are as follows:

- *Focus is only on Kazakhstan*

As it was mentioned in the preceding section, the study was conducted within Kazakhstani public and private sectors, therefore the same results and conclusions should not be expected in other countries. The findings of the research may be different from other countries, because of the country's specifics.

- *The reliability of the data collected*

There is a possibility that respondents were not fully open and honest while providing answers. Despite the consent forms containing the confidentiality of the interview results, the human factors play an important role, and therefore findings may not be 100% accurate.

- *Findings are preliminary,*

Therefore they should be confirmed in future research, taking into account a possible transformation of management styles in both private and public sectors.

- *Differences between the two sectors in terms of their autonomy and size*

The public sector itself is not capable of "allowing managers greater 'freedom to manage' according to private sector corporate practice" therefore, line managers in public sector are less flexible (Knox, 2008, p. 479). A greater number of people in one department in civil service can be managed with more complexity because a big number of people are in charge of one task. Meanwhile, the private sector itself is described to be more compact and one task can be assigned to a couple of people only. Therefore, taking into account these distinctive features of both sectors, it should be noted that management style can be different.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research indicate that the public sector suffers from a lack of public servants' motivation and managers should pay attention to this issue as much as possible. After conducting the survey we came up with the idea that one out of three hypotheses was proven. In general, a similar pattern can be seen in answers provided by interviewees. Based on the results of the conducted analysis, several policy recommendations were elaborated:

- Overcome the communication crisis in public sector

According to the conducted survey, most subordinates realize that there is a shortage of communication with their line managers. They admit that frequent one-to-one sessions could help them to be more involved in working processes and to define opportunities they could use and personal competencies they could improve. So we recommend line managers to create “communication bridge” between their subordinates and make their conversation more clear and delightful (e.g. corporate gatherings, team buildings, sports events etc.)

- Ensure transparent career approaches for public servants

It is suggested for managers to have talks with their subordinates regarding career opportunities. According to the conducted survey, approximately 60 percent of the respondents did not have a clear view of their careers. If to compare with the private sector, public managers do not pay attention to the personal development of their subordinates which in turn demotivates public servants and affects working results and performance.

- Ensure work-life balance for public servants

Also, public managers should pay attention to the functioning capacity of their subordinates. 40 percent of respondents said that they are demotivated by tight working schedules and deadlines. Therefore, managers should prioritize working processes from urgency and importance perspectives. This method successfully is being implemented in the private sector and could help the public to increase the level of servants' motivation.

- Provide cross-sector experience exchange (trainings, teambuilding sessions)

The survey demonstrates to us that line management in the private sector is more developed and fully influences their workers' motivation to perform at a high and more effective level. It is strongly recommended for the public sector to inherit the private sector's experience and implement it in their working style. Furthermore, line management could be included in the job description of public sector employees to make job functions more clear.

In conclusion, this research was focused on answering the research question: how does the line management influence on public servants' motivation. The analysis shows us that good line management positively affects servants' motivation and the hypothesis "Line management influences employees' motivation" was correct. The Kazakhstani authorities should strengthen and develop basic concepts of managing people to build a strong civil service.

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