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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN'S CIVIL SERVICE

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Abstract. This study explores civil servants' perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices in Kazakhstan, focusing on five key areas: employee engagement, incentives and rewards, career development, workforce management, and recruitment processes. Although recent reforms in Kazakhstan have highlighted meritocracy and professionalisation, there is limited empirical evidence on how employees experience these changes, especially in transitional public administration settings. The novelty of this study resides in its empirical evaluation of HRM practices through employee perceptions, providing insights from a post-Soviet governance environment that is underrepresented in existing research. The research is based on a survey of 105 civil servants working in central government agencies, local executive bodies, and territorial divisions. Data were analysed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, non-parametric tests, ANOVA, correlation, and regression analysis. The results reveal a complex pattern. No significant differences were found across gender, job position, or institutional type in key HRM areas, indicating a certain level of formal standardisation in HR practices. However, a strong positive relationship between employee engagement and career development confirms the importance of participatory HRM practices. At the same

time, an unexpected positive correlation between perceptions of workload fairness and transfer intentions suggests that procedural fairness alone is not enough to retain staff when dissatisfaction with salary and limited career advancement persist. This highlights a significant gap between formal HR reforms and actual employee experiences. The study contributes to the literature by extending HRM research into transitional governance contexts and offers practical recommendations for strengthening civil service systems through better compensation, participatory practices, and transparent recruitment.

Keywords: Human Resource Management (HRM); Civil Service Reform; Employee Involvement; Career Growth; Pay Satisfaction; Employee Retention; Transitional Governance

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ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК ҚЫЗМЕТІНДЕГІ АДАМ РЕСУРСТАРЫН БАСҚАРУ ТӘЖІРИБЕЛЕРІ ЖӘНЕ ҚЫЗМЕТКЕРЛЕРДІҢ ҚАБЫЛДАУЫ

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Аннотация. Бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы мемлекеттік қызметшілердің адам ресурстарын басқару (HRM) тәжірибелеріне қатысты қабылдауын талдайды және бес негізгі өлшемге назар аударады: қызметкерлердің тартылуы, ынталандыру және марапаттау, мансаптық даму, кадрлық құрамды басқару және іріктеу рәсімдері. Қазақстанда жүргізіліп жатқан соңғы реформалар меритократия мен кәсібилендіру қағидаттарына басымдық бергенімен, бұл реформалардың қызметкерлер тарапынан қалай қабылданатыны жөніндегі эмпирикалық деректер, әсіресе өтпелі мемлекеттік басқару жағдайында, әлі де жеткіліксіз зерттелген. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы – HRM тәжірибелерін

қызметкерлердің қабылдауы арқылы эмпирикалық тұрғыдан бағалауы және ғылыми әдебиетте жеткілікті қамтылмаған посткеңестік басқару ортасы туралы жаңа түсініктер ұсынуында. Зерттеу орталық мемлекеттік органдарда, жергілікті атқарушы органдарда және аумақтық бөлімшелерде жұмыс істейтін 105 мемлекеттік қызметшінің сауалнамасына негізделген. Деректер SPSS бағдарламасы арқылы сипаттамалық статистика, параметрлік емес тесттер, ANOVA, корреляциялық және регрессиялық талдау әдістерін қолдана отырып өңделді. Нәтижелер күрделі және біркелкі емес үрдісті көрсетті. HRM-нің негізгі өлшемдері бойынша жыныс, лауазым немесе мекеме түріне байланысты мәнді айырмашылықтар анықталмады, бұл HR тәжірибелерінің белгілі бір деңгейде формалды стандартталғанын көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар, қызметкерлердің тартылуы мен мансаптық даму арасында күшті оң байланыс анықталып, партисипативті HRM тәжірибелерінің маңыздылығын растады. Сонымен бірге, жұмыс жүктемесінің әділдігі мен ауысу ниеті арасындағы күтпеген оң байланыс жалақыға қанағаттанбаушылық пен мансаптық өсу мүмкіндіктерінің шектеулігі жағдайында тек рәсімдік әділеттіліктің қызметкерлерді ұстап қалуға жеткіліксіз екенін көрсетті. Бұл нәтиже формалды HR реформалар мен қызметкерлердің нақты тәжірибесі арасындағы маңызды алшақтықты айқындайды. Зерттеу HRM саласындағы ғылыми әдебиетті өтпелі басқару контексіне кеңейтіп, мемлекеттік қызмет жүйесін жетілдіруге бағытталған практикалық ұсыныстар береді, атап айтқанда еңбекақы жүйесін жетілдіру, қызметкерлерді тарту тәжірибелерін дамыту және іріктеу рәсімдерінің ашықтығын қамтамасыз ету.

Түйін сөздер: адам ресурстарын басқару (HRM), мемлекеттік қызмет реформасы, қызметкерлерді тарту, мансаптық өсу, еңбекақыға қанағаттану, персоналды ұстап қалу, өтпелі басқару

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ПРАКТИКИ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКИМИ РЕСУРСАМИ И ВОСПРИЯТИЕ СОТРУДНИКОВ В ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ СЛУЖБЕ КАЗАХСТАНА

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Аннотация. Данное исследование анализирует восприятие государственными служащими практик управления человеческими ресурсами (HRM) в Казахстане, сосредотачиваясь на пяти ключевых измерениях: вовлечённость сотрудников, стимулы и вознаграждения, карьерное развитие, управление персоналом и процедуры подбора кадров. Несмотря на то что последние реформы в Казахстане ориентированы на меритократию и профессионализацию, эмпирические данные о том, как эти реформы воспринимаются сотрудниками, остаются ограниченными, особенно в условиях переходного государственного управления. Научная новизна исследования заключается в эмпирической оценке практик HRM через призму восприятия сотрудников, что позволяет получить новые представления о постсоветской управленческой среде, недостаточно отражённой в научной литературе. Исследование основано на опросе 105 государственных служащих, работающих в центральных государственных органах, местных исполнительных органах и территориальных подразделениях. Данные были проанализированы с использованием программы SPSS с применением описательной статистики, непараметрических тестов, ANOVA, корреляционного и регрессионного анализа. Полученные результаты демонстрируют сложную и неоднозначную картину. Значимых различий по полу, должностному уровню или типу учреждения в ключевых измерениях HRM выявлено не было, что свидетельствует о некоторой формальной стандартизации практик управления персоналом. В то же время выявлена сильная положительная связь между вовлечённостью сотрудников и карьерным развитием, что подтверждает важность партисипативных практик HRM. Одновременно обнаружена неожиданная положительная корреляция между справедливостью распределения рабочей нагрузки и намерением перейти в другие организации, что указывает на недостаточность одной лишь процедурной справедливости для удержания сотрудников в условиях сохраняющегося недовольства уровнем оплаты труда и ограниченных возможностей карьерного роста. Данный результат подчёркивает существенный разрыв между формальными реформами HR и реальным опытом сотрудников. Исследование вносит вклад в развитие научной литературы, расширяя анализ HRM на контексты переходного государственного управления, а также предлагает практические рекомендации по совершенствованию системы государственной службы, включая улучшение системы оплаты труда, развитие партисипативных практик и обеспечение прозрачности процедур подбора кадров.

Ключевые слова: управление человеческими ресурсами (HRM), реформа государственной службы, вовлечение сотрудников, карьерный рост, удовлетворённость оплатой труда, удержание персонала, переходное управление

Introduction. For decades, human resource management has been recognised as a fundamental element of organisational success, as the sustainability and growth of institutions largely depend on the efficiency and productivity of their workforce.

To achieve and maintain a competitive advantage, organisations must not only leverage but also strategically deploy their human capital (Dessler, 2024). Human resource management (HR) practices play a central role in this endeavour, as they create a unique and inimitable source of advantage through employees (Balgovind, 2007; Jena and Pradhan, 2014). Consequently, sound HR policies and practices serve as critical drivers of productivity and development (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006; Paul and Anantharaman, 2003). Numerous studies consistently emphasise the key role of human resource management (HRM) in ensuring organisational success and employee performance (Condrey, 1995; Huselid, 1995; Koys, 2001). However, most of this research on the links between HR practices, organisational performance and employee attitudes has focused on the Western context (Delaney and Huselid, 1996; Huselid, 1995; Katou and Budvar, 2007; Ouabi et al., 2024), with relatively limited attention to developing and transition economies, including Kazakhstan.

In Kazakhstan, human resource management (HRM) reforms are systematically embedded through flagship initiatives such as the National Plan "100 Concrete Steps" and the long-term Strategy "Kazakhstan 2050," which highlight meritocracy, professionalisation, and performance-based pay in the public sector (Aliyeva, 2017). Moreover, the government has implemented structured HR performance assessment mechanisms based on international standards, such as the Canadian Management Accountability Framework (CMAF) and the European Common Assessment Framework (ECAF). These mechanisms evaluate key areas, including staff turnover, training, promotion opportunities, workload distribution, and corruption prevention, and incorporate employee surveys to gauge perceptions of engagement, fairness, and satisfaction.

Globally, there is strong empirical evidence that HR practices significantly influence employee attitudes, especially regarding engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Research conducted in public sector organisations (PSOs) shows that HR practices are positively linked to job satisfaction, with employee engagement serving as a mediator in this relationship (Pradhan, Dash and Jena, 2017). Engaged employees are more likely to see their organisations as supportive, respond with greater motivation, and demonstrate loyalty and productivity. Although such evidence is increasingly compelling internationally, the situation in Central Asia remains relatively understudied, leaving a substantial gap in understanding how public servants perceive and evaluate HR reforms.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices among 105 civil servants working in central government agencies, local government bodies (akimats), and territorial divisions in Kazakhstan. The survey instrument, adapted from national and international HRM assessment frameworks, covers five thematic areas: engagement, incentives and rewards, career development, human resource management, and personnel selection. By analysing these areas, the study aims to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of HRM implementation from the perspective of civil servants, thereby

contributing to the ongoing debate on how HRM reforms influence employee satisfaction and organisational performance in transitional public administration.

Despite Kazakhstan's significant progress in modernizing the civil service and embedding meritocratic principles in HR policy, significant challenges remain in translating these reforms into the actual experiences of employees. Previous assessments have identified persistent issues, including high turnover, dissatisfaction with salary levels, uneven workload distribution, and limited career advancement opportunities (Aliyeva, 2017). While international research consistently demonstrates that effective HR practices combined with employee engagement improve job satisfaction and retention (Pradhan et al., 2017), empirical confirmation of this dynamic in Kazakhstan remains rare. In the absence of such evidence, HR reforms risk becoming mere procedural compliance rather than addressing the deeper motivational and developmental needs of civil servants.

In light of the identified research gap, this study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of civil servants' perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices in Kazakhstan. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate how HRM practices are viewed across five key dimensions, including employee engagement, incentives and rewards, career development, workforce management, and recruitment processes. Furthermore, the research investigates whether these perceptions vary according to demographic and institutional characteristics, such as gender, job position, and type of government agency. Particular attention is given to analysing the relationships between employee engagement, career development opportunities, perceived workload fairness, and intentions to transfer, to better understand the underlying mechanisms influencing employee attitudes and retention within the civil service. By addressing these aspects, the study aims to generate empirically grounded insights that can inform both academic debates and policy reforms in transitional public administration contexts.

To fulfil the stated objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1. Gender and Employee Engagement

Hypothesis: Male employees report greater levels of employee engagement than female employees.

H2. Position Level and Salary Adequacy

Hypothesis: Employees in higher positions (middle and senior management) report greater satisfaction with salary adequacy than rank-and-file employees.

H3. Type of Government Agency and Trust in the Recruitment System

Hypothesis: Employees working in central government agencies exhibit higher levels of trust in the recruitment system than employees in local government agencies or territorial divisions.

H4. Employee Engagement and Career Advancement

Hypothesis: Employees with greater engagement report increased satisfaction with career advancement opportunities.

H5. Workload Fairness and Transfer Intention

Hypothesis: Employees who perceive a fair workload are less likely to report an intention to transfer.

Literature Review. Human resource management (HRM) has long been viewed as a strategic tool for enhancing organisational performance, as its practices directly impact employee attitudes, engagement, and job satisfaction (Price, 2004; Huselid, 1995). Fundamental research highlights that HRM not only ensures the effective utilisation of human capital but also generates unique, inimitable advantages that are difficult for competitors to replicate (Balgovind, 2007; Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006). Consequently, well-designed HRM plays a vital role in motivating employees, boosting satisfaction, and maintaining retention in both the private and public sectors (Paul and Anantharaman, 2003; Koys, 2001).

Extensive international research has examined the links between HR practices and job satisfaction, often emphasising employee engagement as a key mediating factor. Pradhan, Dash, and Jena (2017) found that in Indian public sector enterprises, HR practices such as career development opportunities, training, and participation in decision-making were positively related to job satisfaction, with employee engagement acting as a significant mediator. This aligns with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which suggests that when organisations invest in supportive HR practices, employees reciprocate through increased engagement, commitment, and satisfaction. Similar findings have been documented in Western contexts, where HR practices have consistently been associated with positive employee outcomes, including workplace trust, motivation, and lower turnover rates (Delaney and Huselid, 1996; Gould-Williams, 2003; Katu and Budvar, 2007).

In the public sector, job satisfaction is especially important because it influences employee retention, productivity, and the quality of services delivered. Research shows that HR practices in public organisations improve staff morale and performance, challenging old stereotypes of passivity and indifference among public servants (Linna et al., 2010; Kim, 2010). For example, Steyn (2004) found that Dutch public sector employees who viewed HR practices positively experienced higher job satisfaction, while Gould-Williams (2003) highlighted the significance of HR policies in building trust and boosting the performance of local government in the United Kingdom. These studies demonstrate that effective HR systems in the public sector can turn institutional reforms into tangible benefits for employees.

Gender differences in work experiences have long been acknowledged in HRM research. Studies show that men and women often view engagement, participation, and recognition differently due to structural and cultural influences (Jeet and Sayeeduzzafar, 2014). In many public sectors, men have historically had greater access to decision-making and leadership roles, which may enhance their sense of engagement. Pradhan et al. (2017) demonstrated that HR practices encouraging participation in decision-making and employee voice significantly boost engagement and job satisfaction; however, these effects may not be experienced equally across genders. International research indicates that women often report lower satisfaction with engagement because of barriers such as underrepresentation in leadership and unequal access to career opportunities (Vu et al. 2025). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that male employees are more likely to perceive higher levels of engagement than their female counterparts.

Compensation is consistently recognised as a vital factor in job satisfaction. Employees in management positions not only earn higher salaries but also express stronger perceptions of pay fairness and adequacy (Khan, 2010). Pradhan et al. (2017) emphasise that HR practices, such as promotions and job security, contribute to employee satisfaction by linking pay and recognition to employee contributions. In hierarchical public organisations, job level significantly influences perceptions of pay. Research in the banking and manufacturing sectors similarly indicates that managers and supervisors report higher pay satisfaction than rank-and-file employees (Jeet and Sayeeduzzafar, 2014). In the civil service, where pay scales are formalised, mid- and senior-level employees often receive additional benefits, prestige, and security, which strengthen perceptions of adequacy. This body of evidence supports the view that employees in management roles tend to report greater satisfaction with pay adequacy.

Trust in recruitment processes reflects employees' perceptions of fairness, transparency, and meritocracy in HR practices. Pradhan et al. (2017) note that HR policies signal an organisational commitment to fairness and competence, which increases engagement and satisfaction. International studies of public sector organisations confirm that transparent recruitment promotes trust and productivity in the workplace (Gould-Williams, 2003; Steijn, 2004). In Kazakhstan, reforms have emphasised merit-based recruitment, particularly in central government agencies (Aliyeva, 2017). However, local executive bodies and territorial divisions may face challenges such as resource constraints and local patronage, which can reduce employee trust in HR practices. Previous research on organisational justice and HR management effectiveness suggests that trust levels are higher in organisations with more standardised and formalised HR procedures (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, employees of central government agencies are expected to demonstrate higher confidence in hiring compared to their colleagues in local or territorial institutions.

Employee engagement is a crucial predictor of career satisfaction. When individuals feel that their opinions are valued and that they are involved in organisational decision-making, they are more likely to see opportunities for career progression (Razieh Hashemi, 2025). Pradhan et al. (2017) empirically demonstrated that HR practices that enhance employee engagement and participation significantly impact both engagement and job satisfaction. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that employees reciprocate organisational support by becoming more committed and motivated, which in turn creates pathways for career advancement. Research across various sectors confirms that engagement fosters a stronger sense of ownership and alignment with organisational goals, thereby improving employees' perceptions of growth opportunities (Suhail et al., 2025). Consequently, increased employee engagement is expected to be positively associated with satisfaction regarding career development.

Workload fairness is closely linked to perceived organisational justice, which significantly affects employee retention and intentions to leave. Pradhan et al. (2017)

emphasise that fair HR practices, such as equal task distribution and recognition, enhance engagement and satisfaction, thereby reducing turnover. Research indicates that when employees perceive their workload as fair, they are less likely to seek transfers or resign (Shore and Wayne, 1993; Ram and Prabhakar, 2011). Conversely, uneven workload distribution can cause dissatisfaction, disengagement, and higher intentions to leave. Empirical studies within the public sector confirm that workload fairness is a vital factor in fostering loyalty and lowering turnover intentions (Linna et al., 2010). Therefore, perceived fairness in workload allocation is inversely related to turnover intentions.

Although there is significant international research showing that HRM practices positively influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention, several key limitations still exist. First, most studies are focused on Western or highly institutionalised public sector contexts where governance systems, organisational cultures, and incentive structures differ greatly from those in transitional or post-Soviet environments. Consequently, the relevance of these findings to countries like Kazakhstan remains uncertain. Second, while many studies highlight the importance of specific HRM practices such as compensation, career development, or participation in decision-making, they often examine these in isolation, ignoring potential interactions and conflicts between them. For instance, although workload fairness is generally linked to greater retention, recent evidence indicates that this may not apply in settings where other motivational factors, such as dissatisfaction with salaries or limited career advancement, are still problematic.

Furthermore, existing research often depends on formal policy analysis or organisational-level indicators, paying insufficient attention to how HRM practices are actually perceived and experienced by employees. This creates a gap between the intended outcomes of HR reforms and their real-world effects on employee attitudes and behaviour. In the context of Kazakhstan, where civil service reforms have emphasised meritocracy and standardisation, empirical studies examining employee perceptions are still limited. Consequently, there is a clear need for research that not only assesses HRM practices across multiple dimensions but also critically explores how these practices interact and affect employee outcomes in a transitional governance setting. This study addresses this gap by offering an integrated, perception-based analysis of HRM practices in Kazakhstan's civil service.

Methodology. Data for this study were collected through a structured survey designed to evaluate civil servants' perceptions of human resource management practices within government agencies. The instrument was adapted from existing civil service assessment systems and included several items organised into thematic categories. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The survey investigated five key aspects of human resource management practices. The first aspect, engagement, measured how involved employees are in the organisation, including their understanding of work goals, their perception that their opinions are considered in decision-making, and

reports of positive relationships with colleagues. The second aspect, incentives and rewards, assessed perceptions of recognition and compensation systems, including the effectiveness of non-financial recognition, the motivational impact of bonuses, and the perceived adequacy of salaries. The third aspect, career development, examined opportunities for professional growth and advancement, focusing on the ability to fully utilise knowledge, perceptions of promotion prospects, and the prestige associated with the civil service. The fourth dimension, human resource management, evaluated workload distribution and organisation of working hours, asking respondents whether they frequently worked overtime or on weekends, if work was evenly distributed, and whether they intended to transfer to the private sector. Lastly, the dimension related to recruitment measured perceptions of the transparency and fairness of recruitment processes, emphasising trust in recruitment procedures, the influence of department heads on personnel decisions, and the overall openness of civil service recruitment.

The data collection process adhered to a structured and standardised method. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to civil servants via institutional communication channels, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses, which helped to minimise social desirability bias. Using a self-administered questionnaire reduced interviewer influence and maintained consistency in data collection across participants. The data collection period was confined to a specific timeframe, ensuring that responses reflected a relatively stable organisational context.

The survey involved civil servants working in central government agencies, local executive bodies (akimats), and territorial divisions. Participation was voluntary and anonymous to ensure confidentiality and encourage honest responses. A total of 105 civil servants took part in the survey. The majority of respondents were women (65.7%), while men accounted for 34.3%. Regarding age, the largest group was under 25 years old (31.4%), followed by those aged 25–34 (19.0%) and 35–44 (19.0%). Respondents aged 55–64 comprised 18.1% of the sample, those aged 45–54 made up 10.5%, and only 1.9% were aged 65 and older. Civil service experience varied: 21.9% of participants reported having less than one year of service, with a similar proportion having between one and three years of service. About 9.5% had between four and seven years of experience, 15.2% between eight and fifteen years, and 31.4% had more than fifteen years. Institutional affiliation also differed: 47.6% worked in central government bodies (including ministries and departments), 39.0% in local government bodies, and 13.3% in territorial divisions. Regarding education, half of the respondents (50.5%) held a bachelor's degree, while 35.2% had secondary or technical qualifications. A smaller proportion held postgraduate degrees: 11.4% had a master's degree and 2.9% a doctorate or equivalent.

Although the sample size ($N = 105$) may seem modest, it is considered sufficient for exploratory quantitative analysis in organisational research, especially given the relative homogeneity of the target population. The sample includes respondents

from central government agencies, local executive bodies, and territorial divisions, ensuring institutional diversity and improving the representativeness of the data. Additionally, variation in demographic characteristics such as age, gender, work experience, and position level further supports the analytical robustness of the study. While the sample does not aim to be statistically representative of the entire civil service of Kazakhstan, it offers a sufficiently diverse cross-sectional snapshot that enables meaningful analysis of patterns and relationships within HRM perceptions.

Responses were coded numerically and analysed using the Social Science Package (SPSS), which provided both descriptive and inferential statistical results. Descriptive statistics were utilised to summarise the sample's demographic characteristics and item-level responses across the five dimensions of HR management practices. Reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measures. Additionally, cross-tabulations and comparative analyses were performed where necessary to examine differences by gender, age group, length of service, and institutional affiliation. The utilisation of SPSS for these analyses offered a robust and systematic approach to evaluating the survey data and drawing valid conclusions about HR management practices in Kazakhstan's government agencies.

Although normality tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk) indicated deviations from normal distribution for several variables, the choice of statistical methods was guided by both theoretical and practical considerations. Parametric tests such as ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and linear regression are widely regarded as robust to moderate violations of normality, particularly in samples exceeding $N = 100$ and when group sizes are relatively balanced. Therefore, these methods were retained to allow for comparability with existing literature and to maximise analytical interpretability. To enhance the robustness of the findings, nonparametric alternatives (e.g., Mann–Whitney U test and Spearman's rank correlation) were additionally employed where appropriate. The convergence of results across parametric and nonparametric methods supports the reliability of the findings and reduces the risk of biased statistical inference.

This study has several limitations that should be recognised. First, the sample size, although adequate for statistical analysis, restricts the generalisability of the findings to the entire population of civil servants in Kazakhstan. Second, using a self-reported questionnaire introduces the possibility of response bias, including social desirability bias, where respondents may give answers they believe are favourable rather than completely accurate. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study does not permit causal inference, as it measures perceptions at a single point in time rather than over a period. Additionally, selection bias might be present, as participation was voluntary and may have attracted respondents who are more engaged or hold stronger opinions about HRM practices. Finally, although efforts were made to include participants from various types of government institutions, institutional imbalance cannot be entirely ruled out. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results and emphasise the need for

future research involving larger samples, longitudinal designs, and mixed-method approaches.

Results. To improve clarity, detailed statistical procedures are not repeated here and are explained in the Methodology section; this part highlights key findings and their interpretation.

Hypothesis 1: Gender and Employee Engagement

There was no statistically significant difference in employee engagement between male and female employees ($U = 1195.00$, $Z = -0.33$, $p = .742$). Although male respondents reported slightly higher engagement levels, the difference was minimal. This indicates that gender does not significantly affect engagement perceptions within Kazakhstan's civil service. It may also suggest that recent HR reforms have promoted a more uniform experience of participation across genders, reducing traditional disparities documented in international literature.

Table 1 — Descriptive statistics and Mann–Whitney U-test results for Staff Involvement by Gender

Gender	n	M	SD	Mean Rank
Male	36	3.98	1.12	54.7
Female	69	3.89	1.21	53.9

Note. Mann–Whitney $U = 1195.00$, $Z = -0.33$, $p = .742$ (two-tailed).

Hypothesis 2: Position Level and Salary Adequacy

The analysis showed no significant differences in perceived salary adequacy across position levels ($F(2, 102) = 0.33$, $p = .720$). Employees at managerial and non-managerial levels reported similarly low satisfaction with their pay. This finding indicates that dissatisfaction with salary is systemic rather than hierarchical, reflecting structural limitations within the remuneration system rather than differences related to organisational status.

Table 2 — One-way ANOVA for Pay Sufficiency by Position Level

Source	SS	df	MS	F (p)
Between Groups	0.858	2	0.429	0.33 (.720)
Within Groups	132.660	102	1.301	
Total	133.517	104		

Hypothesis 3: Type of Government Agency and Trust in Recruitment

No statistically significant differences were observed in trust towards recruitment processes among central government agencies, local executive bodies, and territorial divisions ($F(2, 102) = 0.31$, $p = .735$). This suggests that perceptions of recruitment transparency and fairness remain fairly consistent across different types of institutions. Instead of reflecting organisational differences, this pattern may indicate a widespread perception of recruitment practices across the civil service.

Table 3 — One-way ANOVA for Recruiting Trust by Government Body Type

Source	SS	df	MS	F (p)
Between Groups	1.051	2	0.525	0.31 (.735)
Within Groups	173.797	102	1.704	
Total	174.848	104		

Hypothesis 4: Employee Engagement and Career Development

A strong and statistically significant positive relationship was identified between employee engagement and satisfaction with career development ($\rho(105) = .71, p < .001$). This finding indicates that employees who feel more involved in organisational processes are also more likely to perceive meaningful opportunities for career advancement. It highlights the central role of participatory HRM practices in shaping positive career perceptions and aligns with established international evidence.

Table 4 — Spearman's Correlation Between Staff Involvement and Career Growth

Variables	ρ	p	N
Staff Involvement – Career Growth	.711	< .001	105

Hypothesis 5: Workload Fairness and Transfer Intention

Contrary to expectations, workload fairness was positively linked to transfer intentions ($r(105) = .22, p = .025$). Regression analysis confirmed this link ($\beta = .22, p = .025, R^2 = .048$), indicating that employees who perceive workload distribution as fair are slightly more inclined to consider transferring to the private sector. This unexpected result suggests that procedural fairness alone does not guarantee employee retention. When dissatisfaction with salary levels and limited career advancement opportunities persists, fairness in workload may not serve as a retention factor. Instead, it might boost employees' confidence in their own abilities, making external opportunities more appealing. This finding highlights the complexity of motivational factors in transitional public sector contexts.

Table 5 — Pearson's Correlation Between Workload Fairness and Transfer Intention

	Workload Fairness	Transfer Intention
Workload Fairness	1	.218*
Transfer Intention	.218*	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Regression Analysis. To further test Hypothesis 5, a simple linear regression was conducted with workload fairness as the predictor and transfer intention as the outcome. The model was significant, $F(1,103) = 5.14, p = .025$, and explained 4.8% of the variance in transfer intention ($R^2 = .048$) (Table 6). The standardised coefficient was positive ($\beta = .22, p = .025$), again indicating that employees who perceived a fairer workload were somewhat more likely to express transfer

intention. These results contradict the original hypothesis, which predicted a negative relationship.

Table 6 — Model Summary for Regression Analysis

R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	F (p)
.218	.048	.038	1.554	5.14 (.025)

Discussion. This study investigated civil servants' perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices in Kazakhstan and their connection to key employee outcomes. By comparing the results with existing international literature, the study offers valuable insights into how HRM functions within a transitional public administration context.

First, the lack of significant gender differences in employee engagement contrasts with previous research suggesting that women often report lower engagement due to structural and cultural barriers (Jeet and Sayeeduzzafar, 2014; Vu et al., 2025). While these studies emphasise unequal access to decision-making and career opportunities, the findings of this study indicate a more uniform perception of engagement across genders. This may suggest that recent reforms in Kazakhstan, which prioritise meritocracy and professionalisation (Aliyeva, 2017), have reduced observable gender disparities. However, it may also reflect a broader limitation in participatory practices that affect all employees equally, regardless of gender.

Second, the finding that salary adequacy does not vary across position levels contradicts established evidence that higher-ranking employees generally report greater pay satisfaction due to increased rewards and status (Khan, 2010; Jeet and Sayeeduzzafar, 2014). Unlike these studies, the results suggest that dissatisfaction with compensation is common across hierarchical levels. This supports earlier observations in the Kazakhstani context that standardised pay systems and limited financial incentives decrease differentiation between positions (Aliyeva, 2017). Therefore, while HRM theory emphasises the motivational role of rewards (Pradhan et al., 2017), the findings indicate that this mechanism may be weakened in highly regulated public-sector systems.

Third, the absence of significant differences in trust in recruitment across institutional types challenges previous research showing that transparent and standardised recruitment practices boost organisational trust (Gould-Williams, 2003; Steijn, 2004). Although reforms in Kazakhstan have aimed to enhance merit-based recruitment, especially in central government agencies (Aliyeva, 2017), the findings indicate that these efforts have not yet resulted in varied levels of trust. This may reflect a generalised perception of recruitment practices across institutions or ongoing scepticism about their implementation, emphasising a gap between formal policy and perceived organisational justice (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

In contrast, the strong positive link between employee engagement and career development aligns with a substantial body of international research. Previous studies have shown that participatory HRM practices improve job satisfaction and

career advancement by fostering a sense of involvement and organisational support (Pradhan et al., 2017; Jose and Mampilly, 2014). The present findings affirm this link in the context of Kazakhstan, demonstrating that even within a transitional governance system, employee engagement remains a vital mechanism connecting HR practices to positive career outcomes. This supports the applicability of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), suggesting that employees reciprocate perceived organisational support with greater commitment and positive views of their career prospects.

The most unexpected finding of this study, the positive relationship between workload fairness and transfer intentions, contradicts the dominant view in the literature that fairness reduces turnover intentions (Shore and Wayne, 1993; Ram and Prabhakar, 2011). While previous studies emphasise that equitable workload distribution enhances retention and organisational commitment, the results suggest that this relationship does not hold in the Kazakhstani context. One possible explanation is that fairness alone cannot compensate for dissatisfaction with salary and limited career advancement opportunities, which have been identified as persistent challenges in Kazakhstan's civil service (Aliyeva, 2017). In this sense, fairness may function as a necessary but insufficient condition for retention. Alternatively, employees who perceive fairness may feel more confident in their competencies and therefore be more willing to pursue external opportunities. This finding contributes to the literature by challenging the universality of assumptions about organisational justice and highlighting the importance of contextual factors in shaping employee behaviour.

Overall, the findings both confirm and expand on existing HRM research. While the link between engagement and career development matches international evidence, the lack of expected differences in gender, hierarchical rank, and institutional type, along with the counterintuitive role of workload fairness, show that HRM practices function differently in transitional governance systems. This study thus contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from a post-Soviet context and illustrating that formal HR reforms do not automatically lead to varied employee experiences. Instead, employee perceptions are influenced by the interaction of institutional frameworks, policy implementation, and underlying motivational factors.

Conclusion. This study explored civil servants' perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices in Kazakhstan, concentrating on five key areas: employee engagement, incentives and rewards, career development, workforce management, and recruitment procedures. Using quantitative analysis of survey data from 105 respondents across various levels of government, the study offers empirical insights into how HRM reforms are experienced within a transitional public administration context.

The findings reveal a complex and somewhat contradictory pattern. While no significant differences were seen across gender, job position, or institutional type, indicating a level of formal standardisation in HRM practices, a strong positive link

between employee engagement and career development emphasises the importance of participatory management approaches. Simultaneously, the unexpected positive correlation between workload fairness and transfer intentions shows that procedural fairness alone is not enough to retain employees when dissatisfaction with pay and limited career opportunities remains.

The scientific contribution of this study is in extending HRM research to a post-Soviet governance context and demonstrating that established theoretical assumptions, especially those about organisational justice and motivational mechanisms, might not fully apply in transitional public sector systems. By showing that formal HR reforms do not automatically lead to varied employee experiences, the study promotes a more context-aware understanding of HRM and employee behaviour.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers and HR managers should adopt a more integrated approach to HRM reform. First, improving compensation systems is essential to address widespread dissatisfaction across all hierarchical levels. Second, strengthening participatory practices, such as involving employees in decision-making and enhancing communication, can reinforce engagement and support career development. Third, ensuring genuinely transparent and merit-based recruitment processes is critical for building trust in public institutions. Finally, HR policies should be designed holistically, recognising that fairness in one area (e.g., workload distribution) cannot compensate for deficiencies in others, such as pay and career progression.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations, including a relatively modest sample size and reliance on self-reported data, which may affect generalisability. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and comparative approaches across post-Soviet countries to further examine how HRM practices influence employee outcomes in different institutional contexts.

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