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Driving Meaningful Innovation for Human Resources in the Public Sector: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Human resource innovation in the public sector is crucial for organizational adaptability and resilience, yet knowledge on how to foster meaningful innovation remains limited. This study aims to answer the question: how can we drive meaningful innovation in human resources in the public sector? Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this study extracted a total of 1,190 Scopus articles and identified 24 relevant and high-quality articles from the Scopus database (2016–2026) for further analysis. The analysis identified four main, systemically interrelated themes to foster human resource innovation in the public sector. First, leadership that builds a safe psychological climate and a culture of innovation. Second, human-centered human resource management practices, particularly recognition, inclusion, locally specific training, innovation standards in performance evaluation, and the creation of new roles. Third, employee psychological capacity and internal motivation, including proactive motivation, paradox mindset, and compassion. Fourth, equitable digital governance, where human resources information system and human resource analytics technologies are complementary and only meaningful if supported by capabilities, motivation, opportunities, and guarantees of algorithmic fairness. The conclusions of this study confirm that meaningful public human resource innovation is not generated by a single factor, but rather by the systemic interaction between these four pillars. Consequently, public leaders need to shift their focus from rigid procedures to human empowerment, and ensure that every innovation intervention is holistic and contextual.

Keywords: Human Resources, Meaningful Innovation, Public Sector, Systematic Literature Review.

Introduction

Innovation is a crucial aspect in various sectors, including the public sector. Innovative public sector organizations tend to be more adaptive and resilient in the face of environmental dynamics (Bhamra & Brodersohn, 2025; Cedergren & Hassel, 2024; Hasan, 2026), thereby maintaining their existence amid current developments. Conversely, less or no innovative public sector organizations tend to struggle with change (Criado et al., 2025; Horák et al., 2026), be uncompetitive (Caravella & Crespi, 2021; Chughtai et al., 2024), and (as a result) question their

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long-term existence. In the public sector, innovation can encompass public service innovation, public policy innovation, governance innovation, and even human resource innovation (Cinar et al., 2024; Lopes & Farias, 2022).

One important determinant of innovation is human resources (Danquah & Amankwah-Amoah, 2017). Innovation stems from individual actions (Pater & Lewandowska, 2015). This is highly dependent on skills, professional experience, and knowledge (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2019). However, not all innovations will be beneficial. Meaningful innovation can be defined as a process that combines internal and external innovation elements (e.g. resources, capabilities, systems) to achieve outcomes with both economic value and social significance (Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, various efforts or initiatives aimed a creating meaningful innovation in the public sector require the attention of leaders or top management in public sector organizations. Innovative human resources can also help organizations achieve their strategic targets or goals, both short-, medium-, and long-term. On the other hand, non-innovative human resources can become a burden on public sector organizations (Kyeong, 2026).

Previous research on innovation in the public sector has been limited, particularly in the context of human resources. This limitation is because research related to innovation in the public sector is mostly conducted in contexts that include: the factors influencing innovation in public sector organizations (Ali & Buang, 2016; Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2017; Moussa et al., 2018; Pradana et al., 2022), public policy (Arundel et al., 2019; McGann et al., 2018; Villa Alvarez et al., 2022), digital government (Gong & Li, 2023; Misuraca & Viscusi, 2020; Mu & Wang, 2022), and health care (Abdul et al., 2024; Lister et al., 2017; Torvinen & Jansson, 2023). Meanwhile, research investigating efforts to drive meaningful innovation for human resources in the public sector is known to have not been widely conducted.

This is reinforced by the search results on the Scopus website using the keywords "Innovation" AND "Public Sector" over the past 10 years (from 2016 to 2026) with the specific subject area of "Social Sciences" which yielded 4,835 documents. A visualization of the search results is shown in figure 1 below:

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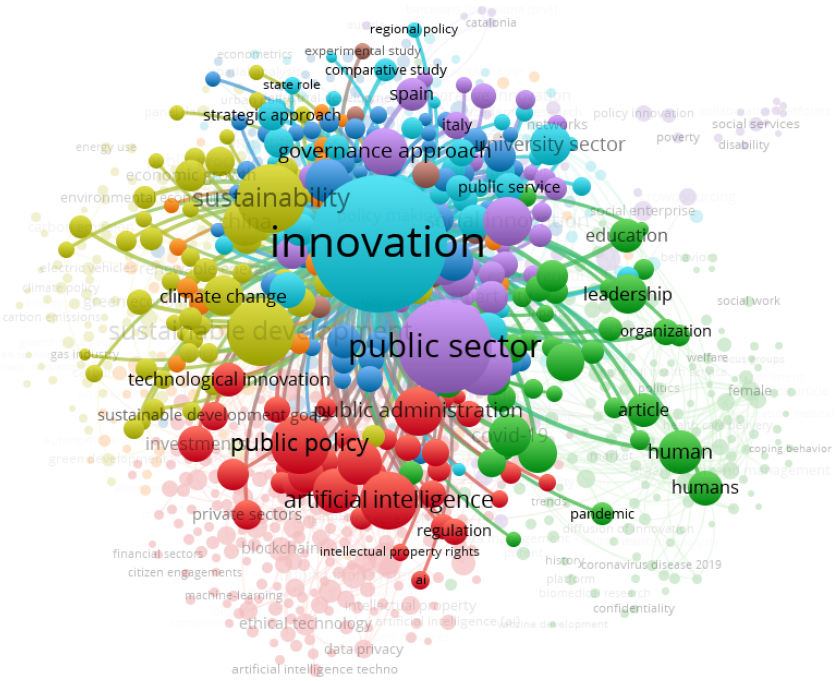

Figure 1. Research Network on Innovation in the Public Sector
Source: Scopus Page and Processed by the Author Using VOSviewer

According to Figure 1, with the keywords used for the search ("Innovation" AND "Public Sector"), studies on innovation in the public sector are more connected and more often conducted in the context of public policy, artificial intelligence, sustainability, technological innovation, and governance approaches. Meanwhile, studies of innovation in the public sector in the context of humans or human resources, remain very limited. These initial findings concretely demonstrate a research gap. In addition, the results of this study, which focuses on driving meaningful innovation for human resources in the public sector, have great potential to become a scientific novelty in the discourse of social sciences, specifically on the broad theme of human resources.

Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to answer the research question: how can we drive meaningful innovation for human resources in the public sector? The analysis and answers to these research questions are expected to address current knowledge gaps regarding innovation in the public sector, particularly in the context of human resources. Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to provide insights for leaders and administrators of public sector organizations in their efforts to encourage innovation in resources.

Research Methods

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To answer the research question "how to drive meaningful innovation for human resources in the public sector?" this study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Cabrera & Cabrera stated that SLR is a methodology or conducting research, in which specific questions are systematically and in structuredly answered by identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing all available literature (Rahman et al., 2026). Meanwhile, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram is used to learly outline the stages of SLR using various inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure transparency and accountability of the research process from upstream to downstream.

The data source used in this study is the Scopus database. Scopus was chosen because it provides broad and multidisciplinary coverage of peer-reviewed journals in public administration, governance, public management and policy, and human resources in the public sector. In addition, the Scopus database was chosen for its high-quality research results. Furthermore, the stages of this research are as follows: *First*, identify the required data using relevant keywords. In this study, the keywords used were: "Innovation" AND "Human Resources" AND "Public Sector". The initial search obtained 1,190 Scopus documents. The reason for selecting these keywords is their suitability to the substance of the research questions that need to be answered and analyzed.

Second, the screening stage. This stage is carried out to identify and select the most relevant Scopus articles for use as research data. The screening applies the following inclusion criteria: 1) Articles published between 2016 and 2026; 2) Journal article document type; 3) English-language publication; 4) Full-text articles that are freely accessible; and (5) Relevance of the abstract to the research topic. *Third*, the eligibility assessment stage. This stage involves a thorough examination of articles that have passed abstract screening. The selection of articles is based on relevance and analytical quality. Additionally, article selection is based on the content of the research findings, which are deemed to address the main research question. The results of the filtration according to these stages are shown in Figure 2 below:

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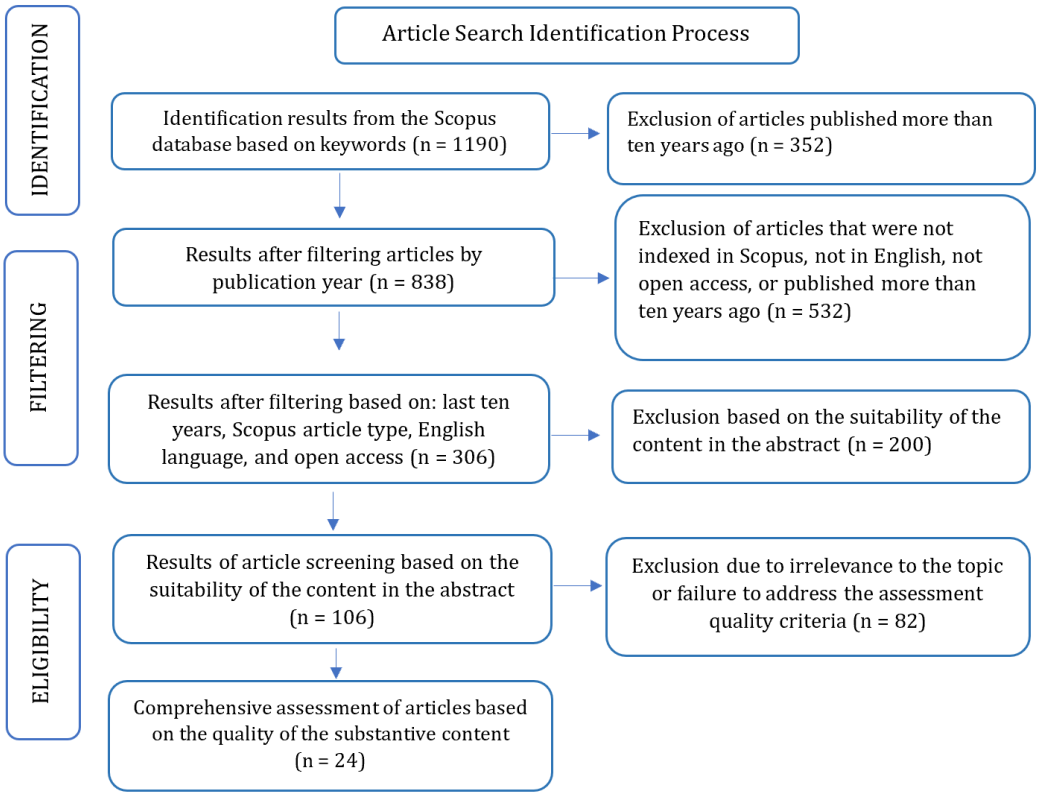

Figure 2. Filtering Results Using PRISMA Flowchart
Source: Processed by the Authors from the Scopus Database Using VOSviewer

Based on figure 2, it is clear that in the data filtering process, this study used several inclusion criteria, including: all articles must come from the Scopus database, research results must only be from the last 10 years (2016 to 2026), all of articles must be English only, and be open access. In addition, the abstract description must align with the study's main theme. Finally, the final articles selected as the core data of the study must align with the substance of the research questions to be answered. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria used were anything that contradicted the comparison inclusion criteria.

Furthermore, after the initial identification process in which 1190 articles were found: only Scopus articles from the last 10 years, 838 articles were found because 352 articles did not meet this criterion. Furthermore, using the second inclusion criteria: only Scopus articles in English and open access, 306 articles were found because 532 articles did not meet these criteria. Then, using the third inclusion criteria: suitability of the abstract to the main theme of the research, 106 articles were found because 200 articles did not meet this criterion. In this section, researcher reads the abstract in detail. Finally, using the inclusion criteria: only articles that have strong substantial content and are highly relevant to answer the research questions, 24 final articles were found because 82 articles did not meet this criterion. In this section, the article is read in depth by the

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researcher, then reviewed in depth by 2 expert reviewers to further validate the suitability of the substance.

Results and Discussion

Results

This section will describe the strategic substantive aspects related to the research question: "how to drive meaningful innovation for human resources in the public sector?". This question was derived from the final findings of 24 Scopus articles. These findings are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Findings from the Systematic Literature Review Result

Tittle (Authors, Year of Publication)	Research Methods	Findings
The entrepreneurial public servant: Unlocking employee potential through recognition and inclusion (Vivona & Lewis, 2025)	Large-scale quantitative survey (n=92,128) with structural analysis	Encourage innovation by providing recognition and creating a climate of inclusion, as these two practices have the strongest effect on employee entrepreneurial attitudes. Conversely, performance appraisals and mass training have not been shown to be significant.
Human resources information system (HRIS) to enhance civil servants' innovation outcomes: compulsory or complimentary? (Satispi et al., 2023)	Quantitative survey (and=500) with structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	Relying solely on a Human Resources Information System (HRIS) as an automatic driver of innovation isn't enough, as HRIS is only complimentary. Innovation will only occur if it's simultaneously supported by employee ability, motivation, and opportunity.
Antecedents of employee intrapreneurship in the public sector: a proactive motivation approach (Gorgievski et al., 2023)	Weekly longitudinal quantitative survey (n=757 employees, 2,279 data points) with multilevel SEM	Organizational leaders are encouraged to fulfill 3 categories of proactive motivation simultaneously: 1) Reason-to (prosocial impact, accountability); 2) Can-do (autonomy, self-efficacy, optimism); 3) Energized-to (work engagement). All three must be present to trigger HR intrapreneurship.
Using system traps to understand and potentially prevent human resource development intervention failure (Blackman et al., 2022)	Qualitative research with secondary data analysis in the Australian public sector	Avoid the four system traps that lead to HR failure: 1) Shifting the burden to external parties; 2) Pursuing the wrong goals; 3) Policy resistance; 4) Performance decline. A system-based prevention strategy is necessary for sustainable innovation.
Paradox mindset as an equalizer: A moderated mediated perspective	Three-wave quantitative	Develop a paradox mindset (the ability to accept contradictions) in employees, as

on workplace ostracism (Ahmad et al., 2024)	survey (n=513) with conditional process modeling	this mindset moderates the negative impact of ostracism on innovative behavior. Psychological training can enhance this capacity.
Innovative work behavior in Singapore evoked by transformational leaders through innovation support and readiness (Tan et al., 2021)	Quantitative survey (n=406) with three-way mediation analysis	Implement transformational leadership that sequentially increases perceived support for innovation and innovation readiness. These two mediators are key leadership pathways that drive innovation at the human resources level.
A behavioral approach to administrative reform: a case study of promoting proactive administration in South Korea (P. S. Kim, 2022)	Qualitative case study with document and policy analysis	Implement behavioral reform through a "proactive administration" initiative. Change the mindset and behavior of civil servants, not just organizational structures, to encourage innovation.
Compassion—A key to innovation: What promotes and what prevents innovation in organizations? (Spännäri et al., 2023)	Qualitative focus groups (9 FGDs) with grounded theory	Embed compassion throughout the organization. Four key factors: 1) Supportive strategies and structures; 2) Allocation of time as a resource; 3) A collaborative work culture; and 4) Positive individual-community interactions. The presence of compassion drives innovation; its absence inhibits it.
How Does Green Training Boost Employee Green Creativity? A Sequential Mediation Process Model (Wu et al., 2021)	Two-wave quantitative survey (n=464) with SEM	Designing green training can trigger a sequential mediation process that includes: training → green values → green intrinsic motivation → green creativity. However, training must address values and motivation, not just technical skills.
Exploring systemic design practices in public sector innovation (Palm et al., 2024)	Qualitative semi-structured interviews (n=21) with thematic analysis	Use the systemic design toolbox with 12 innovation tools. The key principle: involve the right people at every stage of the innovation process. Flexibility in choosing tools and people is more important than following a rigid process model.
Do HRM practices facilitate innovation? A qualitative study in a developing country (Abdul Ghani Azmi & Hashim, 2022)	Qualitative semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis	Implement three differentiating HRM practices: 1) Specific local training (not general training); 2) Diverse forms of rewards (not just financial); 3) Minimum innovation standards in performance evaluation. Innovation award-winning organizations implement these consistently.
The Effect of Dynamic Governance on Public Service Innovation Through The	Quantitative survey (n=357) with	Build dynamic governance consisting of dynamic capabilities and institutional cultures. Strengthen this with an effective

Recruitment of Managers of Public Organizations (Natsir et al., 2023)	regression analysis	public management recruitment process, as recruitment moderates the relationship between dynamic governance and innovation.
Exploring the individual adoption of human resource analytics: Behavioural beliefs and the role of machine learning characteristics (Hülter et al., 2024)	Qualitative focused interviews with thematic analysis	Proactively ensure fairness in HR Analytics, as end users don't naturally consider this aspect. Organizations must integrate fairness values into analytics design and implementation.
Deriving Public Innovation Capacity: Evidence From the Korean Public Sector (M. Y. Kim & Kim, 2022)	Mini Delphi, EFA, CFA (survey) to develop constructs	Measure and build public innovation capacity (PIC) simultaneously at three levels: the individual level, the middle manager level, and the organizational level. All three must be developed together to create a comprehensive innovation capacity.
Weaknesses in motivation and in establishing a meritocratic system: A portrait of the Portuguese public administration (Nishimura et al., 2021)	Mixed survey (qualitative-quantitative, n=1,119) with non-parametric statistical tests	Address two fundamental weaknesses first: 1) Low levels of employee motivation; and 2) a weak meritocratic system in recruitment and performance evaluation. Without these improvements, other innovation interventions will be ineffective.
Organizational drivers of innovation: The role of workforce agility (Franco & Landini, 2022)	Quantitative survey (18,000 workplaces, 28 countries) with conditional correlation analysis	Improve workforce agility, particularly task agility, as this is positively correlated with innovation. The effect is mediated by increased employee commitment. Flexible job design is key.
The way of human resource development and resource/infrastructure management affect the agroindustrial innovation process in a merged public research institution (Ririh et al., 2025)	Quantitative survey (n=204) with PLS-SEM	Take advantage of moments of uncertainty (knowledge vacuums) during mergers or crises to stimulate open innovation. Human resource development (training, coaching) is slightly more important than resource/infrastructure management.
Implementation of a paraprofessional role across the public health sector in Manitoba: Impacts on system capacity (Marshall et al., 2025)	Mixed research methods (quantitative and qualitative interviews)	Create new professional roles as an HR innovation. Successful implementation requires mentoring, ongoing supervision, role clarity, training, and clear standards of practice. These new roles can dramatically increase system capacity.
Factors influencing electronic human resource management implementation in public	Quantitative survey with hierarchical	Identify five factors for successful e-HRM adoption: perceived simplicity, perceived usefulness, self-efficacy, compatibility,

organizations in an emerging economy (Amoako et al., 2023)	regression (n=363)	and facilitating conditions. These five factors significantly influence e-HRM implementation intentions.
How and when servant leadership affect public employees' innovative behavior (Xiao et al., 2025)	Quantitative survey (n=642) with mediation and moderation analysis	Implement servant leadership that enhances psychological safety. Furthermore, strengthen public service motivation (PSM), as PSM strengthens the relationship between psychological safety and employee engagement.
In what ways are HR analytics and artificial intelligence transforming the healthcare sector? (Cavanagh et al., 2023)	Literature review and editorial (conceptual)	Use HR analytics and AI to address specific challenges like work overload, burnout, and staff shortages. Management innovation and policy support are needed to transform data into innovative HR decisions.
A funder-imposed data publication requirement seldom inspired data sharing (Couture et al., 2018)	Quantitative study (data recovery trial of 315 projects)	Don't rely on mandates or coercive rules to encourage innovative collaboration. Only 26% of data is successfully recovered. Instead, build positive incentives and technical support infrastructure to encourage collaborative behavior.
Scaling up ART adherence clubs in the public sector health system in the Western Cape, South Africa: a study of the institutionalisation of a pilot innovation (MacGregor et al., 2018)	Qualitative study (complex adaptive systems analysis)	Be aware of the "tipping point" when scaling innovations from pilot to full scale. Successful innovations in pilots don't automatically translate to success at scale. Continuous support, additional resources, a culture of iterative learning, and mitigating system complexity are required.
The role of the outer setting in implementation: Associations between state demographic, fiscal, and policy factors and use of evidence-based treatments in mental healthcare (Bruns et al., 2019)	Multilevel analysis with secondary data across US states	Focus on modifiable external factors, particularly interagency collaboration and investment in research centers. These factors are more predictive of the adoption of innovative policies than immutable demographic characteristics.

Source: Scopus Database

Discussion

From the 24 articles that have been critically analyzed, it is obvious that innovative change in human resource management in the public sector cannot be produced through one factor alone, but is multidimensional, situational, and systemic, just like an ecological system which involves interaction among people, processes, technology, and environment. Based on my study and analysis of the 24 articles, there are four (4) core themes that drive innovation for HRM in the public sector. These are:

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Theme 1: Leadership That Builds a Psychological Climate and Culture of Innovation

No innovations can take place without the right kind of leadership. However, leadership within the public sphere is not about commanding or controlling; it is about creating an enabling psychological environment for such processes. According to Tan, Van Dun, and Wilderom from Singapore, transformational leadership operates in a two-step process whereby first it leads to enhanced perception of innovation support and, secondly, innovation readiness (Tan et al., 2021). Leaders, therefore, do not have to be visionary in order to make innovation take place; what they require is showing commitment to innovation, financially and socially.

Moreover, in a similar study conducted in China by Xiao et al., servant leadership promotes innovation by fostering psychological safety, which involves feeling safe to express one's thoughts, to try something and even make mistakes (Xiao et al., 2025). This is very significant especially for organizations that have been known to punish individuals who make error. What is interesting about this finding is the increased influence that comes from having public service motivation. As such, when leaders serve (Rahman et al., 2018) and public motivation is present, an environment conducive for innovation is fostered. On the other hand, the Korean study by M.Y Kim and Kim looks at behavioral reform through proactive administration (M. Y. Kim & Kim, 2022). Rather than reorganizing the structure, the Korean government opted for reforms in its civil servants' mindset and behavior.

It should also be noted that leadership alone is not sufficient for innovation. For example, Spännäri et al. from Finland highlight that without compassion – that is, the ability to respond to the pain and happiness of others – all efforts in terms of strategies, structures, and resource management will prove ineffective, as innovation cannot be achieved otherwise (Spännäri et al., 2023). Compassion serves as the cement that binds relationships within an organization. Thus, a leader concerned with achieving their targets, but completely ignores their workers' interests will simply hinder innovative activities. In turn, it becomes clear that employees cannot be created unless they can innovate in a psychologically safe and compassionate environment.

Theme 2: Human Resources Management Practices that Center on People, Not Procedures

As leadership shapes the climate, HRM activities are responsible for putting it into practice. One of the key observations is presented in Vivona & Lewis's study on Australian workers who number up to 92,128 in total. According to the researchers, recognition and inclusion were the only activities with the greatest impact on employees' entrepreneurial attitudes (Vivona & Lewis, 2025). Conversely, those activities commonly recognized as vital, namely formal appraisal and

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mass training, had virtually no influence. It means that the current HRM system of the public sector needs a severe criticism since it is based on procedure and homogeneity. Malaysian researchers Abdul Ghani Azmi & Hashim support the above view (Abdul Ghani Azmi & Hashim, 2022), according to which innovative public organizations have distinctive HRM activities, including: 1) locally specific training (instead of standardized training applicable for everybody); 2) Different ways of rewards (including monetary bonuses, social recognition, and autonomy); 3) Minimum innovation standards in performance assessments. Innovation should become a measurable term.

Role innovation is evident in the case of Marshall et al., who created the Communicable Disease Technician role (Marshall et al., 2025). The result of this innovation included a sharp increase in system capacity, which improved case follow-up from 35% to 98%. However, this achievement cannot be attributed solely to the introduction of the role but rather is due to proper mentoring, supervision, role definition, training, and standards of practice. Hence, HRM innovation can include role innovation, in which one creates novel roles rather than merely changing existing ones. On the other hand, the example offered by Wu et al. shows that well-conceived training may stimulate creativity (Wu et al., 2021). While green training involves transferring skills, it must also stimulate the acquisition of values, which will eventually lead to green intrinsic motivation and green creativity.

From the analysis presented above, it is possible to examine in more detail why classical HR management approaches such as performance appraisal and training programs do not promote meaningful innovation in HR within the public sector. This is due to the fact that such approaches are aimed at compliance rather than innovation, and innovation requires freedom for personalization while the classical performance appraisal approach punishes deviation from standards. Thus, HRM reform in the public sector needs to shift from a compliance to an empowerment logic. Recognition and inclusion are important as they demonstrate the value of each person as a unique entity.

Theme 3: Psychological Capacity and Internal Motivation as Driving Forces

All these good leadership and HRM approaches will be futile if employees are not sufficiently psychologically fit to engage in innovative activities. This particular aspect remains understudied within the field of public management as it is too preoccupied with the structural and policy issues. One such study was conducted in the Netherlands, where researchers Gorgievski et al. proposed a proactive motivational approach (Gorgievski et al., 2023). It involves meeting three particular requirements – reason-to (the prosocial nature and accountability of work), can-do

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(autonomy, self-efficacy, and optimism) and energized-to (work engagement). It all has to happen at once – either there should be an ability without any energy behind it or vice versa. In case there is a reason to (prosocial nature), but no ability (autonomy and self-efficacy), there will be no innovation.

On the other hand, in Pakistan, Ahmad et al. have suggested an even more radical idea—the paradox mindset—defined as the readiness to embrace and handle contradictions (Abdul Ghani Azmi & Hashim, 2022). Public bureaucracies experience contradictions every day: there is contradiction between rules and flexibility, between targets and quality, and between individual and organizational priorities. Those with paradoxical mindsets do not feel conflicted by these contradictions but rather see them as sources of creativity. The study by Abdul Ghani Azmi and Hashim has found that a paradoxical mindset could act as a moderator in relation to ostracism and innovation.

Spännäri et al. have once again made an interesting discovery: compassion is the foundation of innovation (Spännäri et al., 2023). Four elements – strategy and structure, resources (time above all), work culture, and interaction processes – determine whether or not compassion will thrive or not survive. Compassion leads to innovation, as it enables people to form emotional connections that make people willing to help each other. At the same time, the lack of compassion leads to organizational coldness, self-interest, and defense – major barriers to innovation. From this, it can be further deduced that developing a culture of meaningful innovation among the public service workforce requires sustained effort, including coaching, reflection, and ritual creation. However, very few longitudinal evaluations of such interventions are included in the sample for this article.

Theme 4: Equitable Digital Governance and Technology (Not Just Automation)

Finally, yet again, an equally entral theme, is the issue of technology and digital governance. While in many instances HRM digitization has been viewed as the panacea for achieving efficiency and innovation, a number of studies included in this book present some dire warnings. For example, research conducted in Indonesia by Satispi et al. clearly concludes that HRIS does not necessarily lead to innovation (Satispi et al., 2023). Technology is only complementary. Innovation can only take place under three conditions: ability, motivation, and opportunity. Employees must be capable, motivated, and have the opportunity to try something new. Otherwise, the whole process will end up becoming another bureaucratic hurdle.

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At the same time, five critical components of effective e-HRM implementation were pointed out by Amoako et al. in Ghana (Amoako et al., 2023): simplicity, usefulness, self-efficacy, compatibility, and facilitating conditions. It should be noted that the above-mentioned components have more to do with perception and context than technology. Therefore, HRM digitalization will prove to be successful if users perceive the system correctly and are ready to use it regardless of its technological characteristics. Moreover, Hülter, Ertel, and Heidemann bring up another important aspect that is frequently overlooked – ethical (Hülter et al., 2024). Namely, the question of fairness when using machine learning (ML) in HRM analytics. Since the algorithms may be biased, an organization needs to proactively work on making sure that the decisions made (related to recruiting, promotion, and performance management) are impartial. What is alarming, however, is the findings that end users do not naturally think of fairness while adopting ML solutions but rather pay attention to accuracy and efficiency.

Additionally, Cavanagh et al. claim that AI and HR analytics could prove to be extremely beneficial in solving problems such as burnouts, workforce shortage, and overwork (Cavanagh et al., 2023). Nonetheless, their true benefits can be achieved only through innovations and favorable policy decisions by management. Otherwise, AI could exacerbate problems in the organization. In this regard, it may be said that implementation of HR technology in the workplace usually occurs when under external pressure (such as donations or global trends) but there is no preparation within. Therefore, investment in costly technology becomes useless and even harmful. The take-away message from the articles discussed above is that digitization of HRM must start with human capital development rather than with technology purchases. In other words, the order should be: first, create opportunities, motivate employees, and develop skills; second, select simple and helpful technology; third, ensure it guarantees fairness; and finally, implement technology only then.

Synthesizing the four pillars, we propose a synergistic model of meaningful HR innovation in the public sector: Meaningful innovation = f (Leadership × HRM practices × Psychological capacity × Digital governance). Where the multiplication sign (×) denotes interdependence rather than addition. For example, servant leadership (Pillar 1) enhances psychological safety, which in turn enables proactive motivation (Pillar 3). Recognition and inclusion (Pillar 2) are more effective when leaders model compassion (Pillar 1). Digital tools (Pillar 4) only amplify innovation when employees already possess ability, motivation, and opportunity (Pillar 3). A weakness in any pillar reduces the overall innovative output non-linearly. This framework has two practical implications for public managers: First, invest in leadership development that prioritizes psychological safety,

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compassion, and recognition – not just technical or strategic skills. Second, avoid piecemeal interventions (e.g., launching an HRIS without preparing employees). Instead, design integrated programs that address all four pillars simultaneously.

Conclusion

Based on a systematic literature review of 24 selected articles, it can be concluded that meaningful innovation in public sector human resources cannot be generated by a single factor, but rather is the result of a systemic interaction between leadership, HR management practices, employee psychological capacity, and equitable digital governance. More explicitly, there are four core areas that should be executed at the same time. *First*, public leaders must create a psychologically secure and positive environment for people, such as through transformational leadership that creates an innovative mindset and servant leadership that promotes the idea of psychological safety. Another example is the use of various behavioral changes, such as administrative actions aimed at change.

Second, HR management processes must be oriented towards people rather than procedures. As studies demonstrate, recognition and inclusion exert the greatest impact on the development of innovations, while the appraisal and mass training do not matter. Training has to be local-specific, value and motivation-based, as well as combined with minimal innovation requirements within performance evaluation. Third, employee psychological capacity and internal motivation serve as the driving factors. It is important to ensure that three types of proactive motivations – reason-to, can-do, and energized-to – are satisfied simultaneously. Moreover, a paradoxical mindset and compassion are among the key factors of successful innovation.

Fourth, the digitalization of HRM cannot be seen as a panacea. HR information systems (HRIS) or HR Analytics are just tools to complement the existing practices; digital innovation would have significance if it is enabled through the capacity, motivation, and opportunities for employees and fairness in each decision made through the algorithms. What it means is that the significant innovation of HR from a public perspective is about transforming the organization culturally and developing the required capacity, not necessarily using new technologies or introducing new regulations. In addition, this research propose a synergistic model of meaningful HR innovation in the public sector: Meaningful innovation = f (Leadership × HRM practices × Psychological capacity × Digital governance). On the other hand, this research has limitations,

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including: the use of data only from Scopus, only open-access articles, and the data period taken was only the last 10 years (2016–2026).

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