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Connecting People and Organizations: Research Pathways and Perspectives in Human Resource Management Practices in the Public Service

Conectando Pessoas e Organizações: Caminhos e Perspectivas de Pesquisa em Práticas de Gestão de Pessoas no Serviço Público

Conectando Personas y Organizaciones: Caminos y Perspectivas de Investigación en Prácticas de Gestión de Personas en el Servicio Público

Literature Reviews

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Abstract: Studies on human resource management practices have garnered increasing interest, yet there is a lack of research addressing this variable in the public sector context. This study explores the international state of the art in government human resource management practices through a systematic literature review (SLR) of 27 articles from Scopus and Web of Science published between 2017 and 2023. The findings indicate that most studies are quantitative, with a focus on performance, where training and performance appraisal emerge as the most recurrent practices in the models. There is limited interest in exploring the specificities of these practices from a government perspective, highlighting the gap addressed in this study. This SLR is expected to shed light on new challenges and research opportunities in human resource management practices within the government, contributing to more strategic and humanized management, with positive implications for the quality of public services.
Keywords: human resource management practices, public sector, systematic review.

Resumo: Estudos sobre práticas de gestão de pessoas têm ganhado interesse crescente, mas há carência de pesquisas que discutam essa variável no contexto público. Assim, este estudo busca identificar o estado da arte internacional sobre práticas de gestão de pessoas no ambiente de governo. Nesse sentido, foi elaborada uma revisão sistemática de literatura (RSL) de 27 artigos contidos nas bases de dados Scopus e Web of Science, entre 2017 e 2023. Constatou-se que os estudos têm natureza majoritariamente quantitativa, com foco no desempenho, sendo treinamento e avaliação de desempenho as práticas mais recorrentes nos modelos. Há baixo interesse em discutir as especificidades dessas práticas na perspectiva de governo, reforçando a lacuna abraçada neste estudo. Espera-se que esta RSL lance luz a novos desafios e oportunidades de pesquisas em práticas de gestão de pessoas no setor público, contribuindo para uma gestão mais estratégica e humanizada, com reflexo na qualidade dos serviços públicos.
Palavras-chave: práticas de gestão de pessoas, setor público, revisão sistemática.

Resumen: Los estudios sobre prácticas de gestión de personas han ganado interés, pero son escasas las investigaciones que abordan esta variable en el sector público. Este estudio analiza el estado del arte internacional sobre dichas prácticas en contextos gubernamentales mediante una revisión sistemática de la literatura (RSL) de 27 artículos publicados en las bases de datos Scopus y Web of Science entre 2017 y 2023. Los resultados muestran que los estudios son mayoritariamente cuantitativos, centrados en el desempeño, siendo la formación y la evaluación del desempeño las prácticas más comunes. Sin embargo, existe un interés limitado en explorar las especificidades de estas prácticas desde una perspectiva gubernamental, lo que subraya una brecha importante. Esta RSL busca iluminar nuevos retos y oportunidades de investigación en gestión de personas en el sector público, promoviendo enfoques más estratégicos y humanizados que impacten positivamente en la calidad de los servicios públicos.
Palabras clave: prácticas de gestión de personas, sector público, revisión sistemática.

Introduction

The current organizational environment is experiencing profound and significant changes that have driven research on human resource management. Among the main contextual changes are the introduction of new technologies, new work arrangements (such as telework), the nature of employment contracts, and the composition of the workforce (Fraccaroli et al., 2023). Additionally, unpredictable challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore the importance of strategic agility and flexibility in addressing crises that lead to economic, financial, and social transformations (He et al., 2023). To address such dynamics, organizations find themselves needing to strengthen their organizational capabilities (Arbab & Mahdi Abaker, 2018), with the field of human resource management playing a critical role in enhancing organizational performance, regardless of how it is measured (Yamin, 2019).

The literature presents a substantial body of concepts on human resource management, understood here as managerial decisions directed toward policies and practices that collectively influence the dynamics of labor relations and aim to achieve specific objectives (Boselie et al., 2021). As highlighted by Legge (2006), the field of human resource management encompasses a range of debates stemming from various normative and descriptive models. These models address both hard concepts, which focus on the effective and efficient utilization of human capital, and soft concepts, which view people as valuable and strategic resources, prioritizing human development.

Demo et al. (2024) define human resource management practices (HRMP) as the organization's articulated proposals, inspired by its strategies, which translate human resource management policies into actions and organizational routines concerning human relations, aiming to achieve desired outcomes. The continuous rethinking of strategies, policies, and practices integrated with organizational objectives and goals to optimize performance and fully leverage human potential establishes the foundation for strategic human resource management (SPM) (Castro et al., 2020).

Several studies suggest a strong association between human resource management practices (HRMP) and variables such as productivity, commitment, turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behaviors (Cesário & Magalhães, 2017), resilience (Costa et al., 2019), workplace well-being (Demo et al., 2022), leadership, organizational virtues (Coura et al., 2022), and quality of life in telework (Melo & Demo, 2023). Although the scope of human resource management practices continues to expand, research indicates that their core functions include recruitment and selection, training and development, performance evaluation, compensation and rewards, participation and teamwork, workplace relationships, and working conditions (Demo et al., 2024; Van der Wal, 2017).

Despite the fact that the literature provides some indices for evaluating specific human resource management practices (Gould-Williams, 2003; Pfeffer, 2005), a gap persisted regarding the development of more integrated and comprehensive models for assessing HRMP (Boon et al., 2019; Huselid, 1995), particularly in the context of public service (Boselie et al., 2021). The models proposed and cross-culturally validated by Demo et al. (2012, 2014) aimed to address this gap and have been widely used in various studies (Dello Russo et al., 2023; Telles, 2023). Furthermore, to advance the collection of validity evidence for a specific measure to assess HRMP in the public sector, Demo et al. (2024) developed a customized instrument tailored to this context.

Thus, the adoption of human resource management practices in the public sector differs from that in the private sector, as noted by Jakobsen et al. (2023). This divergence arises for various reasons, including differences in legitimacy requirements and organizational values, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of how public managers effectively implement these practices within their specific contexts (Jakobsen et al., 2023).

Public organizations are less exposed to market competition, face greater legal constraints, and are subject to political influences. Additionally, they have more ambiguous, complex, and multidimensional goals compared to the private sector (Lim et al., 2017). Furthermore, certain human resource management practices in the public service, such as selection and compensation, are governed by law.

As a starting point for this literature review, a search for recent reviews on human resource management practices was conducted using the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Boon et al. (2019) analyzed the evolution of human resource management systems and their connection to research instruments used to assess the construct up to 2017. Castro et al. (2020) reviewed Brazilian literature on strategic human resource management practices from 1997 to 2017 across public and private sectors. Meanwhile, Demo et al. (2020) mapped international scholarly output on the topic from 2005 to 2019, without sector-specific restrictions.

Another identified review study, with no temporal restriction and encompassing both public and private sectors, was conducted by Melo et al. (2023), focusing on human resource management practices in the telework context. Jakobsen et al. (2023), in turn, concentrated on recruitment and selection practices, while Oliveira et al. (2023) evaluated Brazilian research on human resource management practices across both sectors up to May 2022.

Finally, a systematic literature review by Boselie et al. (2021) was identified, mapping international scientific production on human resource management, exclusively in the public sector, from 2000 to 2016. As noted by the authors, although there has been an increase in the number of

publications dedicated to the topic in the public sector, it is essential to learn from the lessons derived from previous research and continue identifying new research perspectives in order to consider contextualized approaches when applying human resource management practices in the public context (Boselie et al., 2021).

Therefore, the present systematic literature review aims to advance the mapping of this research field, building on the work of Boselie et al. (2021), seeking to expand and refine previous findings by exploring additional aspects and incorporating new perspectives. In this regard, the central question of this research is: "What are the research paths and perspectives on human resource management practices in the public sector?" Based on this question, it was possible to identify the trajectories of international production and pinpoint gaps, challenges, and new opportunities, which laid the foundation for proposing an agenda for future studies.

It is worth noting that the international scope of the search also includes Brazilian scientific articles that have been published in English and in journals indexed in the aforementioned databases. This strategy aimed to prioritize publications with greater impact and quality in the scientific landscape concerning the variable.

Method

To conduct this research, a combined systematic literature review (SLR) strategy was adopted to cover qualitative analyses and bibliometric analyses, which allow for a quantitative assessment of the set of identified articles (Rojon et al., 2021).

The SLR was conducted based on the PRISMA method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis), which consists of three stages: identification, screening, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). The research question was, "What are the research paths and perspectives on human resource management practices in the public sector?"

Subsequently, research was conducted in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases. These databases were chosen for their large number of indexed journals and the broad temporal coverage of the periodicals (Chadegani et al., 2013). No other sources were included in the search to ensure the quality and relevance of the articles to be analyzed (Aguinis et al., 2023). The survey was carried out in March 2024, with descriptors searched in the title, abstract, and keywords fields, covering the period from 2017 to 2023, as the literature review by Boselie et al. (2021), focused on the public sector, covered the 2000-2016 period. The defined descriptors were (("human resource management practices" OR "HRM practices" OR "human resource management systems" OR "HRM systems" OR "strategic human resource management practices") AND ("Public sector" OR "government" OR "public service" OR "public organizations" OR "civil servants" OR "public employees")). The initial search resulted in 315 documents (Scopus 206 + WoS 109).
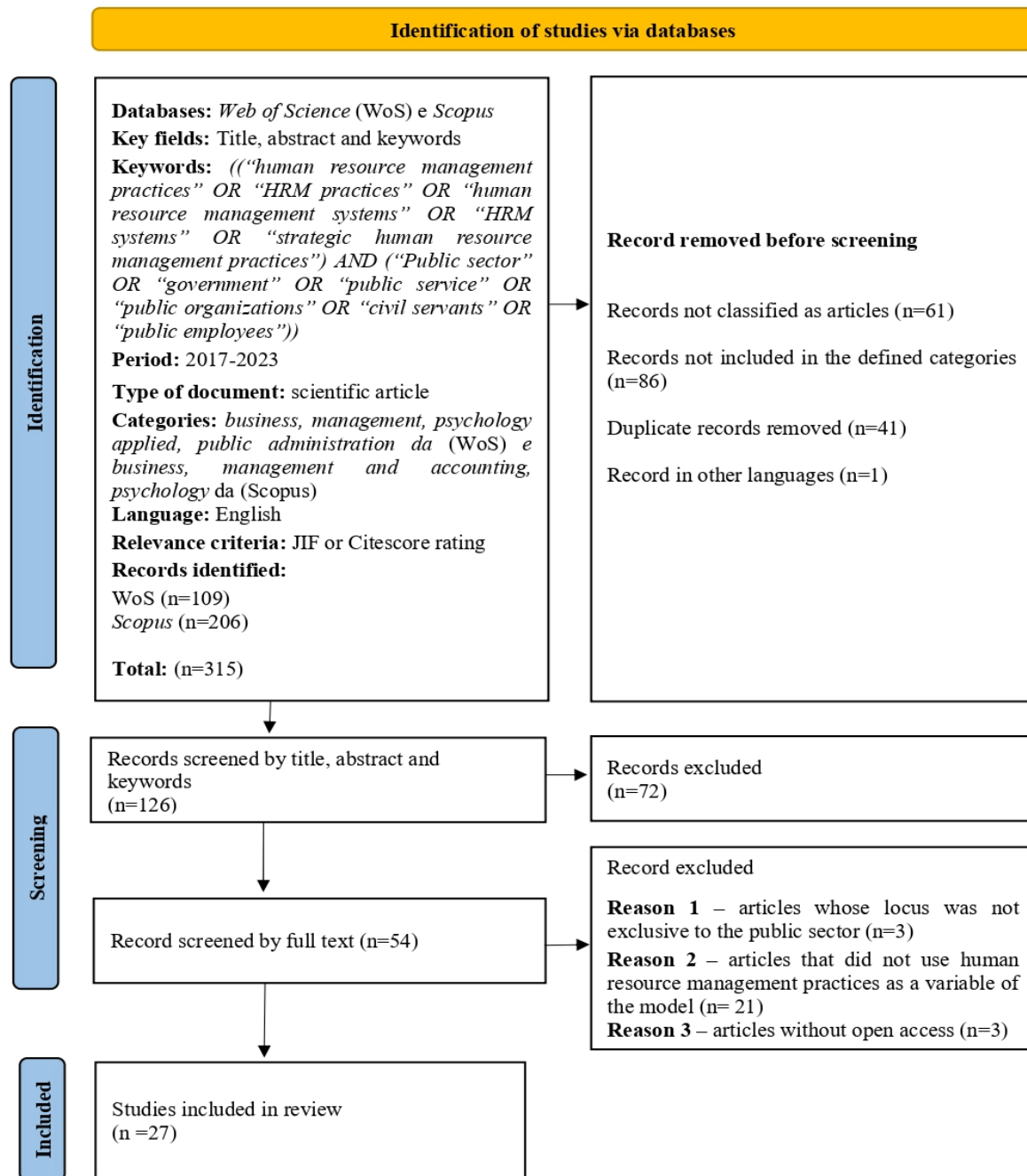
It is worth noting that the search strategy includes additional descriptors beyond those defined by Boselie et al. (2021), as well as covers other journals (in addition to the eight selected by the authors), aiming to expand and refine previous findings and, thus, explore other aspects and incorporate new perspectives regarding the variable.

The initial identification phase also involved the application of filters: language (English), document type "article," and the categories business, management, psychology applied, and public administration for the Web of Science database, and business, management and accounting, and psychology for the Scopus database, as these are the categories that traditionally research the topic (Melo et al., 2023). After applying these filters, the resulting set consisted of 167 articles, which were evenly distributed for independent analysis by two researchers, using the criteria described below. Any doubts regarding the eligibility of a manuscript were resolved through consultation between the researchers. Duplicate documents (n = 41) were excluded, and the relevance criterion was applied, using CiteScore indicators from Scopus and the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) from Web of Science, to assess the quality of the journals in which the articles were published (Aguinis et al., 2023). No articles were excluded, as all were published in journals with JIF or CiteScore ratings. Thus, the identification phase resulted in 126 articles, which proceeded to the next phase of screening.

Finally, in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the behavior of the field of study on human resource management practices in the public sector, bibliometric analyses were conducted on the articles that comprise the analysis corpus. The RStudio software (package 'bibliometrix') and VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) were chosen due to their free access and ability to assist in more objective and structured analyses through graphical data visualization and the characterization of publications (Kirby, 2023).

Figure 1

PRISMA Protocol Diagram

Identification of studies via databases

Identification

Databases: *Web of Science* (WoS) e *Scopus*
Key fields: Title, abstract and keywords
Keywords: *(("human resource management practices" OR "HRM practices" OR "human resource management systems" OR "HRM systems" OR "strategic human resource management practices") AND ("Public sector" OR "government" OR "public service" OR "public organizations" OR "civil servants" OR "public employees"))*
Period: 2017-2023
Type of document: scientific article
Categories: *business, management, psychology applied, public administration da* (WoS) *e business, management and accounting, psychology da* (Scopus)
Language: English
Relevance criteria: JIF or Citescore rating
Records identified:
WoS (n=109)
Scopus (n=206)

Total: (n=315)

Record removed before screening

Records not classified as articles (n=61)

Records not included in the defined categories (n=86)

Duplicate records removed (n=41)

Record in other languages (n=1)

Screening

Records screened by title, abstract and keywords (n=126)

Records excluded (n=72)

Record screened by full text (n=54)

Record excluded

Reason 1 – articles whose locus was not exclusive to the public sector (n=3)
Reason 2 – articles that did not use human resource management practices as a variable of the model (n= 21)
Reason 3 – articles without open access (n=3)

Included

Studies included in review (n =27)

Note. Source: Figure by authors.

Results

The analysis of the final sample of articles (*n* = 27) in this systematic literature review reveals that most of the studies adopted a quantitative approach (78%), followed by qualitative research (22%). No multimethod or theoretical articles were found. Regarding data collection techniques, the majority of the quantitative studies used questionnaires (95%), while the qualitative studies employed semi-structured interviews (67%). In terms of data analysis techniques, structural equation modeling predominated (52%) among the quantitative studies, while thematic and content analysis (50%) were the most common in the qualitative studies.

Regarding the journals, the most frequent publications on the topic were in the Review of Public Personnel Administration (*n* = 3), with a CiteScore of 8.9 (2022), which focuses on various approaches used in studies and human resource management practices in the public sector, and the International Journal of Public Administration (*n* = 2), with a CiteScore of 4.4 (2022), which publishes

studies exploring the latest advancements in the public administration landscape, public policies, and management.

Additionally, the data on annual scientific production showed a relatively steady number of publications, with an average of 4 per year, from 2017 to 2023. However, as shown in Figure 2, 2018 had the lowest number of publications ($n = 2$), while 2023 saw the highest increase ($n = 6$), possibly due to the need to analyze human resource management practices in different work arrangements as a consequence of the 2019 pandemic crisis.

Furthermore, it is possible to infer, through the analysis of the number of citations of the articles that make up the sample of this review, which studies have exerted the greatest influence in the field of research on human resource management practices in the public sector. Table 1 lists the three most cited articles, ranked by the number of citations, along with their authors, publication year, journals, CiteScore, Journal Impact Factor (JIF), and the number of citations in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases.

Figure 2

Annual Scientific Production
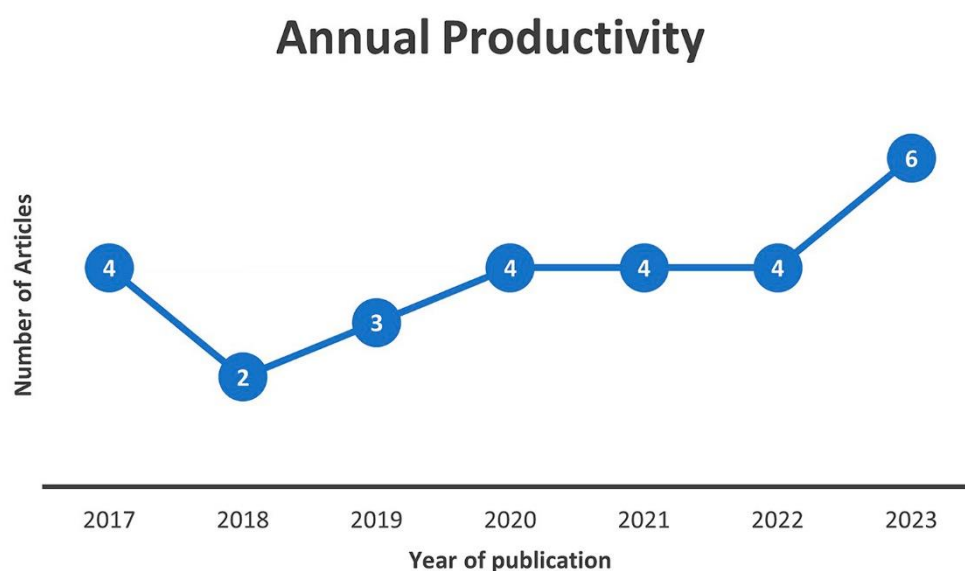
Note. Source: Figure by authors.

Table 1

Ranking of most cited articles

Title / Authors / Year	Journal	*CiteScore* (2022)	JIF (2022)	Number of citations *Scopus* + WoS
1) Conceptualization of wasta and its main consequences on human resource management (Alsarhan & Valax, 2021)	International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management	4.6	3.0	23
2) The Effects of Politicization on Performance: The Mediating Role of HRM Practices (Fuenzalida & Riccucci, 2019)	Review of Public Personnel Administration	8.9	3.9	23
3) Shedding New Light on Strategic Human Resource Management: The Impact of Human Resource Management Practices and Human Resources on the Perception of Federal Agency Mission Accomplishment (Lim et al., 2017)	Public Personnel Management	3.0	4.7	17

Note. Source: Table by Authors using Scopus and Web of Science databases.

The article by Alsarhan and Valax (2021), which is qualitative in nature, seeks to elucidate the main implications of the use of wasta, understood as the power of influence and a form of expression of social capital in the Arab world, in human resource management practices in the workplace and the overall performance of public institutions in Jordan. Interviews were conducted with public sector professionals, and the results indicated that wasta has negative consequences on the overall performance of the studied organizations. It influences employee motivation, morale, job satisfaction, frustration, workplace diversity, turnover, burnout, as well as impacting the image and reputation of individuals and organizations.

The second most cited article, by Fuenzalida and Riccucci (2019), questions the effects of politicization, understood as the replacement of technical and neutral criteria with political and personal biases, on the organizational performance of public institutions in Chile. The authors propose that this influence can be explained by the deterioration of human resource management practices, such as recruitment, selection, performance evaluation, and training. The results confirm the existence of negative impacts of politicization on the performance of public agencies, which is partially mediated by the detrimental effect of politicization on the effectiveness of human resource management practices.

The article by Lim et al. (2017) evaluates the resource-based view in the study of strategic human resource management in public institutions. The study examines the impact of human resource management practices (HRMP) on the perception of public mission fulfillment. The authors identified that all types of human resource management practices, whether results-oriented or performance-based, such as rewards, training, evaluation, and recruitment, positively affect the perception of public mission fulfillment. It is worth noting that this is one of the few articles that seeks to discuss the adoption of HRMP in light of the specificities and constraints present in the public sector.

Turning to the analysis of the authors, in terms of academic production on HRMP in the public sector, Hassan Al-Dhaafri and Mohammed Alosani, both affiliated with the Dubai Police Service in the United Arab Emirates, stand out as the most relevant, with two publications each during the studied period. Regarding the geographical distribution of the publications, in terms of the country of correspondence of the authors, Malaysia (n=7), South Korea (n=5), and Ghana (n=4) are the most prominent, in addition to Australia, France, India, Norway, and South Africa, with three publications each. It is worth noting that authors from all continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and America) participated, but Chile was the only representative from Latin America, marking an advancement compared to the systematic review by Boselie et al. (2021), which did not include studies from this region during the analyzed period.

Finally, to advance the understanding of the knowledge structure, connections, and the theoretical-methodological connectivity relationships of the studies that make up the analysis corpus, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Four clusters (red, green, blue, and yellow) were generated, formed by circles (nodes) representing concepts. The larger the circle, the more frequently the word appears within a particular domain. The lines represent relationships between concepts and highlight the conceptual structure present in the literature, as seen in HRMP in the public sector context (Qin et al., 2022). Figure 3 shows the graphical visualization of the clusters.

Figure 3

Keywords co-ocurrance
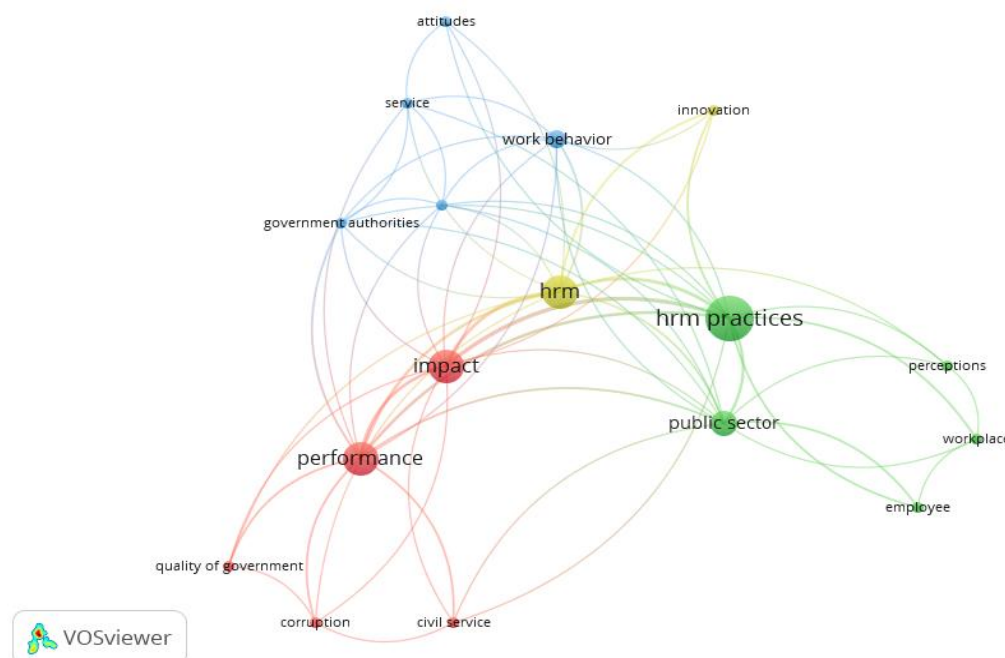
Note. Source: Table by Authors using Scopus and Web of Science databases.

A general analysis of the keyword co-occurrence map indicates that human resource management, impact, and performance, represented by the largest nodes in Figure 3, are the most relevant concepts in the field of study on human resource management practices in the public sector. This result aligns with the literature, as the adoption of effective HRMP enables the creation of work environments that promote better individual performance, leading to greater impact on deliverables (Boon et al., 2019).

The concepts in the blue cluster (work behavior, government authorities, job satisfaction, services, and attitudes) reflect the discussion related to the behaviors and attitudes of employees and leadership in promoting job satisfaction and service delivery. Evidence can be found on the impact of HRMP in fostering positive behaviors and attitudes (Cesário & Magalhães, 2017; Venard et al., 2023; Zumrah et al., 2022).

The red cluster, composed of the words impact, performance, public service, corruption, and government quality, invites reflection on the presence of unprofessional practices, based on personal interests, often found in the government environment. These practices tend to harm the government's image quality and have negative repercussions on institutional performance and public service delivery. According to Cooper (2022), public bureaucracy, based on Weberian principles of merit and permanent careers, especially in the presence of established whistleblowing mechanisms in the workplace, provides a positive impact on recruitment practices and promotion opportunities. Van der Wal (2017) and Fuenzalida and Riccucci (2019) support this by pointing out that job satisfaction and performance can be improved through anti-corruption initiatives and the promotion of ethical principles.

The green cluster (human resource management practices, public sector, civil servants, workplace, and perceptions) highlights the importance of investigating civil servants' perceptions of human resource management practices (HRMP) in the workplace. Alhajaj and Ahmad (2023) assessed public employees' subjective experiences regarding satisfaction, empowerment, participation, and communication in their intention to leave their jobs. Cesário and Magalhães (2017) also found positive relationships between HRMP perception and intention to leave the job, as well as organizational citizenship behavior. Gur and Tzafrir (2022) examined how HRMP perception interacts with trust in different groups within a public health institution and recommended the design of customized HRMP for each group of workers.

Finally, the yellow cluster (human resource management and innovation) associates terms related to the creation of environments favorable to the adoption of innovative practices in the public sector. An innovation culture within the organizational environment positively affects human resource management practices, and conversely, the implementation of effective and suitable HRMP facilitates and stimulates a more innovative profile among employees (Alosani & Al-Dhaafri, 2023; Azmi & Hashim, 2022). Vivona and Lewis (2023) note that recognition and inclusion practices have highly positive effects on the entrepreneurial behavior of public servants, helping governments become

more capable of addressing complex societal problems and delivering high-quality public services (Alosani et al., 2021).

Discussion, perspectives and agenda

Although academic production on human resource management practices in organizations is extensive, there is still room to deepen the understanding of the characteristics involved in these practices within the public sector. As is often the case with research on organizational variables in the public sector, most authors tend to overlook the specificities of this domain, such as bureaucracy, public mission, expenditure efficiency, legal regulations, and meeting citizens' needs (Lim et al., 2017; Van der Wal, 2017).

Furthermore, the authors of some selected articles sought to provide a definition of human resource management practices (HRMP) based on references from the literature, as well as their purpose within organizations. According to Zumrah et al. (2022), HRMP encompass activities within an organization such as compensation, training and development, career development, and work-life balance. Azmi and Hashim (2022) argue that the knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and attitudes desired in employees—commonly referred to as competencies—are shaped through HRMP. Biscak and Bencina (2019), in turn, assert that HRMP aim to ensure that employees deliver high-quality services, achieve user satisfaction through efficient resource use, and enhance employee qualifications. Malik and Lenka (2020) and Cesário and Magalhães (2017) state that HRMP contribute to achieving organizational objectives.

It can be inferred from the concepts presented that the primary understanding is that HRMP, beyond their operational nature—such as recruitment and selection—aim to implement mechanisms that foster individual performance and the achievement of organizational goals. Notably, aspects related to well-being, quality of life, self-fulfillment, and purpose, for instance, are often not prioritized in these conceptualizations. These elements tend to take a secondary role when defining the main objectives of HRMP, highlighting a significant opportunity for further research.

In this regard, the practices proposed by Demo et al. (2024) in their customized measurement model for the public sector aim to address this call by incorporating relationship practices and working conditions that primarily focus on employee well-being and quality of life. Additionally, it is worth highlighting the conceptualization presented by Biscak and Bencina (2019), who emphasized aspects related to resource efficiency and the delivery of high-quality services—elements that should guide the public mission in the conceptualization of the construct.

In terms of research model design strategies, in 92% of the articles (n = 25), the variable "human resource management practices" (HRMP) was included as a predictor in the analyses. Only the study by Alosani and Al-Dhaafri (2023) positioned HRMP as a criterion variable, while Fuenzalida and Riccucci (2019) analyzed it as a mediating variable in the model. This trend suggests that HRMP are more commonly perceived as impacting other organizational variables rather than being influenced by them. Boon et al. (2019) had already highlighted the need to develop more complex structural models of relationships between variables, including HRMP as mediators. Similarly, suggestions for future studies identified in the literature point to comparable paths (Demo et al., 2022; Coura et al., 2022; Melo & Demo, 2023).

Among the set of human resource management practices (HRMP) most commonly utilized by authors, training and performance evaluation stand out. This aligns with the dominant productivity-focused understanding reflected in the most widely adopted concepts, as well as the findings of Boselie et al. (2021). Their systematic review identified a strong interest among researchers in exploring the relationship between human resource management and performance. The authors attribute this interest to a prevailing trend in the public sector, particularly over the past two decades, toward results-oriented management.

Regarding the models, Table 2 presents the variables selected by the authors for analyzing relationships with the construct "human resource management practices" (HRMP). The variables were grouped into thematic categories, named "trust" for those involving aspects related to credibility, morality, and ethics in the organizational environment (Teresi et al., 2019). Additionally, the categories of culture, organizational performance, innovation, and individual-centered variables were defined to better understand the trends in studies concerning the construct.

Table 2

Main Variables Adopted in the Analysis Models of the Relationships with HRMP

Category	Variables	Articles
Trust	Corruption; Knowledge sharing; Organizational ethical climate; Politicization; Trust in manager. Wasta (influence power); Whistleblowing.	Alosani e Al-Dhaafri (2023); Alsarhan e Valax (2021); Cooper (2022); Gur e Tzafrir (2022); Venard et al. (2023); Yamin (2019).
Culture	National culture; Organizational culture.	Lockhart et al. (2020)

Category	Variables	Articles
Organizational performance	Adaptive performance; HR Outcomes; Organizational excellence; Organizational performance; Perceived mission accomplishment; Performance; Supply chain management.	Al Damoe et al. (2017); Al Marhoobi e Atan (2018); Arbab et al. (2018); Biscak e Bencina (2019); Fuenzalida e Riccucci (2019); Lenda (2017); Lin et al. (2023); Tabiu et al. (2020); Venard et al. (2023); Yamin (2019).
Innovation	Attitude toward public sector entrepreneurship; Innovation culture; Service innovation.	Alosani et al. (2021); Alosani e Al-Dhaafri (2023); Azmi e Hashim (2022); Vivona e Lewis (2020).
Individual-centered variables	Employee performance; Employee perception; Job satisfaction; Motivation; Organisational citizenship behaviour; Person-organisation fit; Person-job fit; Self-efficacy; Talent turnover intention; Work engagement.	Abane et al. (2023); Alhajaj e Ahmad (2023); Cesário e Magalhães (2017); Fuenzalida e Riccucci (2019); Lenda (2020); Lin et al. (2023); Lockhart et al. (2020); Sixpence et al. (2021); Venard et al. (2023); Vivona e Lewis (2020); Zumrah et al. (2022).

There is a predominance of interest in variables focused on the individual level (attitudes and behaviors). Boselie et al. (2021) obtained similar results, attributing them to the quantitative and psychologization characteristics present in studies in this field—a term used by the authors. Although some variables within the "trust" category are more commonly discussed in the public sector context, it is evident that all identified categories pertain to practices equally applicable to private organizations.

However, it is important to highlight the choice of some studies to include variables such as ethics, corruption, whistleblowing, and politicization in their analyses, given their significance in the governmental sphere. Along these lines, the two most-cited articles (Alsarhan & Valax, 2021; Fuenzalida & Riccucci, 2019) discuss the negative impact of behaviors based on personal influence and the disregard for standards of impartiality on performance and human resource management in the public sector.

Further contributing to the debate on HRMP in the public sector, some articles have offered valuable reflections on the field. Lim et al. (2017) argue that public organizations face more complex and multifaceted problems than those in the private sector and operate within the constraints of legal requirements and political influence. Mariani et al. (2021) expand the discussion by examining the effects of managerial reforms brought about by the New Public Management (NPM) movement, which emerged in the late 1970s, initially in Anglo-Saxon countries. The authors analyze the effectiveness of pay-for-performance practices in government, considering budgetary constraints, the intrinsic nature of public employees' motivation, and the challenge of linking performance to compensation.

Thus, based on the insights provided by the articles and the discussions presented above, it is possible to outline a research agenda for future studies. The proposed agenda is organized into three main groups: method, public sector/culture, and leadership, as the research suggestions in the analyzed articles primarily focused on these themes. In terms of method, it was found that there is a lack of multimethod and theoretical studies during the analyzed period. Advancing studies, especially of a theoretical nature, could deepen the understanding of the variable, including identifying which set of variables would be most suitable for the public sector. Furthermore, multimethod studies with a hermeneutic bias would allow for a better understanding of the phenomenon being analyzed, going beyond the measurements provided by quantitative techniques. Regarding methodological advancements, it is suggested to conduct more research with HRMP as a mediator in the adopted model, which is also a current agenda in the field (Boon et al., 2019), since most studies focused on testing models where HRMP predicted other organizational variables.

Future studies that aim to better understand the characteristics of the public sector and aspects of cultural nature, both at the organizational and country/locality levels, are also relevant. The public sector, in particular, is influenced by variables such as political support, budgetary constraints, legal rigidity, policy complexity, and public values and opinions, which ultimately affect the scope and effectiveness of human resource management practices. This context reinforces the need to establish human resource management practices specifically tailored to the public sector, as also suggested by Boselie et al. (2021).

Moreover, in many countries, the public sector plays a significant role in economic participation and employment, further emphasizing the need to understand how human resource management practices can assist in achieving organizational objectives, delivering quality services, and, equally important, promoting employee motivation and well-being. Thus, future studies should consider aspects related to the political maturity and level of professionalization of the organizations under study, as well as national cultural factors, which can influence levels of corruption, clientelism, and political influence in the workplace.

Finally, studies that incorporate the variable of leadership in their analytical models are recommended, as leaders are capable of linking teams and daily practices to organizational strategy. None of the articles analyzed considered the influence of this variable on the effectiveness of human resource management practices. Therefore, it is important to explore how leadership styles impact the quality of relationships developed in the organizational environment and innovation in the public sector, as well as how human resource management practices influence these relationships. Additionally, it is recommended to further investigate leadership at various levels within the organization, especially regarding its role in designing HRMP.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the search for articles included in this literature review was restricted to the Scopus and Web of Science databases and journals with impact factors (CiteScore or Journal Impact Factor). While this strategy aimed to ensure higher quality for the review, the studies included in the analysis were also limited to those classified as articles and written in English. As a result, there is a possibility that relevant ongoing works, such as those presented at conferences or published in other languages or databases, may have been overlooked.

Conclusion

It is understood that the main objective of this research was achieved, as the scientific articles published in high-impact journals between 2017 and 2023 that investigated human resource management practices in the public sector were mapped. Furthermore, it was possible to unveil the state of the art of the variable, as well as establish a research agenda for future studies.

A research field, to progress, requires academia to focus on understanding how the studied phenomenon is characterized. In terms of the theoretical advancements made by this study, the diagnosis of the incipience of both the theoretical and conceptual debate on people management practices in the public sector and the scientific production on the subject stands out. Therefore, there is still a need for deeper exploration of the construct and a better understanding of how to approach people management practices based on the idiosyncrasies present in public organizations.

Regarding the practical advancements of this study, it can be stated that the findings suggest that public organizations, through their leadership, should recognize the importance of designing and implementing human resource management practices that go beyond aspects related to productivity and performance. It is necessary to include in internal discussions the subjective needs of employees, such as well-being, quality of life, and self-fulfillment. By doing so, not only will healthier work environments and more engaged employees be fostered, but also better public service delivery to citizens.

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