



Pearson
TalentLens

HR Trends and Perspectives:
Talent Acquisition and
Retention in the Public Sector

INDUSTRY REPORT

TRENDS AND HR PERSPECTIVES

Talent Acquisition and Retention in the Public Sector

Under the control of the state or local authorities, public sector organizations are tasked with providing essential services (education, healthcare, security, justice, infrastructure, etc.) and employ a significant number of people worldwide. Nearly one in three employees work in the public sector in Scandinavia, one in five in France, and around 15% in the United States and the United Kingdom (OECD).

In order to maintain continuity in public services, it is essential to consider budget constraints and regulations and their affect on recruitment, mobility support, and skills development. Let's delve deeper into the HR challenges faced by the public sector and explore solutions to that can support their talent acquisition and retention strategies.

(digitalization, AI, cybersecurity) in order to modernize public services and improve operational efficiency.

- » **Adaptability and Responsiveness:** The public sector must quickly adapt to economic, social, and environmental changes and manage economic, health, climate, and security crises.

I. Specific Challenges in the Public Sector

The public sector faces several challenges, characterized by:

Key Characteristics of the Sector:

- » **Budget Constraints:** Public administrations, primarily funded by taxes, subsidies, or public loans, must streamline spending and innovate to optimize resource use.
- » **Evolving Citizen Expectations:** Public services must be personalized, accessible, high-quality, and delivered promptly.
- » **Technological Innovation:** Adapt and upskill in the adoption of digital technologies

II. Key HR Challenges in the Public Sector

The public sector faces several HR challenges, including:

- » **Attracting and Retaining Talent:** The public sector struggles to compete with the private sector in terms of benefits, career prospects, and salaries (only 39% of public sector employees believe they are fairly compensated). The sector is also perceived as too bureaucratic and rigid, mainly due to slow decision-making processes and limited innovation.
- » **Aging Workforce:** Many employees are nearing retirement age, creating an urgent

need for succession planning. While 30% of public sector workers will retire by 2029, only 2% of Generation Z, who are expected to replace them, entered the public sector in 2021 ([Thomson Reuters](#)). Moreover, only 8.1% are under 30 compared to 23% in the private sector ([Deloitte](#)).

- » **Digital Transformation:** Adopting new technologies requires managing resistance to change and supporting employees in skill development in a sector already marked by reforms and restructuring.
- » **Employee Engagement and Motivation:** The sector must maintain high job satisfaction and employee engagement levels despite budget constraints and political pressures.

III. Solutions and Best Practices

Here are some strategies to attract talent to the public sector:

- » **Develop a Strong and Authentic Employer Brand:** Highlight the purpose of public service and its positive impact on society. More than 40% of public sector employees cited meaningful work as one of the main reasons for staying in their job ([McKinsey](#)).



- » **Offer Competitive Benefits:** While the public sector may not always offer salaries as high as the private sector, it can compensate with benefits (job security, attractive pension plans, flexible hours, and telework options).



» **Optimize the Recruitment Process:**

Public sector employees, whether civil servants or contractors, are recruited under specific statutes and procedures. However, it is necessary to simplify and speed up the recruitment process, often considered too long and tedious - more than three times longer than in the private sector (**119 days** on average). Using skills assessment tools can also help expand the candidate pool and address staffing shortages.



» **Promote an Inclusive Workplace:**

Encourage a respectful and welcoming environment by implementing fair hiring practices and providing equal access to opportunities for all candidates.



» **Invest in Skills Development:**

Highlight the professional development and career progression opportunities that the public sector can offer, including training, certifications, and mentoring programs.





Integrating Psychometric Assessments in Public Sector Recruitment and Talent Development

Soft skills, also known as behavioral or transversal skills, are increasingly important in the public sector.

- » Communication, empathy, conflict management for effective interaction with the public and quality service.
- » Integrity, honesty, ethics to uphold public service values.
- » Adaptability, flexibility, resilience as public policies and government priorities rapidly evolve.
- » Stress management, positive attitude to maintain positive mental health and engagement in a work environment often under pressure due to high expectations and limited resources.
- » Collaboration, cooperation to promote teamwork.
- » Critical thinking, innovation, problem-solving to meet needs effectively.

By assessing, developing, and valuing these human skills, public sector employees can enhance their employability, professional effectiveness, and contribution to improving public services.

To evaluate these skills when recruiting new employees or supporting the development of those already in position, HR professionals can use reliable psychometric tests designed according to rigorous scientific standards:

- » **Personality Inventories** to gain insight into communication and collaboration skills, supplemented by inventories of dysfunctional tendencies to ensure no inclination towards inappropriate, unethical, or counterproductive behavior. These are recommended, especially in “sensitive” jobs requiring self-control, calmness, and the ability to defuse difficult situations (security, surveillance, defense); in roles involving the transport of people (train, bus); or in jobs related to vulnerable individuals (education, social work, hospitals, nursing homes, daycare).
- » **Cognitive Ability or Intellectual Aptitude Tests** to assess intellectual potential, learning and adaptability, data analysis skills, and problem-solving abilities by seeking innovative solutions.

- » **Critical Thinking Assessments** to measure the ability to take a step back, identify and analyze problems, and seek and evaluate information to draw relevant and logical conclusions and make better decisions.
- » **Career Planning Tools** can help develop professional projects that align with each individual's key interests and motivations and encourage mobility.
- » **Motivation and Job Satisfaction Questionnaires** are useful when gathering employee feedback for more open and transparent communication.

The public sector faces stiff competition from the private sector, which often offers more attractive salaries, comprehensive benefits, and faster career progression. It has no choice but to evolve its recruitment and retention strategies to reignite enthusiasm for working in the public sector. It is here that the adoption of psychometric tests to evaluate and develop the human skills expected of its employees can help to ensure the quality of services delivered to citizens.



Evaluate your talents' skills with Pearson Talentlens psychometric tests!

Unleash the full potential of your organization by refining your approach to talent acquisition and retention.

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About TalentLens

TalentLens is a central component of Pearson's Workforce Skills division, a global leader in learning solutions and a recognized authority in assessment and workforce development.

The Workforce Skills division includes Pearson TalentLens - publisher of psychometric tests in professional environments, widely recognized in the market - as well as Faethm AI, the world's first company to use data to operationally project the future of an organization's skills, and Credly, the global leader in digital credentialing.

With over 70 years of research, our psychometric tests, such as the WATSON-GLASER™ III, are used by hundreds of companies worldwide for recruiting and developing employee skills. As experts in the professional world, our primary goal is to help you review your practices, understand and define your needs, and guide you in choosing and using our assessment solutions.