

Marco Salm / Christian Schwab

**HRM and Change Management:
Comparative Results from
Three European Cities of Excellence**



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1 Introduction

In its latest “Cities of Tomorrow” report, the European Commission emphasized that cities are facing important current and future challenges, such as economic crisis, economic stagnation, demographic change, and/or social polarization (European Commission, 2011). In addition to these “external conditions” that must be addressed, there are also New Public Management (NPM)-driven “internal reform drivers”. City administrations have to adapt themselves to their changing environment in terms of these internal and external reform drivers, leading to sub-national modernization policies. The administrative adaptations involve various institutional changes in order to achieve set reform objectives. Variations in adaptations, changes, and objectives may further imply different impacts on local governments’ results and performances in service delivery. In order to deal with these challenges many cities have reacted with either holistic or specific reform programs, wherein Human Resource Management (HRM) is becoming increasingly important. The reform of HRM is only one reform component, but it is – probably more than ever before – a primary focus of city administrations.

Both scientists and practitioners have found that empirical evidence with regard to the reform of HRM has been neglected in the past decades and needs to be examined more closely. A review of the current literature shows that public management reforms downplay the role of HRM. Furthermore, the effects of HRM reforms are a neglected research issue and scarcely discussed in the reform context (OECD, 2015). A recent article, which reviews HRM reforms and performance, finds a general lack of empirical evidence linking HRM reforms with (the expected) results (Jordan/Battaglio, 2013). Moreover, there is little empirical evidence on the role of HRM in terms of change management (Sedlack, 2010). Yet the management of change in organizations is very much linked to HRM. Therefore, more scientific (empirical) attention needs to be directed toward HRM reforms and their corresponding results, effects, and outcomes on the local level of government.

This chapter examines three case studies of “reform excellence” by analysing an online-survey conducted amongst the key actors from three nominee cities of the European Public Sector Award in 2009 and 2011, namely Bilbao (Spain), Mannheim (Germany), and Tampere (Finland).

The focus of the survey was the city reform approach as a whole and especially HRM reform approaches.

The chapter follows two analytical guiding questions in order to discover whether HRM reforms and change management make a difference, at least in city administrations classified as “best performers”. These questions are:

- a) which approaches to and effects of HRM reform can be identified in cities of (supposed) “excellence”; are there major commonalities or differences and is there a general reform trend in Finland, Germany, and Spain from a cross-countries comparative perspective?
- b) which organizational, personnel, and instrumental changes affect the organizational performance of the city administration?

In summary, this chapter provides some insights into the correlation between change management and HRM reforms and their (presumed) effects. First, it highlights some ambiguities, tensions, and problems inherent within change processes. Second, it scrutinizes the scope and extent of the implementation of new HRM related instruments and organizational structures as well as the results of HRM reforms on the organizational performance of the city administrations. The findings seek to stimulate future research by advancing hypotheses drawn from the case study results. Whether the hypotheses hold true and lead to more nomothetic knowledge is a question to be answered by subsequent research.

In the following sections, the applied conceptual framework is laid out (section 2) before a more general comparative overview of HRM reforms in Finland, Germany, and Spain is given (section 3). The next section examines the change management and HRM reform process in the three case cities (section 4). In concluding, we highlight crucial findings and draw some hypothesis.

2 Conceptual Framework, Method & Case Selection

The theoretical framework draws on the neo-institutionalist approach (Peters, 2007; Hall/Taylor, 1996; Immerguth, 1998). For the conceptualization of the causes and effects of HRM reforms, the analysis relies

on an institutional understanding, in the sense of an actor-centered institutionalism (Mayntz/Scharpf, 1995; Ostrom, 2007). It considers reforms as the attempt of administrative and political actors to change the institutional order (polity), with a non-deterministic correlation between the institution's and actor's behaviour. Instead, they lead way to different acting strategies inside a restricted corridor for non-institutional factors (Benz, 2004; Jann, 2006), which is also the explanatory statement for our survey target group. As shown elsewhere (Salm/Schwab, 2015), key reform actors have a significant influence on the success or failure of a change process.

The starting point of the case selection is the evaluation of the administrative reform process of the city of Mannheim, which could be labelled as a “best practice” benchmark for local government reform in Germany (Färber et al., 2014) and to which the authors’ had extensive field access. Mannheim established guidelines for leadership, communication, and cooperation in order to promote a cultural change within the city administration (Salm/Schwab, 2015). In order to address HRM reform activities in a broader, European context, the sample of cities was expanded to three “best practice” cities within Europe: Bilbao (SP), Mannheim (DE), and Tampere (FI). These cities have been nominated for (and won) the European Public Sector Award (EPSA) of the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in 2009 and 2011 (Bosse et al., 2013). Albeit “best practice” approaches and especially the “awarding” procedures can be criticized (Gannon et al. 2012: 516), “best practice” or at least “good practice” approaches are commonly accepted and used in business and public administration (Rackow 2011); they can be used analytically for benchmarking.

From a methodological point of view, the comparative research design is based on “similar cities with different reform concepts”. Drawing on a most similar case design (MSCD), the classification of a city as a city of “excellence” is the most important selection criterion in terms of “similarity”. Furthermore, selected cases are non-capital cities that play important economic and cultural roles in their respective nations. Overall, the three cities under comparison are “similar” in size and socio-economic conditions, yet followed “different” reform concepts; thus, they provide a fruitful basis for comparison. By applying MSCD, it is possible to analyse institutional changes triggered by the reform process and the perceived effects of these changes. Although it is not possible to totally discount that other city specific contextual factors influenced the outcome, the “common context” of the city cases is sufficient to

account for the major possible exogenous drivers and thus justify their selection.

Empirically, this chapter draws on data from an online-survey conducted in the three selected cities in 2015. The standardized questionnaire was addressed to the key reform actors. In all three cities, one key actor from each of the five following target groups responded (n=15):

- » (1) mayor / head of directorate; (2) municipal council / faction leader; (3) staff council / employee committee; (4) organizational development unit / change manager; (5) personnel / human resource management unit

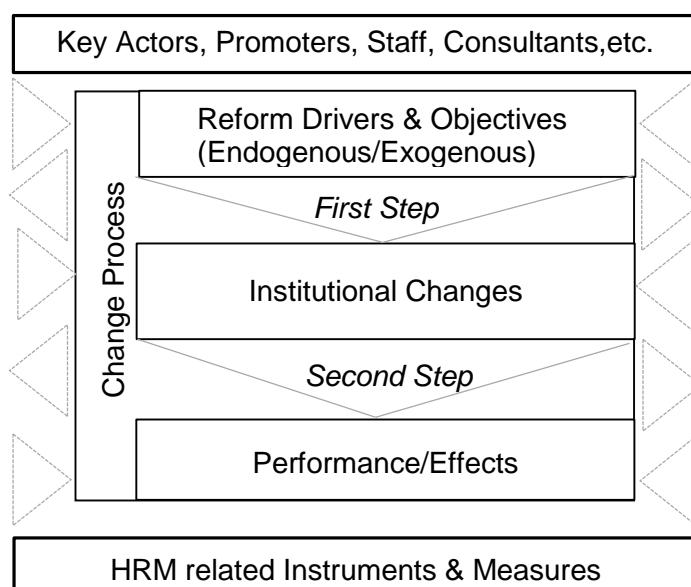
Since municipal administrations cannot be considered as unitary actors, one needs to differentiate between the different actor groups, because any change always affects the groups involved to differing degrees. Therefore, a multi-perspective approach is used, concentrating on the key actors involved in the change processes. Moreover, the use of key actors as the unit of analysis is methodologically recommended (Holtkamp 2012: 112), firstly, for research-pragmatic reasons, and secondly, because the knowledge of the staff involved is often limited to their fields of responsibility. To guarantee anonymity, the answers have been consolidated into a single response for each sample city. Each “consolidated city answer” has been ex post validated and accepted by the cities. While the strengths of this explorative approach analysing only cities of “excellence” was discussed above, it counts also as its (major) weakness, which are limited generalizability and results overinterpretation.

Content wise, the development of the questionnaire was derived from several sources linked to the New Public Management (NPM) movement. We assume that the reform of HRM (especially the introduction of new instruments) is strongly linked to the doctrines of New Public Management (Christensen et al., 2007). The introduction of new types of civil service organizations (on the national level) and the introduction of new budgeting and accounting standards (mainly on the local level) may be cited as examples. Therefore, the survey focused on NPM-oriented reforms on the national level (Bogumil et al., 2007) and on private-sector oriented studies that draw on the same ideological roots as NPM (Sedlack 2010). Additionally, the questionnaire draws from the self-evaluation scheme of the Common Assessment Frame-

work (CAF), especially with respect to the “enablers” and key performance results.

The concept for the analysis applied to assess the institutional changes to, and effects of HRM reforms is adapted from the “three step model to evaluate institutional policies” (Kuhlmann/Wollmann, 2011: 481). As shown in Figure 1, the original model was adapted and reduced into a “two step model”: first, the institutional change in the city administrations under scrutiny, which occurred due to the change process (and which was triggered by endogenous and exogenous reform drivers) is captured. Second, the institutional changes are assessed against the backdrop of success and/or failure and (performance) effects.

Figure 1: Analytical Design – Change Management & HRM Linkages



Source: Authors; Kuhlmann/Wollmann, 2011

3 HRM Reform Profiles: Comparing Finland, Germany, & Spain

To cast the setting of cases into a broader light and enable some cross-country comparisons, as well as the identification of (possible) country-wide trends, one has to look into the “HRM profile” of the selected countries.

The public sector is highly decentralized within all three countries, with 75% to 80% of public employees located at the local level. According to OECD (2011) data, job cutbacks on the central government level have been quite significant in the last decade (2001-2011), especially in Spain. However, the picture is different at the local level (2008-2011). While the share of employment of the central level went from 17% down to 13% in Germany, the share of employment on the sub-central level was rather stable, 80% and 79% respectively (the remaining percentage corresponds to the social security system). The same situation is to be found in Finland and Spain (Table 1).

Table 1: Public Employment Across Levels of Government

| | | GERMANY | FINLAND | SPAIN |
|--------------------------|------|---------|---------|-------|
| <i>Employment at ...</i> | | | | |
| <i>central level</i> | 2001 | 17.1% | 24.6% | 39.9% |
| | 2011 | 12.9% | 22.9% | 19.7% |
| <i>sub-central level</i> | 2008 | 79.8% | 76.0% | 79.8% |
| | 2011 | 78.5% | 75.4% | 80.3% |

Source: Authors; OECD 2011

Various points of departure for the reform in our case countries can be identified. These can generally be classified as either external or internal factors:

External factors, such as budgetary constraints, are one determinant of public administration modernization for national governments. Overall, budgetary constraints have placed additional performance pressure on most OECD countries. Spain was amongst the states with the “highest budgetary pressure and consolidation requirements” during the financial crisis of 2008-2013 (OECD, 2015). This is reflected in some

of the measures implemented on the national level, such as no replacement of operating staff, recruitment freezes, salary cuts, and bonus payment cuts (OECD, 2012). As Germany and Finland were among the OECD states experiencing “modest budgetary pressure and consolidation requirements”, their cutbacks were less heavy, focusing on staff reductions through productivity measures and rationalization of support services.

In Finland, one main driver of reform is the aging population. Finland has the fastest aging population in the EU, with the resulting well-known consequences for human resource management and public service provision. The “Finwin – Towards a New Leadership” program was established in 2006 in order to reach a common understanding and vision concerning the challenges ahead. Finwin constitutes a platform for all levels of government to disseminate and draw best practice from the changing environment.

Furthermore, international, national, and/or sectoral developments (also from the private sector) revealing outdated processes constitute another reform driver. This is mainly the case in Germany as a so-called “NPM laggard” (Eymeri-Douzans/Pierre, 2010), where human resource reforms could be seen as a bottom-up movement, with the national level’s role more limited compared to the local level. The “translation” of the New Public Management concept into the German local government context, the so-called New Steering Model (NSM), has involved a broad NPM-driven reform process on the local level since the 1990s. Among the NSM elements are HRM related innovations, such as recruiting management expertise, teamwork and participation, performance-related pay, and modern HRM systems (Kuhlmann et al., 2008). While the overall NSM reform process in Germany has been evaluated as a partial failure (Kuhlmann et al., 2008) this might not apply to adjunct HRM reforms. Färber et al. (2014) indicate that the NSM reforms were accompanied also by a general modernization of HRM.

Internal factors, such as political motives and legal gaps, led to modernization processes in Spain and Finland. In Spain, a major reform program for human resource management started in 2007, encompassing all levels of government. The “Basic Statue for Public Employees (EBEP)” aims at consistent practices with regard to human resource management in the public sector. Furthermore, improving the provision and quality of public services through the adoption of a performance-oriented culture constitutes a main objective (Huerta Melchor, 2008).

This short overview shows that there are different primary drivers for HRM reforms in the public administrations of Finland, Germany, and Spain and that different levels of government are at the forefront of HRM reforms in each case. While comparing the effects and out-comes of HRM reforms is not possible (due to a lack of empirical evidence), one can derive some lessons learned from these HRM reforms, especially with regard to change management. These insights can be very helpful, because successfully managing change requires supportive HRM measures and instruments (Huerta Melchor, 2008; Färber et al., 2014; Kuhlmann et al., 2014).

In particular, communication (i.e. information and dialogue) among all types of stakeholders plays a vital role through the entire change process. A vision and derived strategies/objectives gives people a direction and a basis for communication and cooperation. Leadership is one main determinant of success: Even though top managers are not initiators of the process, they have a pivotal role within the process (i.e. implementing change, communication of change, motivation for change, and generally setting an example to all employees). In a reform process in which all levels of government are addressed, an incremental approach towards a change increases receptiveness to that change.

4 HRM Reforms and Change Management in Three City Administrations: The Cases of Mannheim, Bilbao, & Tampere

Institutional Setting

Change processes are generally challenging due to the nature of the administrative policy field of reform (often referred as “polity policy”; Wollmann, 2003) as well as, in part, specific regional and local contexts. These peculiarities are reflected in every single administrative change process.

While Bilbao’s initial motivation for reform was to improve the city’s strategic direction (i.e. introduction of a vision, objectives, strategic planning, and budgeting), Tampere sought to optimize their processes and further emphasize a customer orientation. Mannheim’s reform drivers constituted a combination of the other two cities (Table 2). Per-

sonnel issues (i.e. training, recruitment, etc.) were not part of the reform drivers in any city examined.

Table 2: Reform Drivers, Design, and Duration

| | <i>Bilbao</i> | <i>Mannheim</i> | <i>Tampere</i> |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>Name of Reform*</i> | Political Management based on Economic Stringency & Strategic Budgets | CHANGE ² | Tampere Flows |
| <i>Reform Driver</i> | City Strategy | City Strategy, Organizational Changes, Process Optimization, Citizen Involvement | Process Optimization, Customer Orientation |
| <i>Reform Design Time Frame*</i> | Top Down 2007-2011 | Top Down 2008-2013 | Top Down* 2007-2020 |

*Source: Authors; Online-Survey, Bosse et al., 2013**

The various reform drivers result in different municipal-specific reform objectives (Table 3) designed to meet the municipal-specific needs: Bilbao was facing budgetary constraints, Mannheim and Tampere aimed to improve their administrative culture, while the latter also tried to focus more on customer needs. Similarities among the cities' objectives pertain to efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency. None of the cities had fiscal consolidation as a reform objective.

This is in accordance with Bosse et al. (2013: 11), as Bilbao and Mannheim were running a holistic reform process while Tampere was focusing on a more specific customer-oriented approach. The main objective of the cities of Bilbao and Mannheim was to implement management principles for the administration and political leadership in order to facilitate strategic planning; measure outputs and outcomes, thereby increasing transparency; and rationalize the overall decision-making process. Furthermore, they put substantial reform effort into the field of internal management and dialogue processes as well as external

communication with citizens and social groups. In contrast to this holistic NPM-oriented reform process, Tampere took a customer-oriented approach focusing on strategic and organizational changes, i.e. they focused on good management and on the broader customer's wellbeing, which was only indirectly part of the other cities' objectives.

Table 3: Reform Process Objectives

| | Bilbao | Mannheim | Tampere |
|---|--------|----------|---------|
| Increase organizational efficiency (processes) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Increase political steering capacity and effectiveness | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Increase citizen orientation and transparency | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Increase market orientation and competitiveness | - | - | ✓ |
| Cost reduction | - | - | ✓ |
| Change of administrative culture (e.g. improve communication, leadership behaviour) | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Improve service delivery / quality | - | - | ✓ |
| Fiscal Consolidation | - | - | - |
| Budgetary Consolidation | ✓ | - | - |

Source: Authors, Online Survey

Change Process Description (questionnaire results)

All three cities defined a timeframe for the change process (e.g. definition of start and end) (Table 4). Each city also formulated overall municipal strategies, visions, and/or objectives right at the beginning of reform. Some cities – Mannheim and Tampere – based their municipal strategy on a SWOT analysis. Tampere included a dialogue process already in the planning phase. In a further step, in Bilbao and Tampere the municipal strategies were broken down into operative objectives, management targets, and indicators. These two cities also set criteria to measure success. Consultants were included in the early stage of the reforms in Mannheim and Tampere.

Table 4: Change Process Measures (Planning Phase)

| | Bilbao | Mannheim | Tampere |
|--|--------|----------|---------|
| Development of project(s) timeframe(s) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Formulation of overall municipal strategy, vision, or strategic objectives | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| SWOT analysis | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Formulation of operative objectives and / or management targets and indicators | ✓ | - | ✓ |
| Definition of criteria to measure success (result / output and / or outcome measurement) | ✓ | - | ✓ |
| Inclusion of consultants | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Determination of reform demand (e.g. dialogue, participation, survey) | - | - | ✓ |
| Definition of responsibilities | - | - | ✓ |

Source: Authors, Online Survey

The most important actor in the reform process was the mayor, who was classified as “very important” in all three cities’ responses (Figure 2). Thereafter, the municipal council was classified as “very important”, except in Mannheim where it was classified as “fairly important”. Consultants received a “neutral” rating, while all other actors were classified as “fairly important”.

Figure 2: Change Process and Actors/Groups Involved (According to Importance)



Source: Authors, Online Survey

The municipal council and the staff council played an important role within the change process, but while HRM issues were addressed regularly in Mannheim and Tampere, they were only occasionally addressed in the municipal and staff council in Bilbao. According to the respondents, the human resource unit was no crucial player in the reform process (Table 5).

Table 5: Change Process and the Role of HRM/Personnel Unit

| | Bilbao | Mannheim | Tampere |
|---|--------|----------|---------|
| Providing personnel expertise | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Project manager | - | ✓ | - |
| Promoting function | - | - | ✓ |
| Provision of administrative expertise | - | - | - |
| Project initiator | - | - | - |
| Expert in change management | - | - | ✓ |
| Coaching of middle / top management | - | - | ✓ |
| Communicator / facilitator of HRM-related aspects | ✓ | - | ✓ |
| Personnel management was not involved | - | - | - |

Source: Authors, Online Survey

For future reform efforts, it is of particular importance to consider the various difficulties that arose along with the change process. Noticeable within all three cities were conflicts of interest among the top management level and their insufficient involvement and commitment. Furthermore, there were interface problems among departments and agencies. However, it is remarkable that many well-known problems that usually arise in the context of change processes did not occur in the sample cities (Table 6). The reason may be that overall the reform processes were well-run (labelled as “excellent”); another possible reason is their concrete implementation of essential reform instruments.

Table 6: Change Process Difficulties and Tensions

| | Bilbao | Mannheim | Tampere |
|--|--------|----------|---------|
| Conflicts among the administrative top management | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Conflicts among the administrative top management and the municipal councillors | - | - | - |
| Interface problems across functional departments and / or agencies | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lack of resources | - | - | ✓ |
| Lack of managerial skills | - | ✓ | - |
| Lack of support from top management | - | - | - |
| Lack of expertise within the project team(s) | - | - | - |
| Insufficient involvement / commitment of top and middle management | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lack of communication | - | - | - |
| Inadequate conflict management | - | - | ✓ |
| Inadequate performance review | - | - | ✓ |
| Lack of motivation of involved operative staff | - | - | - |
| Lack of clear objective(s) | - | - | - |
| Increase of responsibility without salary adjustment | - | - | ✓ |
| Excessive workload / intensification of work | - | ✓ | - |
| Decreased career opportunities and gender equality (due to flattening of hierarchy / decentralization) | - | - | - |
| Fear of job cuts and job losses | - | - | - |
| Collected data / indicators are not used or applicable in day-to-day work | - | - | - |
| Opposition coalitions against change process (e.g. political, administrative) | - | - | ✓ |

Source: Authors, Online Survey

Institutional Reform Changes to HRM Instruments

A vast number of HRM related instruments support change processes. We split a preliminary selection of instruments that are widely considered to be the most important into three broader categories of instruments: *leadership*; *communication and cooperation*; and *performance/economic incentives*. Furthermore, we then classified the instruments with regard to their implementation time (before the change process or as part of the change process). This subdivision is important in order to identify if instruments were introduced because of the objectives pursued and in order to evaluate their effects (Annex 1-3).

All instruments listed under the category of *leadership* were implemented in all three cities, with the exception only of rules of conduct in Tampere (A1). Noticeable is that the implemented reform instruments are closely linked with change objectives in the case of Bilbao and Mannheim. During the change process Bilbao implemented relevant leadership instruments, such as a central steering unit and a change management system, in order to achieve their objectives, while Mannheim introduced the complete list of instruments. Tampere was already working with relevant leadership instruments in order to achieve their reform objectives. In addition, Mannheim introduced some additional newly invented leadership concepts, such as the mayor's dialogue – a dialogue session between randomly chosen employees and the mayor.

A more diverse picture can be identified with regard to *communication and cooperation* (A2). Bilbao and Mannheim introduced a change management unit, (partly) taking over some original tasks of human resources (see Table 5). Basic instruments such as intranet, newsletter, and participation instruments (e.g. staff, citizens' surveys) had been implemented before the change process. All cities introduced feedback instruments, such as summaries or improvement actions, which are necessary in order to run strategic-oriented approaches such as those taken by these cities. The concept of lifelong learning was introduced only in Tampere.

Turning to *performance and economic incentive* related instruments, we can see that Bilbao already introduced – with the exception of prizes/awards – all instruments listed before the change process (A3). While all cities make use of performance appraisal and evaluation, HRM-related indicators, and contract management, only Bilbao and Tampere are “closing the management cycle” with performance-related

pay. Mannheim has not implemented performance related pay due to strong opposition by the staff council.

Finally, the instruments can be classified according to their importance (see rating A1-A3). Evident is a correlation between newly introduced instruments and a positive perception – especially in the case of Mannheim. Bilbao has a very positive perception of instruments implemented during the change process, such as central steering and a change management unit, change management system, and feedback instruments. Simultaneously, performance-related instruments, which were already implemented in Bilbao prior to the reform process, are perceived as neutral. In Tampere, all instruments are perceived as “fairly” helpful.

Impact Assessment: Change Process & HRM Instruments

The following section covers the results regarding change management and HRM instruments as perceived by the key actors. They expressed their views by choosing among the following categories: "strongly increased", "increased", "neutral", "decreased", and "strongly decreased". The answers were clustered according to perceived changes on the *instrumental*, *personnel*, and *organizational* level.

Assessment of Change Process

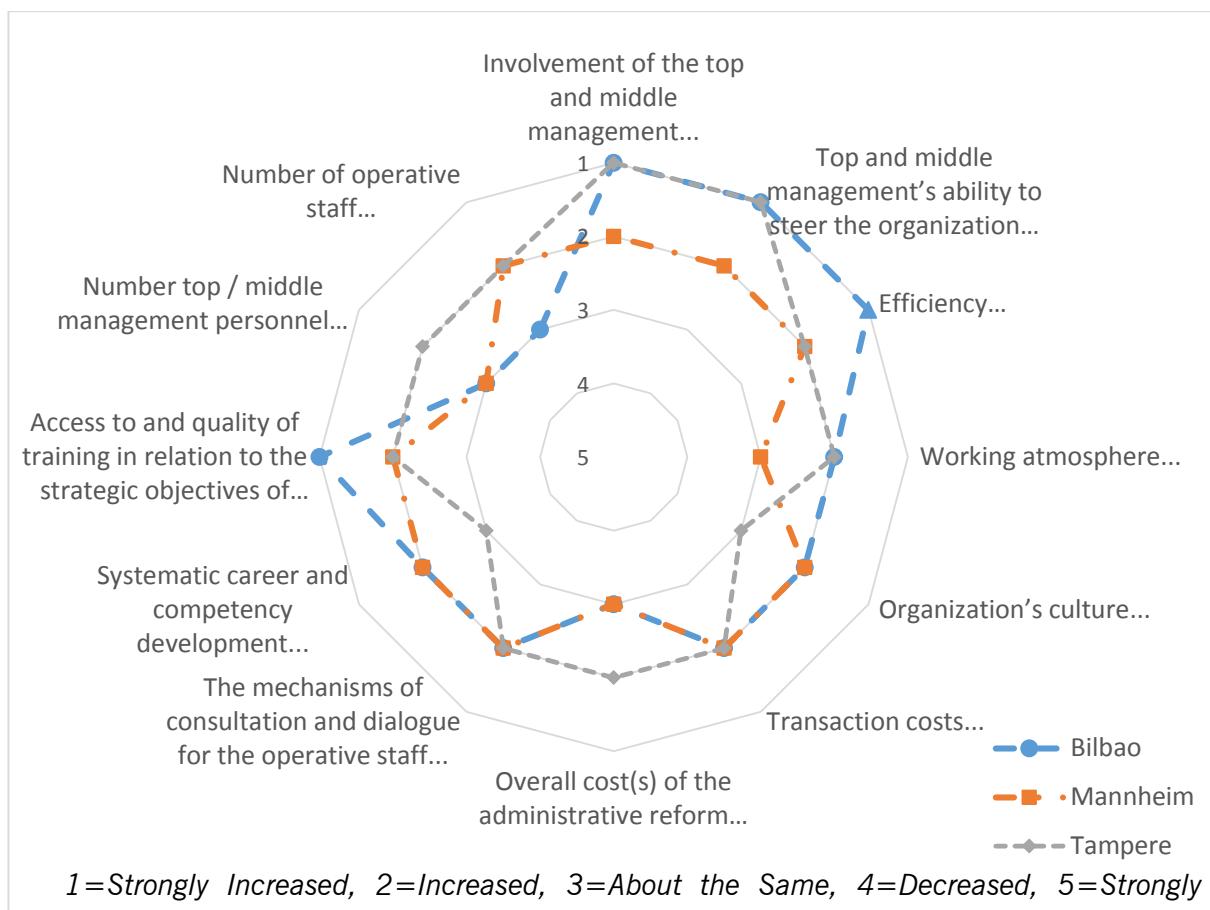
With regard to *instrumental* changes, the respondents indicated that access to and quality of training has (strongly) increased in relation to the strategic objectives of the organization (Bilbao) (Figure 3). Consultation and dialogue for the operative staff has also increased within all three cities. Furthermore, the respondents said that careers and competencies are now more systematically developed.

Results on the *personnel* level are perceived as neutral with regard the quantity of top and middle management staff in Bilbao and Mannheim. An increase in perception of the quantity of operative staff is seen in Mannheim. Tampere is the only city where both management and operative staff levels were perceived as having increased.

On the *organizational* level, the involvement of top and middle management in decision-making processes and their awareness of mission, vision, and values has increased in Mannheim and strongly increased in Bilbao and Tampere. Analogous, the ability to steer the organization

(i.e. setting goals, allocating resources, evaluating the global performance of the organization, and HRM strategy) has (strongly) increased (Bilbao and Tampere). The respondents in Bilbao perceive an (strong) increase in the efficiency (i.e. input vs. output) of the organization in managing the available resources. Furthermore, the organizational culture has increased in Bilbao and Mannheim, and the working atmosphere (e.g. how to deal with conflicts, grievances or personnel problems, and bullying in the workplace) has increased in Bilbao and Tampere. Especially noteworthy is that transaction costs (i.e. costs of cooperation, coordination, and communication) have, according to the respondents, increased within all three city administrations. Overall costs of the administrative reform are classified as neutral in Bilbao and Mannheim, but have increased in Tampere.

Figure 3: Change Process: Before-and-After Comparison



Source: Authors, Online Survey

Assessment of HRM Instruments

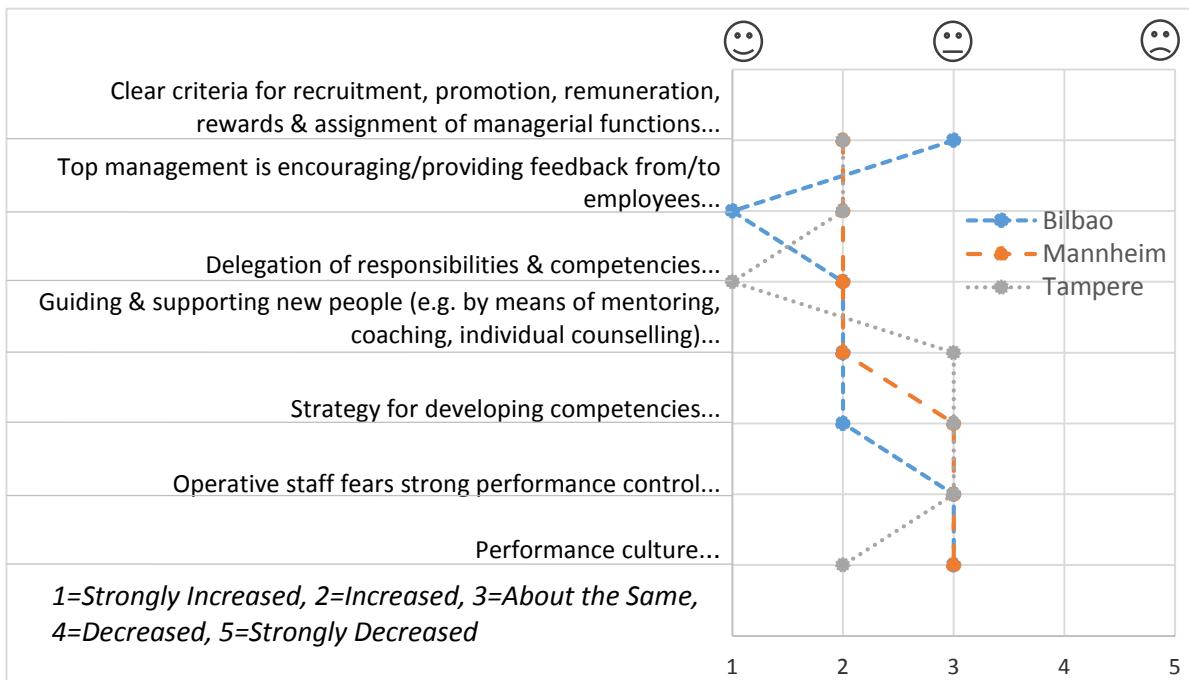
With regard to seven preconfigured selection possibilities for HRM-related instruments (Figure 4), there are two instruments perceived as having a “positive” impact (“increased” or “strongly increased”) that can be assigned to the category of *leadership*: Top management encourages/provides feedback from/to employees, and delegation of responsibilities and competencies. Less positively, the strategy to develop competencies, such as training plans based on current and future organizational and individual competency needs, was classified as neutral in Mannheim and Tampere. Clear criteria for recruitment, for remuneration, and for assigning managerial functions increased in Mannheim and Tampere but was neutral in Bilbao.

Staff motivation is crucial for the success of change processes, as a change process always involves *personnel* (Figure 5). With regard to the motivation of top/middle management, all cities reported an increase – in Bilbao even a strong increase. On the operative level, staff motivation increased in Bilbao and Tampere, but not in Mannheim. Both the top/middle management and the operative staff have also seen a strong increase with regard to their workload, while on the management level in Bilbao and Mannheim this has only increased. Job satisfaction on the operative level is perceived as neutral in Mannheim and Tampere and has slightly increased in Bilbao. Social considerations, such as flexible work time, paternity and maternity leave, sabbaticals, gender and cultural diversity, and employment of disabled people increased in Mannheim and Tampere.

The *organizations’* focus (Figure 6) is on efficiency (relation between inputs and outputs) and effectiveness (relation between objectives and outputs) of HRM-related instruments. Generally, HRM-related costs have increased in Mannheim due to the change process, while Bilbao and Tampere kept their budget constant. The change process is seen as being neutral regarding cooperation and communication among departments in Tampere, but has increased in Mannheim and Bilbao. Effective internal and external communication has increased overall, and even strongly increased in Bilbao. These two preconfigured selection possibilities indicate that communication has improved in all cities, but that cooperation has not improved in Bilbao and Tampere. Relations between the different levels of hierarchy (political and executive and legislative) have strongly increased in Tampere and increased in Mannheim and Bilbao. Furthermore, HRM-related instruments and measures

have had a positive impact on customer orientation and on quality of services.

Figure 4: Perceived Changes in HRM Related Measures – Instrumental



Source: Authors, Online Survey

Figure 5: Perceived Changes in HRM Related Measures - Personnel

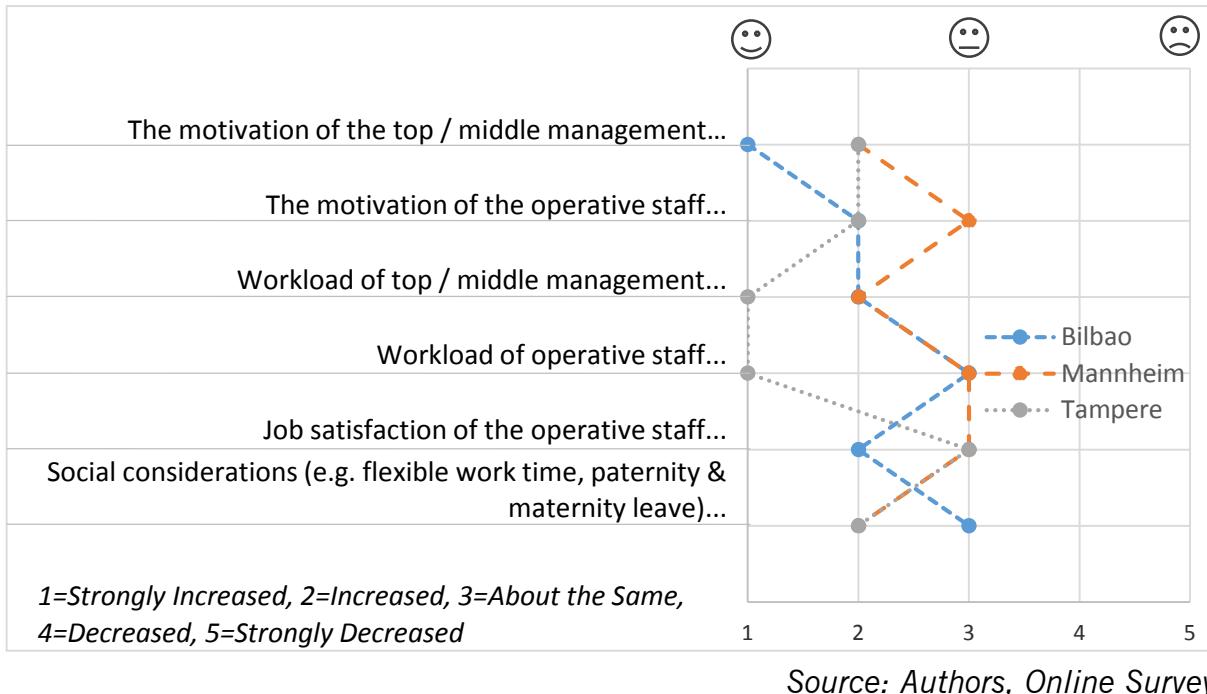
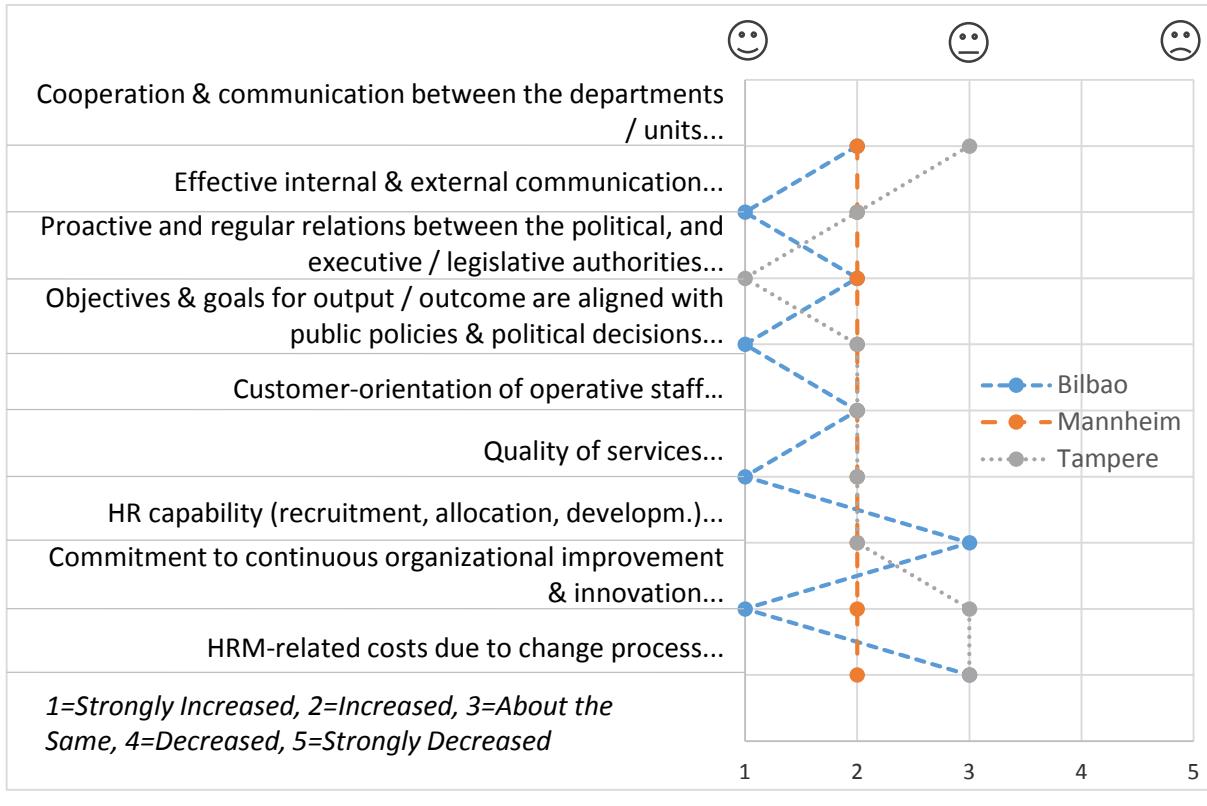


Figure 6: Perceived Changes in HRM Related Measures – Organizational



Overall Assessment of HRM-related changes

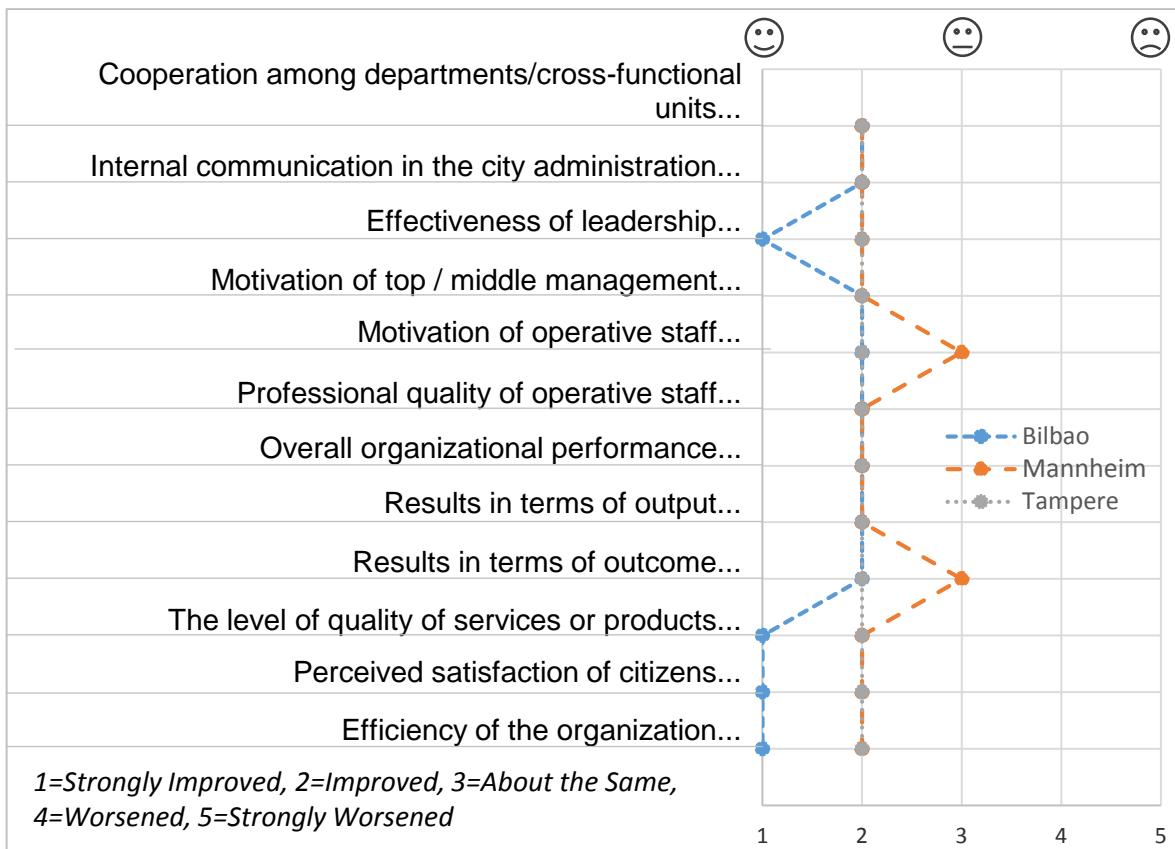
As a final step in the analysis, we turn our attention to overall HRM related changes. This illustrates how HRM measures have (un-)supportive impacts on change management and the organization and in what way they influence success and/or failure (Figure 7).

HRM related *instruments* have an impact on communication (within the administration), cooperation (with other departments and cross-functional units), and leadership. The measures undertaken have had a positive impact on communication, cooperation, and leadership, with all three having improved across the three cities.

On the *personnel* level, motivation is a pivotal element for success. According to the respondents, motivation has improved within the management and staff levels – with the exception of the operative staff in Mannheim. Within all three cities, the professional quality of the operative staff has increased.

The *organizational* level was positively influenced by HRM measures. Overall, the respondents testified to an increase in organizational performance. In terms of outputs (i.e. quantity and quality in the delivery of services and products) and outcomes (i.e. the effects of the delivered output of services and products in society as well as on the direct beneficiaries) HRM-related measures had an overall positive impact on the organization, though are seen as neutral in Mannheim with regard to outcomes. The service quality (i.e. products delivered in relation to standards and regulations) and, accordingly, the perceived satisfaction (i.e. reduced processing and/or waiting times) of citizens has increased in Mannheim and Tampere and strongly increased in Bilbao. The same results are testified to regarding organizational efficiency in managing available resources (which includes HRM) in an optimal way.

Figure 7: HRM-Related Organizational Effects



Source: Authors, Online Survey

5 Conclusions and Hypothesis

This study has thrown light on a neglected field of research: “today, the problem with HR reform is not that there are too few reforms or too little innovation. In fact, the real challenge is the lack of evidence on the effects of reforms, the neglected role of HRM as such and the on-going importance of perceptions and clichés” (OECD, 2015: 14). To fill in this gap the above sections examined HRM reform processes in Finland, Germany, and Spain. The, albeit limited amount of, relevant literature indicates that the main HRM reforms were initiated, broadly speaking, because of an aging population in Finland (Finwin), the introduction of NSM concepts in Germany, and the need to establish coherent HRM practices in the public service sector (EBEP) in the context also of budgetary constraints in Spain. The reform initiatives were addressed from the national level in Spain and Finland, while Germany clearly shows a

bottom-up-approach, with the implementation of NPM instruments on the municipal level, while the state and central levels lagged behind.

Reviewing the cities of “excellence”, it is apparent that there is a link between HRM and local change processes. The change and HRM process in Bilbao and Mannheim focused on a holistic management cycle with NPM elements, while Tampere specifically addressed the improvement of customer services. More specifically, all three cities aimed to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency, but each city had also further objectives: Bilbao sought budgetary consolidation, Mannheim the improvement of administrative culture, and Tampere the improvement of service delivery/quality and administrative culture.

Observing the conditional change factors, e.g. macro-trends and reform drivers in the three countries, and contrasting them with the knowledge obtained from the sample cities, one can clearly state that there is a high cross-country variance, an outcome observable due to the most similar case design applied herein.

Institutional Changes

The key actors within the institutional settings are the respective mayors (mean value, 1.3), which is not surprising given that all three cities followed a (mostly) top-down driven change management approach (Figure 2). The most important stakeholders that had to be addressed within this approach were the municipal council (1.3), followed by staff representatives and all employees regardless of their position (2.0). The only rather neutral position was assigned to consultants (2.6).

Financial and budgetary constraints seem to influence the degree of “centrality” (top-down) in the implementation of the change process, at least in city sample selected. Bilbao, where the fiscal pressure was highest, had the most stringent top-down approach with a consolidation objective. It was also the city where mayoral influence was highest and employee and citizen involvement was lowest (Figure 2). The middle position was taken Mannheim; followed by Tampere (both had no explicit consolidation objective during the change process, although Mannheim has recently introduced one). Assuming that this observation is generalizable, one can state:

- (H1a) the higher the external financial pressures on city administrations (fiscal and budgetary), the more likely a top-down approach will be followed (e.g. avoiding deliberative

and participatory elements and a citizens' orientation, less likely to involve employees and other departments, including HRM units, instead fostering mayoral influence etc.).

With regard to the institutional setting and respective competencies, it is striking that the organizational and HRM units were kept almost entirely out of the implementation process (Table 5). Instead, a strict top-down approach was followed. This leads to the proposal that:

(H1b) cities of 'excellence' make heavy use of the available HRM measures 'tool kit', but when it comes to the implementation of these measures the administrative units in charge of the process (irrespective of phase. e.g. planning or implementation) are NOT the HRM/organizational unit.

Assessment of Change Management

To run change successfully, it seems necessary that a clear timeframe and vision/objectives are set. The strengths and weaknesses (SWOT) have to be identified right at the beginning of the change process (a SWOT analyses was not conducted in Bilbao, perhaps because of the budgetary consolidation, and was identified as the main "weakness" in that city's approach) (Table 5). Furthermore, in order to successfully manage change operative objectives and management targets (including indicators) have to be derived from the vision and criteria to measure success have to be set. Overall, this strategic approach might explain that:

(H2) conditional factors and 'starting conditions' (rule of law tradition, budgetary framework conditions, administrative discourse etc.; Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2014) have a non-significant influence on the success of overall change processes – more relevant is the pursuit of a 'strategic pathway to change'.

Assessment of HRM Instruments

In addition to the reform path, HRM instruments (might) play an important role in successfully run change. With regard to instruments, Bilbao could be classified as the most modern public administration, as they were already working with almost the whole set of instruments prior to the reform (Annex 1-3). They thus had to implement only 10

out of 37 instruments. Finland has only to implement a customer oriented approach, as they worked already with most of the leadership and communication instruments. Overall, they needed to implement 11 more of 37 instruments. Further, Mannheim has to newly implement 23 out of 37 proposed instruments. In this context, they could be classified as reform laggard within the city sample.

Currently, all preconfigured instruments in the questionnaire have been implemented in all three cities, with only minor exceptions. These findings notwithstanding, all cities of “excellence” had a similar emphasis in their choice of reform instruments, this being an excessive use and assessment of leadership, communication and cooperation instruments, but a reluctant use and assessment of performance/economic incentive instruments. Based on this it could be proposed that:

(H3) conditional factors have an insignificant influence on the implementation of HRM instruments, indicating that there is a mix of ‘core’ instruments that are used, leading to a ‘convergence of instruments’.

Overall, less positively rated are all instruments with regard to performance measurement and all items pointing into a performance culture or regime (Annex 1-3). The key actors rather “neutrally” assessed performance measurement. These findings are consistent with other studies, i.e. of the UK, showing that audit and performance regimes tend to be critical in the long run for several reasons (e.g. data cemetery, oversteering, transaction-costs etc.) (Lowndes/Pratchett, 2012).

HRM measures’ assessment on the organizational performance is overall rated positive (Figure 4-6). An increase in motivation at the top and middle management level is observable, whereas the operative staff tends to react rather neutrally or moderately positive. This is quite surprising because the workload resulting from the change process increased mainly for the top-level management and not for the operative staff. This puzzle, an increase in motivation despite an increase in the workload, can be solved if one takes the results from another study into account (Färber et al., 2014): in depth interviews with key reform actors showed that a clear city strategy, leading to transparently defined and broadly communicated operative objectives result in an enormous increase in intrinsic motivation, as everyday work gains ‘meaning’ and the purpose of work becomes more comprehensible.

Further, a positive impact on the organization with regard to organizational efficiency and effectiveness can be observed. Remarkably, HRM-related costs arising from the change process are neutral – they increased only in Mannheim – while at the same time there are performance improvements for all organization issues (efficiency, effectiveness, service quality, and customer-orientation).

Summing up the findings of the assessment of HRM instruments, we can put forward that:

(H4) some instruments (e.g. feedback instruments) or categories of instruments (leadership; communication and cooperation) are better rated (with more positive effects) than others (performance/economic incentives), regardless of when they were implemented (before or after the change process). This indicates that time of implementation is not crucial for successful HRM reforms. The implementation of the ‘right’ instruments (regardless of the point in time) not only helps to achieve positive overall effects, but also avoids unintended negative effects like reductions in motivation or quality due to work overload.

Overall Effects

To gain an insight on HRM related effects, it is fruitful to contrast reform objectives (Table 3) and the overall impact assessment of HRM instruments (Figure 7). All three cities addressed efficiency and effectiveness as reform objectives. According to the respondents both of these aspects (even strongly) improved (in Bilbao) due to HRM reforms. The objective of “budgetary consolidation” set in Bilbao was achieved and surpassed – Bilbao is the only large municipality in Spain that is debt-free. Moreover, Bilbao also shows the best results among the sample cities with regard to efficiency of the organization and effectiveness of leadership (as all other items are perceived alike in Mannheim and Tampere).

Beyond these findings, there is no correlation between additional objectives set and positive HRM related effects on change. For example, Mannheim and Tampere aimed to enhance the administrative culture, but motivation has increased in the same way in Bilbao despite it not having specifically addressed the issue. Further, Tampere aimed to improve service delivery/quality, but Bilbao has achieved better results

with regard to the quality of services even while not setting it as an objective. Of course, this discourse neglects the fact that all three cities faced different starting positions; therefore, one city might have achieved “more” in absolute or relative terms, while showing “less” improvement within this rating.

In addition to the “usual” problems accompanying change processes, such as the acceptance of innovations, long decision-making processes, inflexible hierarchies, and coordination problems between different management levels, there is one peculiarity worth mentioning: the clearly evidenced need to mainstream and establish a culture of “project management” alongside the hierarchical steering of the city administrations. Most of the new HRM and change process measures need to be carried out as a “project” throughout the whole organization. This means technical teams (be it the ICT unit, HRM/personnel unit, organizational/administrative reform units, or other cross-functional units) need to be empowered to carry out those tasks. A striking finding is, therefore, that all three cities of “excellence” established a central steering unit, which served more or less as an “internal counselling” unit with its staff acting as project managers to advance the respective projects on all levels of the organization. Therefore, one can state that:

(H5) successful change processes rely on the empowerment of technical teams as a necessary but not sufficient condition to ensure a project management that secures the successful implementation of reform measures.

Lastly, this study has shown that it is possible to successfully transform city administrations with change concepts and supporting HRM measures even in times of crisis. However, some critical success factors must be taken into account: proper planning of strategy, clearly communicated/transparent (overall) objectives, formulation of mission statements appealing to staff and management, technical empowerment, fiscal responsibility, and – last but not least – a strong top-down approach with a very high level of commitment and involvement by the top management. Through combining these factors, a “continuous culture of improvement” may be achieved. That leads to the conclusion that:

(H6) *ceteris paribus*, even in a hostile economic climate successful change processes and HRM reforms can be effectively

conducted as long as critical success factors are taken into account.

Finally, with regard to further research, more attention has to be given to the question of causality and the direction of effects. In other words, causal links between proper planning, a “correct” mix of instruments, and/or the inclusion of all relevant actors as well as other conditional factors such as local law or municipal voting systems must be empirically tested in order to clearly identify what distinguishes “success” from “failure”.

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A 1: HRM Related Instruments on Leadership: Implementation and Importance

1=Very Helpful, 2=Fairly Helpful, 3=Neutral, About the Same, 4=Not very Helpful, 5=Not at All Helpful

| | Bilbao | Mannheim | Tampere | B | M | T | | | |
|---|---------------|----------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---|---|---|
| | Already Impl. | Impl. | Already Impl. | Impl. | Already Impl. | Impl. | | | |
| Establishment of a central steering unit | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Establishment of a change management system (e.g. project management, pilot projects, monitoring, reporting on the follow-up) | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Top-down feedback | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Structured personnel selection process | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Establishment of a personnel development, training & education unit | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Introduction of competence profiles, job and function descriptions for recruiting and personnel development | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Norms of good leadership | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Upward feedback | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Coaching | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Agreed tasks / responsibilities between political & administrative level | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Decentralized responsibility within departments | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Guidelines of good behavior and / or rules of conduct | ✓ | | | ✓ | - | | 3 | 1 | - |

Source: Authors, Online Survey

A 2: HRM Related Instruments on Communication and Cooperation: Implementation and Importance

1=Very Helpful, 2=Fairly Helpful, 3=Neutral, 4=Not very Helpful, 5=Not at All Helpful

| | Bilbao | | Mannheim | | Tampere | | B M T |
|--|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|-------|
| | Already Impl. | Impl. | Already Impl. | Impl. | Already Impl. | Impl. | B M T |
| Culture of open communication and dialogue (e.g. top management conferences, mayor-staff dialogue) | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 1 2 |
| Feedback on the quality of the management | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | 1 1 2 |
| Change management unit (e.g. internal consultation, staff communication) | | ✓ | | ✓ | - | | 1 1 2 |
| Environment for gaining ideas and suggestions from employees (e.g. suggestion schemes, work groups) | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | 1 2 2 |
| Participation instruments (e.g. staff / citizens' surveys) | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | 1 2 2 |
| Feedback instruments (e.g. summaries / interpretations/ improvement actions on results) | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | 1 2 2 |
| Involvement of employees and their representatives in the development of plans, strategies, goals etc. | ✓ | | - | | ✓ | | 1 - 2 |
| Cross-departmental workshops (e.g. coordination of processes across the organization) | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | 2 - 2 |
| Task forces across organizations / service providers to tackle problems | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | 2 1 2 |
| Transparency concerning the decision-making processes (e.g. by publishing annual reports) | | ✓ | - | | ✓ | | 1 - 2 |
| Intranet | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | - 1 2 |
| Newsletter, employee magazine | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | - 2 2 |
| Job rotation | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | - 1 2 |
| Team-oriented forms of organization | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | - 1 2 |
| Conflict management | ✓ | | - | | ✓ | | - - 2 |
| Concepts of lifelong learning | - | | - | | ✓ | | - - 2 |

Source: Authors, Online Survey

A 3: HRM Related Instruments on Performance / Economic Incentives: Implementation and Importance

1=Very Helpful, 2=Fairly Helpful, 3=Neutral, 4=Not very Helpful, 5=Not at All Helpful

| | Bilbao | Mannheim | Tampere | B | M | T | | | |
|--|---------------|----------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---|---|---|
| | Already Impl. | Impl. | Already Impl. | Impl. | Already Impl. | Impl. | | | |
| Non-financial rewarding (e.g. by supporting social, cultural and sport activities focused on people's health and well-being) | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Contract management between council & mayor(s) / heads of departments | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Performance appraisal / evaluation | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| HRM-related indicators & measures | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Contract management between top / middle management | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Performance-related pay for top / middle management | ✓ | | - | | | ✓ | 3 | - | 2 |
| Performance-related pay for operational staff | ✓ | | - | | | ✓ | 3 | - | 2 |
| Performance budgeting | ✓ | | - | | | ✓ | 3 | - | 2 |
| Prizes / awards | - | | - | | ✓ | | - | - | 2 |

Source: Authors, Online Survey

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