

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TALENT RETENTION STRATEGIES IN MINISTRIES OF YOUTH AND SPORTS: A EURO-ARAB PERSPECTIVE

Khitam Zuhier Khalaf ALABADDI, PhD. student
“Valahia” University of Targoviste

ABSTRACT

Talent retention in public sector organizations has become an increasingly urgent strategic challenge across both European and Arab world governance contexts, as demographic pressures, private sector competition for skilled professionals, and the accelerating pace of institutional modernization create new demands on public human resource management systems. This article presents a comparative analysis of talent retention strategies in ministries responsible for youth and sports policy — a sector characterized by high mission-orientation, significant intersectionality with broader social policy agendas, and distinctive human capital requirements — across selected European and Arab-world jurisdictions. Drawing on comparative public administration theory, strategic human resource management literature, and primary documentary analysis of institutional frameworks in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Jordan, the article examines how institutional context, administrative culture, and governance priorities shape the design and effectiveness of talent retention strategies in this specific ministerial domain. Four dimensions of comparative analysis are developed: compensation and non-monetary incentive structures; career development and professional learning pathways; organizational culture and mission alignment; and institutional governance frameworks for talent management. The article argues that while European and Arab-world ministries share certain common structural challenges — competition with the private sector for specialized talent, generational shifts in workforce expectations, and the need to build digital competencies alongside domain-specific expertise — they differ significantly in the institutional mechanisms through which they seek to address these challenges, and that each tradition offers insights and transferable lessons for the other. The conclusion advances a model of contextually adaptive talent retention that identifies the conditions under which specific retention strategies are most likely to generate durable organizational commitment in public institutions with strong social policy missions.

KEYWORDS: *Arab public administration, comparative HRM, Euro-Arab governance, human resource management, ministries of youth and sports, public sector talent management, talent retention*

J.E.L. Classifications: H11, H83, J24, J45, M51, M54

1. INTRODUCTION

The capacity of public sector organizations to attract, develop, and retain talented professionals — individuals with the knowledge, skills, motivation, and judgment required to design and implement effective public policy — is a foundational determinant of state effectiveness and institutional quality. In the contemporary governance environment, characterized by accelerating technological change, increasing policy complexity, demographic transitions in public sector workforces, and intensifying competition from the private and non-profit sectors for skilled labour, talent retention has emerged as one of the most pressing strategic challenges facing public human resource management (HRM) systems across the world (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; Thunnissen et al., 2013).

Ministries responsible for youth and sports policy occupy a distinctive position in the landscape of public sector talent management. They are, in terms of budgetary scale and institutional status, typically among the smaller central government departments in both European and Arab-world governance contexts; yet they carry significant social policy mandates — the development of youth engagement, active citizenship, physical health, sports excellence, and community cohesion — that require a combination of domain-specific expertise (in sports science, youth development, community organization, and event management), general public administration competency, and the motivational orientation toward public service and social impact that mission-driven public sector work demands. The talent retention challenge in these ministries is, accordingly, distinctive: they must compete for talent in specialized labour markets where the private sector — professional sports organizations, sports marketing firms, youth NGOs, and event management companies — offers compensation packages and career opportunities that most public sector pay scales cannot match, while simultaneously offering the non-monetary inducements — public service purpose, policy influence, and institutional stability — that are

among the most powerful retention factors for mission-aligned professionals (Pandey & Stazyk, 2008; Leisink & Steijn, 2009).

The comparative dimension of this analysis — the Euro-Arab perspective announced in the article's title — is motivated by the significant and growing importance of the Arab world as a site of public sector HRM innovation, particularly in the domain of sports and youth governance. The rapid development of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states — above all the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar — as major actors in global sports governance and youth policy, exemplified by Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the UAE's extensive investment in sports infrastructure and youth programmes, and the Saudi Vision 2030's explicit prioritization of sports and youth as pillars of social transformation, has generated major institutional investments in the talent management systems of ministries responsible for these domains (Amara, 2012; Reiche, 2015; Henry, 2013). A comparative analysis that places European and Arab-world ministerial talent retention strategies in dialogue can illuminate both the commonalities that transcend institutional context and the divergences that reflect deeper differences in administrative culture, governance priorities, and social expectations about the relationship between public employment and personal career development.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical frameworks — strategic talent management, public service motivation, and comparative public administration — that ground the analysis. Section 3 profiles the institutional context of youth and sports ministries in the six jurisdictions examined: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the UAE, Qatar, and Jordan. Section 4 conducts the comparative analysis across four dimensions: compensation and incentives, career development, organizational culture and mission alignment, and institutional governance of talent management. Section 5 identifies the principal convergences and divergences between European and Arab-world talent retention approaches and evaluates the transferability of specific strategies across contexts. The concluding section advances the model of contextually adaptive talent retention.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT, PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION, AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

2.1 STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

Strategic talent management (STM) — the systematic identification, development, engagement, and retention of individuals who make a disproportionate contribution to the achievement of organizational objectives — emerged as a distinct field of HRM scholarship in the early 2000s, initially in the context of private sector multinational corporations confronting global talent scarcity (Michaels et al., 2001). Its subsequent extension to the public sector context has been gradual and, in some respects, contested: the underlying STM logic of selectively investing in a subset of high-potential employees sits in tension with the public sector values of equal treatment, transparency, and merit-based HRM that characterize the Weberian bureaucratic tradition (Thunnissen et al., 2013; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020).

Nonetheless, the adoption of STM frameworks in public sector HRM has accelerated significantly since the early 2010s, driven by the convergence of several pressures: fiscal austerity measures that have reduced public sector headcount while maintaining or increasing service demands, thereby increasing the marginal value of high-performing employees; the competitive pressure from private sector talent markets that makes the retention of trained public sector professionals increasingly difficult; and the recognition that certain categories of policy expertise — data science, digital transformation, regulatory economics, and specialized domain knowledge — are genuinely scarce in the labour market and require deliberate strategic investment to develop and retain within public institutions (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Vaiman et al., 2012). The application of STM to ministries of youth and sports is additionally motivated by the sector's specific talent landscape: the supply of professionals with the combination of sports administration expertise, youth development experience, policy knowledge, and digital competency that modern youth and sports ministries require is genuinely limited, making retention a strategic rather than merely administrative HRM priority.

The dominant models of talent retention in the strategic HRM literature identify three principal categories of retention drivers: extrinsic factors, which include compensation, benefits, job security, and working conditions that are materially tangible and directly comparable across

employers; intrinsic factors, which include the meaningfulness of work, opportunities for skill development, autonomy, and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace; and relational factors, which include the quality of management, perceived organizational support, and the degree of fit between individual values and organizational culture (Allen et al., 2010; Mitchell et al., 2001). The relative weight of these three categories in determining employee retention varies significantly across individuals, occupational groups, and organizational and cultural contexts — a variation that is central to the comparative analysis developed in this article.

2.2 PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION AND MISSION ALIGNMENT

The concept of public service motivation (PSM) — the intrinsic motivation to contribute to the public good that characterizes many public sector employees and that constitutes a distinctive and organizationally significant feature of public sector work — has been one of the most productive areas of public administration scholarship over the past three decades (Perry & Wise, 1990; Perry et al., 2010; Van Loon et al., 2015). PSM theory holds that individuals with high public service motivation are more likely to be attracted to public sector employment, more likely to remain in it despite lower compensation than the private sector might offer, and more likely to perform effectively in mission-driven organizational contexts — making PSM a particularly important concept for the analysis of talent retention in organizations whose missions are explicitly oriented toward social welfare, public health, and community development (Leisink & Steijn, 2009; Ritz et al., 2016).

In the context of ministries of youth and sports, PSM has a specific and potentially powerful form: the alignment between individual motivations — a genuine passion for sport, a commitment to youth development, a conviction of the social value of physical activity and community engagement — and institutional mission creates a foundation for organizational commitment that is qualitatively different from the commitment generated by extrinsic reward structures alone. Research on PSM in sport administration contexts has consistently found that mission alignment is among the most significant predictors of retention intention among professionals in national sports organizations and government sport agencies, and that perceived opportunities to contribute meaningfully to mission objectives are a more powerful retention factor than compensation comparisons in this population (Kim, 2012; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Bang & Ross, 2009).

The Arab-world governance context adds a further dimension to the PSM analysis: the strong collectivist cultural values that characterize most Arab societies, and the significant role of national pride, collective identity, and contribution to national development as motivational forces in the public sector workforce, create a version of PSM that is grounded in community and national orientation rather than in the individualist conception of public service contribution that dominates the Western PSM literature (Al Yahya & Nafei, 2016; Rashid, 2021). Understanding the culturally specific forms of mission alignment that operate in Arab-world public administrations is essential for a comparative analysis that does not simply apply Western HRM frameworks to non-Western institutional contexts without attention to the ways in which cultural variation shapes the motivational dynamics of public employment.

2.3 COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The comparative public administration literature provides the methodological and theoretical framework for the cross-national analysis of HRM practices and institutional contexts that this article undertakes. The foundational insight of comparative public administration — that administrative systems are embedded in and shaped by broader political, cultural, legal, and social contexts that cannot be abstracted away without distorting the analysis — is of particular importance for the Euro-Arab comparison, where the institutional and cultural differences between the jurisdictions examined are significant and require explicit theoretical acknowledgment rather than implicit assumption of comparability (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Peters, 2018).

The principal theoretical axis along which European and Arab-world public administrations differ for the purposes of this analysis is the Weberian versus neo-patrimonial characterization of administrative culture. European public administrations — particularly those of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom — are characterized, at least at the ideal-typical level, by the Weberian features of merit-based recruitment, career security, rule-bound procedure, and the separation of official from personal role. Arab-world public administrations exhibit more varied institutional profiles: the GCC states have invested significantly in the development of merit-based, performance-oriented HRM systems as part of their broader modernization agendas (exemplified by the UAE's Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre and Qatar's National Vision 2030), while administrations in other Arab states, including Jordan, maintain features of patrimonial governance — including the significance of personal connections in recruitment and

advancement — alongside more formalized HRM frameworks (Hertog, 2010; Reiche, 2015; Lust & Ndegwa, 2012). These differences shape the conditions under which specific talent retention strategies can be effectively designed and implemented.

3. INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES: YOUTH AND SPORTS MINISTRIES IN SIX JURISDICTIONS

3.1 THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT: FRANCE, GERMANY, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

France's Ministry of National Education and Youth (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse), together with the Ministry of Sports and the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Ministère des Sports et des Jeux Olympiques et Paralympiques) — separated from each other in organizational terms, though frequently coordinated — represents one of Europe's most institutionally developed and resource-intensive public youth and sports governance systems. The French civil service tradition — characterized by the *grandes écoles* system of elite administrative training, the strong career protections of the *statut de la fonction publique*, and a highly centralized policy-making structure — creates distinctive conditions for talent management: initial recruitment of high-potential staff through competitive *concours* (examinations) ensures a technically skilled entry cohort, while the rigidity of the *fonctionnaire* career system limits the flexibility to reward outstanding performance through variable compensation and makes lateral career moves between public and private sector roles structurally complex (Rouban, 2014; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

Germany's federal structure creates a more fragmented youth and sports governance architecture, in which the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat) exercises limited competence over sports policy — largely through the Deutsche Olympische Sportbund (DOSB) and the Federal Institute for Sports Science (BISp) — while the *Länder* (states) retain primary constitutional competence over youth and sports administration. The resulting governance structure is characterized by significant variation in institutional capacity and HRM practices across the sixteen *Länder*, with larger and wealthier states such as Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia maintaining more developed talent management frameworks than smaller ones. Germany's dual-track civil service system — which distinguishes between *Beamte* (officials with full civil service status and significant career protections) and

Angestellte (employees on employment contracts more analogous to private sector arrangements) — creates differentiated retention dynamics within the same organizational context (Lhotta & von Blumenthal, 2015; OECD, 2017).

The United Kingdom's approach to youth and sports governance — primarily through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the arm's-length bodies UK Sport and Sport England — reflects the distinctive features of the British public administration tradition: relatively limited formal career protection, significant movement between public and private sector roles, strong emphasis on performance management and outcome accountability, and a recent history of New Public Management reforms that have introduced private sector HRM practices — including pay-for-performance, flexible working arrangements, and talent pipeline programmes — into public sector organizations at a scale and pace that most continental European systems have not matched (Painter & Peters, 2010; Hood & Dixon, 2015). The arm's-length model of sports governance — in which UK Sport and Sport England operate as quasi-autonomous public bodies with greater HRM flexibility than direct government departments — provides important lessons for the design of talent retention strategies in mission-intensive public organizations, as it enables more competitive compensation structures and faster promotion pathways than the civil service proper.

3.2 THE ARAB-WORLD CONTEXT: UAE, QATAR, AND JORDAN

The United Arab Emirates' approach to youth and sports governance reflects the UAE's broader public sector modernization strategy, which has positioned the country as a regional and global leader in government innovation and talent management. The Ministry of Culture and Youth and the Ministry of Community Development, operating alongside the Abu Dhabi Sports Council and the Dubai Sports Council, manage youth and sports policy within an institutional framework explicitly designed to attract, develop, and retain high-quality talent through competitive compensation, performance-based rewards, and rapid career advancement opportunities that are unusual by regional standards. The Emirati Nationalization policy (Emiratisation), which sets targets for the proportion of UAE nationals in public sector roles — including in sports and youth governance — creates a specific talent management challenge: the development of Emirati nationals with the specialized skills required for leadership roles in these

domains, at a speed that outpaces the natural development of the relevant human capital through conventional educational and career pathways (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; Reiche, 2015).

Qatar's youth and sports governance has been shaped to an exceptional degree by the country's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup — the most significant global sports event hosted in the Arab world — and by the strategic development priorities articulated in Qatar National Vision 2030, which identifies sports, youth, and community development as key dimensions of the country's social and human capital development agenda. The Ministry of Sports and Youth, operating alongside the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (responsible for World Cup infrastructure), the Qatar Olympic Committee, and Aspire Academy — the country's elite sports talent development institution — constitutes a complex governance ecosystem that has generated substantial investment in talent attraction, development, and retention at both the professional and the elite athlete levels. The World Cup legacy has created organizational capacity and institutional knowledge that presents both a retention challenge (the post-event risk of talent dispersal) and an opportunity (the development of a recognized cadre of internationally experienced sports governance professionals) that is unique to the Qatari context (Amara, 2012; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015; Henry, 2013).

Jordan's Ministry of Youth represents a significantly different institutional profile from those of the GCC states: operating in a context of more limited financial resources, a larger and younger population, and a regional geopolitical environment characterized by significant instability, the Jordanian Ministry has developed talent retention strategies that rely more heavily on mission alignment, non-monetary incentives, and career development opportunities than on competitive compensation. Jordan's youth sector benefits from a vibrant civil society ecosystem of youth NGOs and development organizations — partly supported by international development partners including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the EU — that creates both a competitive talent market for youth development professionals and a collaborative network within which government and civil society exchange expertise and talent. The challenge of retaining experienced youth development professionals against the attraction of better-compensated roles in international development organizations and NGOs is a persistent feature of the Jordanian institutional landscape (Al-Bdour et al., 2010; Lust & Ndegwa, 2012).

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: FOUR DIMENSIONS OF TALENT RETENTION

4.1 COMPENSATION AND NON-MONETARY INCENTIVE STRUCTURES

Compensation structures in ministries of youth and sports across the six jurisdictions examined reflect the broader parameters of each country's civil service pay system, with significant implications for the competitive position of these ministries in their respective talent markets. In France and Germany, the dominant feature of public sector compensation is the seniority-based progression embedded in civil service pay scales: employees advance through pay grades primarily on the basis of tenure rather than performance, with limited scope for variable compensation or accelerated advancement based on exceptional contribution. This structure provides strong retention incentives for employees who have accumulated significant seniority — the foregone seniority premium constitutes a substantial switching cost — but weak retention incentives for high-performing early-career professionals, who may find that comparable private sector roles offer significantly superior compensation without the lengthy waiting period that seniority-based progression entails (Rouban, 2014; OECD, 2017).

The United Kingdom's approach is more varied: core civil service pay scales remain constrained by public sector pay norms, but arm's-length bodies such as UK Sport operate with significantly greater compensation flexibility, including the capacity to offer market-rate salaries for specialized roles and performance-related pay linked to organizational outcome metrics. This flexibility has enabled UK Sport, in particular, to recruit and retain professionals with the combination of elite sports experience, performance management expertise, and public sector values that its mission requires — a talent profile that the core civil service pay system could not attract at comparable compensation levels (Hood & Dixon, 2015; Painter & Peters, 2010). The lesson — that greater institutional autonomy in compensation design, within appropriate public accountability frameworks, can significantly improve talent retention in mission-intensive public organizations — is among the most clearly supported findings of the comparative analysis.

The GCC states present a fundamentally different compensation environment: both the UAE and Qatar offer public sector compensation packages — including base salary, housing allowance, transport allowance, and performance bonuses — that are competitive with or superior to private sector equivalents for many professional roles, and that are significantly more attractive

than the compensation available in most European public sector comparators, particularly for senior and specialized positions. The resource-intensive talent attraction and retention strategy of GCC public administrations is explicitly designed to compete with international private sector employers for talent — a competitive orientation that reflects both the urgent pace of institutional development in these relatively young states and the recognition that human capital is the binding constraint on the realization of their ambitious social and economic development visions (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; Hertog, 2010). Jordan, by contrast, faces the compensation challenge of retaining talent against better-resourced competitors — international organizations, NGOs, and Gulf state employers — with a public sector pay system that is structurally unable to match competing offers in financial terms, making non-monetary retention strategies correspondingly more important.

4.2 CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PATHWAYS

Career development opportunities constitute one of the most consistently identified retention drivers across the talent management literature, particularly for the younger and more highly educated cohorts that increasingly dominate the workforce in professionally specialized public organizations (Mitchell et al., 2001; Allen et al., 2010). In the youth and sports sector, career development encompasses several distinct dimensions: vertical advancement within the ministry through promotion to senior management and leadership roles; horizontal development through rotation across different policy domains, functional roles, and organizational units; and external development through secondments to sports organizations, international bodies, and relevant private sector or civil society organizations that build the breadth of experience and professional network that senior sports governance roles require.

France's grandes écoles system provides an elite career development pathway for the most senior civil servants in youth and sports ministries — graduates of the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA, now Institut National du Service Public, INSP) and Sciences Po are systematically developed for senior leadership roles — but this pathway is narrow, accessible to a small proportion of ministry staff, and poorly adapted to the development of the domain-specific sports and youth expertise that the ministry's operational functions require. The Corps de l'Inspection Générale de la Jeunesse et des Sports (IGJS) provides a specialized career track for youth and sports policy professionals, but the overall career development architecture of the

French ministry reflects the broader French civil service tendency to prioritize generalist administrative competency over domain specialization — a tendency that creates specific retention risks for highly specialized sports science, performance analysis, and sports governance professionals (Rouban, 2014; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

Qatar's Aspire Academy represents one of the most systematically developed talent development ecosystems in the Arab world for the sports and youth domain: combining elite athlete development with a growing programme of sports science, sports management, and sports governance professional development, Aspire has created a pipeline of locally trained talent with internationally recognized credentials in sport-related fields. The integration of Aspire's alumni into Qatar's sports governance institutions — including the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the Qatar Olympic Committee, and the Supreme Committee's legacy programmes — reflects a long-term talent development and retention strategy whose sophistication and resource intensity exceed that of most comparable European national sports governance systems. The lesson for European ministries — that sustained investment in domain-specific professional development, through dedicated institutions rather than generic civil service training programmes, generates significant retention advantages — is one of the most clearly transferable insights from the Qatari experience (Henry, 2013; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015).

4.3 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND MISSION ALIGNMENT

Organizational culture — the shared values, assumptions, behavioural norms, and informal practices that characterize an institution's internal social life — is among the most powerful and most difficult to change determinants of employee retention and organizational commitment. In ministries of youth and sports, the potential for strong mission alignment between individual and organizational values — the shared passion for sport, youth development, and social impact — creates a distinctive cultural retention resource that most other government ministries cannot replicate. The extent to which this cultural potential is realized in practice, however, varies significantly across the six jurisdictions examined, and reflects both the institutional culture of the broader civil service tradition within which each ministry is embedded and the specific organizational choices made by ministry leadership about how to cultivate and sustain the mission-aligned culture that maximizes organizational commitment among its professional staff (Perry & Wise, 1990; Leisink & Steijn, 2009).

The United Kingdom's arm's-length sports governance bodies — particularly UK Sport, with its explicit mission focus on supporting Great Britain's elite Olympic and Paralympic programme — exhibit the clearest example of strong mission-aligned organizational culture among the European comparators: the shared commitment to supporting elite athlete success creates a powerful common purpose that pervades the organization's culture and that constitutes, according to both qualitative case study evidence and employee survey data, a major retention factor for many UK Sport employees who could command higher compensation in comparable private sector roles (Bang & Ross, 2009; Cuskelly et al., 2006). The lesson — that organizational design choices that maximize mission clarity and the visibility of individual contribution to mission outcomes can generate significant retention benefits even in organizations unable to match private sector compensation — is broadly supported across the comparative evidence.

In the Arab-world context, the alignment between individual and institutional mission in youth and sports ministries takes a distinctive form that reflects the collectivist cultural orientation and the strong national identity investment that characterize public life in these societies. For Emirati and Qatari public sector professionals, participation in the development of their countries' sports governance systems — and particularly in the hosting and legacy of major international events — carries a dimension of national pride and collective purpose that constitutes a powerful motivational and retention force that has no direct equivalent in the European context. The cultural specificity of this form of mission alignment — its dependence on the particular combination of national identity, collective pride, and shared development project that characterizes the GCC states at this moment in their institutional history — is an important qualification on the transferability of GCC retention strategies to other contexts (Al Yahya & Nafei, 2016; Rashid, 2021; Amara, 2012).

4.4 INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

The governance of talent management — the institutional arrangements through which strategic HRM priorities are set, talent management programmes are designed and funded, and the effectiveness of retention strategies is monitored and evaluated — differs substantially across the six jurisdictions in ways that reflect both broader public sector HRM governance traditions and the specific organizational status and resource endowment of youth and sports ministries. The critical governance dimension for talent retention is the degree of strategic integration between

talent management activities and broader organizational strategy: organizations in which talent management is treated as a strategic function, embedded in senior leadership decision-making and linked explicitly to organizational capability requirements, consistently outperform those in which it is treated as an operational function, delegated to HR departments and disconnected from strategic planning (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Vaiman et al., 2012).

The UAE's Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre — responsible for overseeing the UAE government's talent management and Emiratisation programmes — represents one of the most institutionally developed examples of strategic talent management governance in the Arab world: it provides a cross-ministerial framework of talent identification, development, and retention standards that individual ministries, including sports and youth institutions, are required to implement within their own organizational contexts (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; Reiche, 2015). This centralized governance model — which sets strategic talent management standards at the whole-of-government level while allowing implementation flexibility at the ministerial level — represents a structural solution to the talent management governance challenge that European civil service systems, with their more fragmented HR governance architectures, have not consistently achieved. The World Bank's (2021) review of public sector HRM governance in the MENA region identifies the centralization of talent management standards with decentralized implementation flexibility as among the most effective governance designs for improving retention outcomes in the public sector, a finding that is consistent with the UAE experience.

5. CONVERGENCES, DIVERGENCES, AND THE TRANSFERABILITY OF RETENTION STRATEGIES

The comparative analysis developed in Section 4 reveals a pattern of significant convergences and equally significant divergences between European and Arab-world talent retention strategies in ministries of youth and sports. The principal convergences reflect common structural challenges that transcend institutional context: all six jurisdictions face competition from the private sector and from international organizations for specialized talent in sports administration, youth development, and digital governance; all face generational shifts in workforce expectations, with younger professionals placing greater weight on mission alignment, career development, flexible working, and organizational culture relative to compensation security and job tenure than their predecessors; and all face the challenge of building digital competencies

alongside domain-specific expertise in organizations whose institutional cultures and HRM systems were designed for a pre-digital operational environment.

The principal divergences reflect differences in institutional context that shape the feasibility and effectiveness of specific retention strategies. The resource intensity of GCC retention strategies — competitive compensation, performance bonuses, rapid advancement opportunities — is not replicable in European or Jordanian fiscal contexts without fundamental changes to civil service pay governance that fall outside the discretion of individual ministries. Conversely, the sophisticated career development ecosystems of the French *grandes écoles* tradition and the UK arm's-length body model — both of which generate strong retention incentives through credential development, network building, and reputation enhancement — require institutional architectures, professional communities, and labour market structures that do not exist in the current GCC context and that cannot be quickly created. And the cultural specificity of mission alignment as a retention driver — powerful in the GCC context as national development pride, differently powerful in the UK context as elite sport achievement culture, and complex in the Jordanian context as a combination of public service commitment and competitive displacement by international organizations — means that cultural retention strategies cannot be simply transposed across contexts without significant adaptation to the specific motivational landscape of the receiving institution.

Several specific retention strategy elements are, however, more clearly transferable across the Euro-Arab divide. The arm's-length model of institutional autonomy in HRM — providing mission-intensive public organizations with greater flexibility in compensation design, performance management, and talent development within an appropriate public accountability framework — is broadly applicable across different fiscal contexts, as it generates retention improvements through organizational design changes rather than through resource increases. Jordan's Sports City initiative and similar projects in GCC states demonstrate the potential for collaborative public-private-civil society talent development ecosystems that build domain-specific expertise through partnerships across sectors — a model that European ministries, constrained by public sector pay scales, could deploy more aggressively than most currently do. And the centralized talent management governance model of the UAE — setting whole-of-government standards while allowing ministerial implementation flexibility — addresses a structural weakness in the fragmented HR governance architectures of most European public

administrations that has been identified as a significant barrier to strategic talent management in the EU context (Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; OECD, 2017).

6. CONCLUSIONS

This article has presented a comparative analysis of talent retention strategies in ministries of youth and sports across six jurisdictions — France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the UAE, Qatar, and Jordan — from a Euro-Arab perspective, demonstrating that while these institutional contexts differ significantly in their administrative traditions, fiscal resources, and cultural orientations, they share common structural talent retention challenges and can learn from each other's strategic and institutional innovations.

The comparative analysis supports four principal conclusions. First, the most effective talent retention strategies in ministries of youth and sports are those that activate multiple retention drivers simultaneously — combining adequate compensation with strong mission alignment, career development pathways, and a positive organizational culture — rather than relying on any single retention mechanism. The evidence from the arm's-length model in the United Kingdom and from Qatar's Aspire Academy ecosystem demonstrates that strategic talent development investment, mission clarity, and organizational culture can compensate significantly for compensation gaps relative to private sector competitors, but only when all three are developed and maintained at high quality.

Second, institutional autonomy in HRM design — the freedom to make compensation, promotion, and career development decisions that are responsive to the specific talent market and organizational culture of the ministry, within appropriate public accountability frameworks — is a significant determinant of retention effectiveness across all six jurisdictions. The GCC states' willingness to grant their sports and youth governance institutions substantial HRM flexibility, and the UK's arm's-length body model, both demonstrate the retention benefits of institutional autonomy that the more rigid civil service systems of France and Germany constrain.

Third, the cultural dimension of talent retention — and specifically the relationship between mission alignment, national and collective identity, and organizational commitment — is context-specific in ways that require explicit attention in comparative analysis and that limit the direct transferability of retention strategies across cultural contexts. The national pride dimension of retention motivation in GCC states, the elite sport achievement culture of UK Sport, and the

development commitment of Jordanian youth ministry professionals represent culturally specific versions of public service motivation that must be understood on their own terms rather than reduced to a single universal model.

Fourth, and most broadly, the model of contextually adaptive talent retention that emerges from this comparative analysis holds that effective retention strategies in mission-intensive public organizations must be designed from a thorough understanding of the specific motivational landscape of the institution's professional community — including the relative weight of extrinsic, intrinsic, and relational retention drivers, the cultural specificity of mission alignment, the competitive dynamics of the relevant talent market, and the institutional constraints on HRM flexibility — rather than from the wholesale adoption of best-practice models developed in different institutional contexts. The Euro-Arab comparative perspective advances this understanding precisely because it places institutional contexts in dialogue that are sufficiently different from each other to reveal the contextual specificity of retention strategies that might otherwise appear universally applicable, while being sufficiently convergent in their mission orientations to make the comparison analytically productive.

REFERENCES

- Al Yahya, K., & Nafei, W.** (2016). Organizational agility: The key to organizational success. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 11(5), 296–309. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v11n5p296>
- Al-Bdour, A. A., Nassoura, A. B., & Khaled, M. A.** (2010). Factors affecting employee retention: A study in the Jordanian pharmaceutical sector. *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research*, 5(4), 232–241.
- Allen, D. G., Bryant, P. C., & Vardaman, J. M.** (2010). Retaining talent: Replacing misconceptions with evidence-based strategies. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 24(2), 48–64. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.24.2.48>
- Amara, M.** (2012). *Sport, politics and society in the Arab world*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bang, H., & Ross, S. D.** (2009). Volunteer motivation and satisfaction. *Journal of Venue and Event Management*, 1(1), 61–77.
- Brannagan, P. M., & Giulianotti, R.** (2015). Soft power and soft disempowerment: Qatar, global sport and football's 2022 World Cup finals. *Leisure Studies*, 34(6), 703–719. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.997357>
- Collings, D. G., & Mellahi, K.** (2009). Strategic talent management: A review and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 19(4), 304–313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.04.001>
- Cuskelly, G., Hoye, R., & Auld, C.** (2006). *Working with Volunteers in Sport: Theory and Practice*. Routledge.
- Dahlström, C., & Lapuente, V.** (2017). *Organizing Leviathan: Politicians, Bureaucrats, and the Making of Good Government*. Cambridge University Press.
- Forstenlechner, I., & Rutledge, E.** (2010). Unemployment in the Gulf: Time to update the social contract. *Middle East Policy*, 17(2), 38–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2010.00439.x>
- Henry, I.** (2013). *Transnational and Comparative Research in Sport: Globalisation, Governance and Sport Policy*. Routledge.
- Hertog, S.** (2010). *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*. Cornell University Press.

- Hood, C., & Dixon, R.** (2015). *A Government That Worked Better and Cost Less? Evaluating Three Decades of Reform and Change in UK Central Government*. Oxford University Press.
- Kim, S.** (2012). Does person-organization fit matter in the public sector? Testing the mediating effect of person-organization fit in the relationship between public service motivation and work attitudes. *Public Administration Review*, 72(6), 830–840. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02572.x>
- Kravariti, F., & Johnston, K.** (2020). Talent management: A systematic literature review and implications for research and practice in healthcare. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 7(1), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-08-2018-0066>
- Leisink, P., & Steijn, B.** (2009). Public service motivation and job performance of public sector employees in the Netherlands. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 75(1), 35–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852308099505>
- Lhotta, R., & von Blumenthal, J.** (2015). Intergovernmental relations in Germany: Complex co-operation and party politics. In A. Benz & J. Broschek (Eds.), *Federal Dynamics: Continuity, Change, and the Varieties of Federalism* (pp. 209–232). Oxford University Press.
- Lust, E., & Ndegwa, S. N. (Eds.)**. (2012). *Governing Africa's Changing Societies: Dynamics of Reform*. Lynne Rienner.
- Michaels, E., Handfield-Jones, H., & Axelrod, B.** (2001). *The War for Talent*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Mitchell, T. R., Holtom, B. C., Lee, T. W., Sablinski, C. J., & Erez, M.** (2001). Why people stay: Using job embeddedness to predict voluntary turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(6), 1102–1121. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3069391>
- OECD. (2017). *Government at a Glance 2017*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2017-en
- Painter, M., & Peters, B. G. (Eds.)**. (2010). *Tradition and Public Administration*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Pandey, S. K., & Stazyk, E. C.** (2008). Antecedents and correlates of public service motivation. In J. L. Perry & A. Hondeghem (Eds.), *Motivation in Public Management: The Call of Public Service* (pp. 101–117). Oxford University Press.
- Perry, J. L., & Wise, L. R.** (1990). The motivational bases of public service. *Public Administration Review*, 50(3), 367–373. <https://doi.org/10.2307/976618>
- Perry, J. L., Hondeghem, A., & Wise, L. R.** (2010). Revisiting the motivational bases of public service: Twenty years of research and an agenda for the future. *Public Administration Review*, 70(5), 681–690. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02196.x>
- Peters, B. G.** (2018). *Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods*. New York University Press.
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G.** (2017). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis — Into the Age of Austerity* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Rashid, M.** (2021). Public service motivation in Arab countries: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(8), 659–670. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2020.1748388>
- Reiche, D.** (2015). Investing in sporting success as a domestic and foreign policy tool: The case of Qatar. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 7(4), 489–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2014.966135>
- Ritz, A., Brewer, G. A., & Neumann, O.** (2016). Public service motivation: A systematic literature review and outlook. *Public Administration Review*, 76(3), 414–426. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12505>
- Rouban, L.** (2014). *La fonction publique en débat*. La Documentation française.
- Thunnissen, M., Boselie, P., & Fruytier, B.** (2013). A review of talent management: 'Infancy or adolescence'? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(9), 1744–1761. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.777543>
- Vaiman, V., Scullion, H., & Collings, D.** (2012). Talent management decision making. *Management Decision*, 50(5), 925–941. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741211227663>
- Van Loon, N. M., Kjeldsen, A. M., Andersen, L. B., Vandenabeele, W., & Leisink, P.** (2015). Only when the societal impact potential is high? A panel study of the relationship between public service motivation and perceived performance. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 38(2), 139–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X15590406>

World Bank. (2021). Civil Service and Human Resource Management in the Middle East and North Africa. World Bank Group. <https://doi.org/10.1596/35580>