

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE  
Doctoral School of Public Administration**

**GÁBOR ÁKOS CSUTORÁS**

**RETENTION POSSIBILITIES OF Y GENERATION STAFF  
IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ORGANIZATIONS**

PhD Dissertation

**THESIS BOOKLET**

**Supervisor:  
Dr. Viktória Linder**

**Budapest  
2020**

## **1. TOPICALITY OF THE ISSUE, THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The reason for my choice of this research topic was using science to find solutions for a very topical challenge for Hungarian and EU public administration organizations and their managers and human resource management professionals, which is likely to become more and more serious in the coming years. This challenge is a stable supply of staff, more precisely the attraction and retention of competent and committed staff to ensure high quality performance. I am also facing these challenges on a daily basis as a practicing HR manager in public administration.

In the current labor market situation in Hungary, the problems related to adequate supply of labor are of varying intensity, but are occurring in more and more employers. Many public administration organizations are facing with an aging staff and even if there is interest in young people in their job opportunities, they are highly fluctuating, leaving the organization shortly and sometimes the whole public service career as well.

Scientific researchers on this field and experts from some companies and employers in the private sector have recognized for years that the so-called Generation Y, the young workers, who are highly exposed to the effects of economic recessions are increasingly present in the labor market with new and higher demands on their employers. Many have realized that winning and retaining these people may be a competitive advantage, moreover, it may be a key issue for survival.

A review of the literature on the subject and my professional, practical experience have confirmed that retaining this young generation in the coming years will be a key challenge not only in management and organization, but also in public service policy, both in Hungary and internationally. Reference to the importance of retaining staff in the civil service appears not only in proposals of major international organizations (e.g. OECD), public service strategies, policies and even in the preamble of the Government Administration Act, but there are is a huge scientific interest in the topic as well. While generation management is being introduced in organizations worldwide, literature on the field of human resource management in the Hungarian public service - although it is often mentioned and discussed as an important challenge - still seems to study the topic quite fairly and without clear solutions.

Some see the root of any problems merely in lower salaries compared to the private sector, whereas in some countries there are already examples of a so-called life-cycle

approach to individual career management policies in public administration. For the time being, the need for information related to the expectations from a public employer, as well as the consideration of possible generational differences are not yet an integral part of the Hungarian civil service personnel policy. Thus, there is no information available for strategic decisions that could make public service human resource management demand-driven. In addition, public service career, which traditionally lasts for a lifetime, has recently become precarious on both sides, as the legislative framework has introduced a kind of mixed, job-based personnel policy for central and regional administration, which has lost its comparative advantages over the private sector. There is also an attitude on the part of the younger workforce that is no longer characterized by the need to stay with a single employer for decades.

My scientific research from a generational approach is capable of filling the gaps regarding the knowledge of the characteristics and expectations of the young workforce towards public administration employers. Based on my research results, it is possible to draw conclusions about the factors influencing retention of new generations of staff in light of the suitability of large public service systems and the current legal environment, as well as practical proposals for establishing responsible generational research in Hungarian public administration. I also need to mention my personal involvement in this topic – as a member of the so-called Generation Y – being an active HR manager serving the “pro publico bono” in today's Hungarian public administration and facing expectations that public employers may not be perfectly prepared for.

## **2. HYPOTHESES**

- I assume that workforce belonging to Generation Y have different expectations from public administration employers compared to other generations. (H1)
- I assume that the main retention factor for Generation Y staff of Hungarian public administration organizations is not the appropriate salary. (H2)
- I assume that the introduction and development of modern human resource management and services, based on a systematic analysis of the needs of civil servants, taking into account generational differences and adapting to the given legal environment, can effectively influence the long-term commitment of the Generation Y staff of Hungarian public administration. (H3)

### **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

- a comprehensive, in-depth theoretical and empirical study as to whether there are any demands on public administration employers that can be linked specifically to someone's belonging to the so-called Y generation;
- development of a multi-level system of proposals for the retention of Generation Y staff of central and regional government administration organizations, based on theoretical and empirical research results.

### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Due to the specifics of the topic of my dissertation, my research was transdisciplinary: in each chapter the results of sociology (organizational sociology), psychology (organizational psychology), and public administration science and management science (human resource management) are synthesized. I am also carrying out a legislative analysis in order to present the legal environment for the administrative application of my proposals.

There is a very extensive, constantly expanding domestic and international literature on the topic of generations and staff retention, which needed to be covered, systematized and, if necessary, synthesized in order to provide proper basis for my own empirical research and opinion. Therefore the first part of the dissertation is of descriptive-explanatory as well as synthesizing nature. For these my secondary research methods used are as follows:

- searching for and studying Hungarian and international literature (scientific articles, studies, books), then analyzing and systematizing it, developing synthesis if necessary, and structuring content in a new form;
- searching for and studying methodologically, as well as summarizing the results of previous international and Hungarian empirical research and surveys;
- studying relevant practices and situations of certain employers involved in this issue by personal consultations with researchers and experts for example at national and international conferences.

Considering the results of my secondary research, I also did primary research using several methods, which I extended only to the Hungarian central and regional government administration. The reason for this is, on the one hand, that I could not realistically conduct representative sample research covering the entire Hungarian public administration, on the other hand, I tried to reach as many officials as possible, whose employment is regulated by the same legislation in the currently quite fragmented legal environment.

My most important primary research with a high response rate was an online survey the participation of government officials from 26 organizations, which I complemented by interviews of public servants in a single organization as follows:

*Table 1.1 Primary research*

<b>Target group</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Research method</b>	<b>Time interval</b>
Staff of Hungarian central and regional government administration organizations	1338	online survey	Jan – Feb 2020
Voluntarily leaving government officials from a central government organization (my own employer)	24	exit interview	Jun – Nov 2017
New entrants of a central government organization (my own employer) on probation	56	„retention” interview	Oct – Dec 2019

*Source: Researcher, own construction*

## **5. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

The dissertation includes eight chapters. Each chapter’s content follows a logical order corresponding to the title of the dissertation.

After the introduction, in the second chapter I summarize the theories of generation research from the beginning to the present day, the possibilities of grouping generations, synthesize the factors determining the „belonging to a generation”, and I also review the critiques of generation theories. I study and synthesize the general characteristics of Generation Y as well as their expectations from employers.

In the third chapter, I analyze the concept, purpose and importance of staff retention, the concept of turnover and methods of its analysis, and I synthesize and group the factors influencing staff retention.

In the fourth chapter, I present the concept of public service personnel policy and the different public service systems, public service careers and job security as a special manifestation of staff retention within public service. On the one hand, I analyze the expectations from Hungarian public servants in legal history, and on the other hand, the values of those people who choose a career in public service. In order to outline the narrower context of the research topic, I briefly interpret and evaluate the situation of public service

personnel policy and the current legal framework of retention, the relevant aspects of regulations related to the topic of the dissertation regarding government administration. I summarize theories and practical solutions in order to attract and retain Generation Y in public administration.

In the fifth chapter I present the results of my own extensive empirical research, including my survey on the commitment of generations among Hungarian public servants of central and regional government administrations, which I complemented with interviews of staff of a central government organization and analyze their results. I try to draw up an identity profile of the Generation Y workforce employed in Hungarian government administrations, and based on my theoretical and empirical research results I compile a complex, generation-conscious and demand-driven retention model for Hungarian public servants.

In the sixth chapter, I summarize all my conclusions based on the results regarding generational differences and the possibilities of retaining different generations within the framework of the current public service personnel policy system.

In the seventh chapter, based on my theoretical and empirical research results and the conclusions drawn from them, I summarize my new scientific results, which offer theoretical and practical solutions to the challenges of retaining different generations of workforce for both Hungarian public service personnel policy and government organizations themselves, as well as a basis for comparison with subsequent research. I also present the practical applicability of the results in the development of a next central public service staff strategy, in the further development of the legal environment and in the development of HR management at an organizational level.

In the eighth chapter I explain in detail my proposals for establishing generational consciousness and management as well as systematically integrating needs analysis into the public service personnel policy system. I formulate proposals to be implemented at strategic and organizational levels - in the current legal environment - as well as recommendations for further development of regulations for achieving more effective staff retention.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. Proving hypothesis H1**

In connection with my first hypothesis in the theoretical part of the dissertation, reviewing the history of the development of generational theories and their critiques, I came to the primary conclusion that “belonging to Generation Y” is a complex issue. It is definitely not only influenced by the birth date but a few other factors, which I summarized both in a table and in a figure. The more of these determinants are in common for two individuals, the more likely they truly belong to the same generation.

I also concluded that belonging to a generation and the generational identity in the workplace means such characteristics and personal qualities that can determine a person's attitude towards an organization and its management, as well as ideas and expectations related to the job and the employer. All this supports that a properly defined Generation Y workforce can be further analyzed in the public service work environment and it provides relevance to the introduction of a generational approach in Hungarian public service human resource management and to its consideration regarding staff supply policies.

I concluded that in today's developed societies, taking into consideration the typically delayed dates of giving birth to a child and the moderate willingness to have children, characteristics related to the human life span in case of Generation Y may appear later (such as founding a family later, thus a later need for a stable job). Due to this it is difficult to state without longitudinal research, whether the characteristics attributed to Generation Y are indeed generational specialties or they can rather be linked to a life stage.

With regard to proving my first hypothesis, it can be claimed with the utmost caution that due to technological changes, in case of Generation Y and subsequent generations the IT skills and the expectations and attitudes in connection with digitalization is a kind of generational difference that previous generations did not bear with. In addition, there is a good chance of that flexibility and mobility are also characteristics of Generation Y, which can also result in new expectations from public administration employers. It is not closely related to the verification of the hypothesis, but I consider the importance of synthesizing my research results, which allowed the identification of all the possible fields and factors, where generational differences may arise in job expectations.

Based on empirical research, it can be stated that Y generation characteristics are recognizable in the field of digitalization, and a more special, more modern and high level of knowledge. My empirical results showed that Generation Y employed in Hungarian central and regional government administrations are considering a shorter stay with any kind of employer than members of other generations, even if an employer is fully in line with their expectations and even if they are not forced to stick to the same particular job at that employer. I also discovered differences in the factors influencing staying with an employer, but on the one hand it was not possible to clearly state whether these were generational differences or effects due to the life span, and on the other hand the most important influencing factors for Generation Y were practically the very same as those mentioned by other generations.

Overall, hypothesis H1 was confirmed, as the fact that belonging to Generation Y may result in different expectations towards employers. I have identified characteristics and attitudes that can be linked to Generation Y, which assume different demands on public administration employers compared to other generations. However, besides IT proficiency, flexibility and mobility, neither the number nor the significance and severity of any additional generational differences could be clearly determined. A provision was also made regarding the possibility of precise distinction between generational and life span related characteristics. (T1)

## **6.2. Proving hypothesis H2**

Regarding my second hypothesis I concluded from theoretical research that in order to analyze the factors of retention and to have any kind of retention strategy, action or decision appropriate measurements are needed first. The reasons for leaving and employee attitudes shall be revealed using various tools. Different turnover rates are calculated using factual data on personnel and well-described mathematical formulas but other data collection methods are also needed for content analysis. For this reason I developed an “exit” and a “retention” interview template, which can be applied by public administration organizations as well. I also realized that in the current, fragmented legal framework and different pay systems there are different possibilities and conditions for providing appropriate salaries.

To test the hypothesis – synthesizing the results of previous scientific research – I formed four groups of factors that influence employee retention (in addition to appropriate salary): personal status and its complex indicators; social, cultural and physical work environment,



HR management policies and measures; individual characteristics. In addition, the impact of the external environment can be identified as a fifth group of factors, however, employers and employees do not have any influence over that. I concluded that there is no single and clear solution for successfully retaining Generation Y workforce in general or even at the level of any organization. On the one hand there is no combination of retention factors that would affect staying in the workplace equally for all individuals and also there is no general retention plan, which would be perfectly applicable to individuals with different needs at who are in different stages of their life and living in different conditions. Therefore, salary cannot be the most important retention factor for all members of an entire generation either.

In relation to the factors influencing retention, I outlined the current civil service personnel policy and the central human resources strategy as well as the legal framework, which determines possibilities on the organizational-level and I recognized leeways. Not closely related to the hypothesis I also found that it is not necessary to make everyone from Generation Y stay but only those, whom the organizations really need and who provides the best performance, whereas the external environment also needs to be considered, for example during lay-offs, budget cuts, or in case of a labor oversupply this issue may be viewed from a different aspect.

To test hypothesis H2 the answers were mostly found in my survey, according to which the appropriate salary for the Generation Y employees in central and regional government was the most frequently mentioned out of the three most important retention factors. However, this cannot be identified as a generational characteristic as it was also the most important factor for all other generations (appropriate salary is the main retention force universally in any age). Good employee relations and work atmosphere were only a few percent less important though. The explanation of this result, which contradicts the preliminary assumption and other theoretical research findings, can be found in the fact that legislative decisions regarding public service payment policies had been long-delayed. After 2014 when law enforcement bodies were considered, salaries of public servants only rose generally in 2019-2020, therefore the results seem partly explained by these historical reasons. However, I did not cover in my work an in-depth analysis of this quite decisive weight of remuneration in the values of respondents.

Overall, my hypothesis H2 was only partly proved. Based on theoretical research results it cannot be claimed that salary is the most important retention factor for Generation Y, while my empirical results showed that appropriate salary was the first among the three most important factors for all generations of Hungarian central and regional government officials. The dissertation does not cover the in-depth analysis of reasons for this result so it can be a subject for further research. (T2)

### **6.3.Proving hypothesis H3**

While testing my third hypothesis I came to the conclusion that legislation for Hungarian government administration has introduced a mixed, job-based system, which is in general able to adapt more flexibly to the expectations of the new generations of workforce, however, at the same time it reduces the comparative advantages of public service careers and job security compared to the private sector. Even from an employee's viewpoint a lifelong career at a single employer seems to be not as attractive as before and the growing intensity of movements on the labor market is extending to public service as well. The Administrative and Civil Service Development Strategy of Hungary includes development goals only as a framework and its reference time interval expires in 2020 as well as the "KÖFOP" project connected to it, therefore there is no written public service human strategy or staff development policy yet for the following years. It can only be assumed based on the dynamically changing legislation. Although the Strategy identified staff retention as one of the most important tasks, it puts more emphasis on measures related to the life span rather than generational differences. Retention also appeared as a key issue in the "KÖFOP" project, though it may be worth taking further steps on a few more target areas in addition to the ones already identified.

The Act on Government Administration and other implementing regulations allow organizations to select the employees who meet their own requirements, by which they can take the first step towards effective employee retention, whereas their discretionary rights are so extended that they may have a negative impact on job security in several aspects. Although performance appraisal can serve as an important factor of employee retention the strict methodology of appraisal does not allow the assessment of the truly relevant competencies in a special position. Regarding work conditions there is minimal regulation on physical work environment, which results in very different standards in organizations but the shift towards flexibility in terms of working hours and work schedules is definitely a key

element in retention possibilities. As for incentives it is interesting that on the one hand the time spent in public service has lost its significance when it comes to promotion, on the other hand the time spent in the same position for long years still deserves recognition, which is quite controversial. The variety of benefits is strictly limited to those exactly specified in a regulation, which ensures predictability and at the same time a narrower leeway for organizations.

In line with the changes that have taken place on the field of recruitment as a profession and the new communication channels used by Generation Y the use of more modern, innovative recruitment channels and tools in the public administration would be necessary. In some countries, life-cycle career management has appeared in public service and practical solutions are used by many organizations to retain young staff. Questions and needs related to this topic arise on the field of human resource management in the Hungarian public service as well but so far there have been few scientific studies to come up with solutions and to evaluate the adoption of theoretical models and methods to practice.

It would be difficult to decide which traditional public service system could respond the most effectively to the needs of Generation Y, but due to the flexibility and high mobility a more open, decentralized and job-based system offers more leeway for HR management and demand-driven solutions. Of course this is only true if it is not a kind of spoils system so recognition is based on real performance and merit and still there is also a certain level of job security that private sector does not offer. In addition, the impact of life span effects need to be considered so we can not know today whether this kind of system remains attractive to young generations as they are aging and their attitudes may change. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to name the most suitable version of public service systems for a generation, if we take into account that today we can rather talk about mixed systems everywhere and any of these may have a dominant element, or elements which may meet needs of Generation Y. Finally, it is not very practical to build such a public service system that serves the needs of a single generation of workforce since a good system shall be appropriate for all generations active on the labor market.

I consider the third hypothesis proved from the point of view of my empirical research since in order to keep Generation Y I managed to identify such HR management actions that can be universally (regardless of generational membership) effective in retention at central and regional government organizations, moreover, flexible working conditions and

introduction and extension of family-friendly services were identified as especially important for Generation Y. All in all, hypothesis H3 has been proved by finding such modern HR management actions that fit into the current legal framework and that can be sometimes very simple and not at all alien from public service (although they are not yet frequent in several organizational cultures). However, it is important to mention that only the coordinated adaptation of HR management methods and public employment regulations can lead to achieving appropriate results. It is also a condition for success that the necessary set of competencies shall be available at managers and HR professionals. Another provision in addition to proving hypothesis H3 is that the actions introduced shall not be targeted to a single generation but an effective personnel policy shall rather consider the needs of all generations.

To have a complex approach for finding the best solutions and further scientific analyses as well as integrating all this into the actual public service system I developed a generation-conscious and demand-driven model for retention of staff working in Hungarian central and regional government organizations. The model takes into account all my primary and secondary research results and it has connection points to the system of objectives found in current governmental public service development projects, as well as the legal and external environment, moreover it fits into the model of the previously designed strategic, integrated public service human resource management system. The model integrates all external and internal factors, organizational circumstances, scientific results, turnover data and empiric data from employee surveys as well as generational and individual characteristics regardless of age. (T3)

To summarize my final conclusion in a single sentence it would stand as follows: based on my research results, in order to retain staff more efficiently in the future, it seems unavoidable for public administration to have a scientifically reasoned awareness regarding the attitudes and expectations of new generation workforce and to integrate retention actions in a complex, generation-conscious and demand-driven approach into the personnel policy and legislation as well as on organization level, while not trying to eliminate generational differences but rather to exploit benefits in a kind of intergenerational harmony and using a combination of universal (regardless of generational membership), generation-specific and life span specific measures in human resource management.

## 7. NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS

Overall, my research results, conclusions and recommendations derived from them are offering both theoretical and practical solutions for Hungarian public service personnel policy and public administration organizations in order to more efficiently face the current and future challenges related to retention of different generations of staff. My results can be used for further research and for the development of the public service development strategy for the next strategic period and also on the level of organizations for introduction of human resource management measures especially in connection with the recruitment of Generation Y staff, increasing their engagement and reducing their intentions of leaving public service careers, thus creating a more stable supply of staff.

- I systematized the factors that determine membership in a generation, I defined the factors influencing retention of staff and I structured the components of expectations from a workplace.
- I created an identity profile of the Generation Y staff employed in Hungarian government administrations.
- I created a complex, generation-conscious, demand-driven retention model of employees working in Hungarian government administrations.
- I formulated proposals for the next strategy of the Hungarian public service personnel policy in order to retain Generation Y more efficiently, I made proposals for amendments to current staff regulations and I also recommended organization-level HR measures for the same reasons.

My research results can be used as a comprehensive theoretical basis, above all at the strategic level, during the formulation of the Hungarian public service personnel policy for the next strategic period in order to validate the aspects of more efficient staff retention and to integrate generational approach to the whole system.

My results and proposals can be used at the legislative level to revise current employment regulations for the purpose of more effective retention and also for compilation of methodological recommendations centrally for public administration organizations. My interview samples, conclusions and the resulting practical suggestions for HR measures can be considered by HR managers and professionals as a starting point for the development of organization-level solutions and measures of staff retention and for any generation-conscious and demand-driven human resource management decisions.

While planning and implementing measures regarding generation management at an organizational level, my results can be used by managers in public administration and also by HR professionals to develop intergenerational collaborations and to better understand Generation Y, to make their recruitment efforts more effective and to increase engagement of their present Generation Y staff as well. Finally, my results can be considered as a theoretical basis for further scientific research of Hungarian public service staff, which field is still fairly researched from a strategic human resource management viewpoint. My results shall offer a good basis for time comparison with results that will possibly be produced later.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **8.1. Recommendations on strategic level**

- The new strategy for the following years regarding public service personnel policy shall define its intentions clearly regarding lifelong career in public administration and shall consider a generational approach in connection with that.
- In the next strategic document challenges regarding staff retention shall appear with a systematic approach, optimally according to my complex, generation-conscious and demand-driven model.
- Public service personnel policies shall consider scientific results and integrating more empirical researches to the system of decision-making as well as in human resource management practices in order to better understand the needs of public servants and to support generation management.
- HRM policies shall include universal (regardless of generation membership) as well as generation-specific and life span related solutions for retention, and some more flexibility on the public service career.

### **8.2. Recommendations on the level of organizations**

- Revision of recruitment and selection strategies and methods.
- Introduction the practices of retention interviews, exit interviews and/or regular employee satisfaction surveys.
- Evaluation and development of current practices and possibilities of flexible working.

### **8.3. Recommendations for the development of regulations**

- Building coherence between requirements for jobs defined on organization level and the competencies defined on central level for evaluation in the framework of performance appraisal system.
- Revision of the function of the recognition that is connected to time spent in a single job.
- Defining criteria for decisions on salary between the regulated pay-intervals.
- Making family-friendly bonuses and services more flexible.

## 9. CATALOGUE OF PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

### Publications in scientific journals:

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## **10. CURRICULUM VITAE**

Gábor Ákos Csutorás achieved a master of public administration diploma in 2010 at Corvinus University of Budapest on Faculty of Public Administration. In the same year he also achieved an economist in human resource management (BA) diploma at University of Pannonia on Faculty of Economy. He achieved an economist in management and leadership diploma (MA) at University of Pannonia on Faculty of Economy in 2015. He started doctoral studies in 2016 at the National University of Public Service in Doctoral School of Public Administration, where he achieved a pre-degree certificate stating that all course units have been completed after meeting all educational and publication requirements as well as a complex exam. His research fields are strategic human resource management and generation management in public service. He has completed a high-level English language exam both in general and for special purposes (law and public administration) as well as an advanced-level Italian language exam. He participated in the Erasmus for Public Administration program in 2014 and other trainings of the European Union and he regularly presented at international conferences organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), where he was recognized as the best presenter of the conference in 2016. During his scientific career so far he has participated as a researcher in KÖFOP project „Strategic support of staff supply for a competitive public service” in Ludovika High-priority Research Workshop, as well as KÖFOP project „Public service development for founding good governance” and he has publications related to this work. After finishing university studies he spent a few months working in a ministry and in a local government and then he started his career in the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO). He worked as a human resource administrator for three years after which he became Head of HR Section for four years and after that he has been promoted to be the Head of Human Resource Strategy and Training Department in HCSO since 2019. During his professional career so far he has participated in a few HR and organizational development projects and he has been active in international co-operations in professional working groups and workshops.