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Exploring strengths and areas for development in decision-making in central public administration through the examples of some organizations

Nikolett Nánási-Pintér
Specialist Psychologist, PhD candidate
Ministry of the Interior,
Department of Leadership Training and Continuing Education
National University of Public Service,
Doctoral School of Public Administration
pinter.nikolett88@gmail.com

Abstract

Aim: The aim of the research is to use the Healthy Organization Model to explore what strengths and areas for development there are in the public administration, what factors, processes, and characteristics there are in the public administration in which the public administration works very well and effectively based on the interview results of some organizations of the central public administration. In this paper, I will focus on one of the 20 health-disease dimensions of the Healthy Organization Model, which is decision-making. I will illustrate its functioning through the examples of a few organizations in the central public administration.
Methodology: Conducting semi-structured interviews with leaders at various levels in several central public administration organizations using an interview guide based on the Healthy Organization Model.
Findings: There are organizations and units where this area functions exemplary; there are organizations and units where they face more difficulties in the area of decision-making, but positive changes and efforts to solve difficulties are visible. The leaders use several methods to make decision-making effective within their jurisdiction, and they suggest possible solutions to the difficulties in decision-making process.
Value: Based on the leader interviews, it was revealed which mechanism of decision making in the central public administration is functioning exemplary,

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and which mechanisms are functioning not so efficient. In those organizations where certain mechanisms need to be developed, there may be possible to develop them with the good practices applied in other organizations**.**

Keywords: organizational diagnosis, public administration, leader interviews, decision-making

Human resources as an important factor in the competitiveness of public administrations

At present, it is generally accepted that the state and public administration have a key role to play in ensuring the competitiveness of the economy (Imre, 2009). However, the state and the government (public administration) can only provide stability to economic actors if it is itself stable. There is therefore a clear link between stability of governance and competitiveness. The efficiency of the management of available resources is an important component of governance performance. One of the most outstanding of these is the conscious management of human capital, which is a store of knowledge. Innovative human resources not only have the capacity to renew themselves, but also to help the organization to improve its performance, i.e. to create value, and are therefore of key importance for increasing competitiveness. In many respects, the role of public administrations in supporting competitiveness depends on the selection of officials, talents and leaders (Belügyminisztérium, 2017).

Public sector earnings have remained below the competitive sector in every year except 2008. Regional wage differentials in the public sector labor market are relatively more limited due to the fixed wage scale within the public administration, except in Budapest, which is home to central administrations with higher wage scales. Despite the rising wage levels, salaries for white-collar workers are still significantly lower in public administrations than in the competitive sector, although to a different extent across regions. In Budapest, the gap is smaller than average due to the higher wages of central bodies (Kaiser, 2017; 2018). However, lower salaries compared to the competitive market can lead to the absence or loss of talent.

Bureaucratic operation

According to Weber, the characteristics of bureaucratic organization and management are:

- A permanent organization with a specialized function or functions, whose actions are governed by rules. Durability and consistency within the organization are ensured by written rules and decisions.
- The organization is built on hierarchical personal relationships. The area of authority within the hierarchy is clearly defined and the rights and duties of civil servants at each level are defined.
- Personnel are separated from the ownership of administrative assets. Personnel members are personally free, accountable only to their superiors for their impersonal official duties.
- The staff are appointed on the basis of their qualifications, i.e. they are not elected. And promoted on merit.
- Staff are paid a fixed salary and are appointed for a fixed term. The rate of pay depends on the rank in the hierarchy. Employment is continuous for a fixed period and usually involves retirement (Weber, 1947, cited in Jenei, 2019).

At the same time, a competitive economy is based on the cost-benefit principle, while in bureaucratic systems, the activities of the civil service will be 'rational' according to a prevailing ideology, even if they are uneconomic or inefficient (Forgács, 2019).

From the last century the number of civil servants increased as the number of public tasks increased, making them indispensable for the professional, fast and precise management of administrative tasks, therefore, Forgács (2019) uses an extended interpretation of the concept of a clerk, which considers all civil servants' bureaucrats.

On the side of the tasks to be performed, he defines this as three ever-widening circles: 1. civil service central tasks (state administration, local administration, military administration), 2. civil service in the broad sense (welfare institutions, social tasks) and 3. civil service in the broadest sense (monetary economy, state production and services) (Forgács, 2019; Sallai, 2022). Forgács (2019) argues that the only common point between the competitive economy and bureaucracy is that both seek to survive. The main differences between the two are: the competitive economy acts goal-rationally ('economically'), whereas bureaucracy acts value-rationally ('ideologically'). Another difference is that the private sector and the state bureaucracy do not have the same tasks Forgács (2019). However, for the efficiency of public service delivery, it is worth adopting solutions from the competitive economy in terms of organizational logic and solutions (Bordás, 2021; Barta, 2020). But mere efficiency alone cannot be a yardstick for organizational performance (Lapsánszky, 2019). There is also a difference in terms of remuneration, which means that the private sector pays for work on a performance basis, while the public sector pays for work regardless of performance. Public sector jobs are the result of political decisions that can be legitimately changed at any time. Therefore, a change of political power, a reorganization, the appointment of a new leader, internal tensions, an unfavorable change in powers or responsibilities will have an impact on jobs because they are independent of job performance. This is compounded by a lack of alternatives: if the workplace climate is unfavorable or the official does not feel sufficiently valued, they will usually stay and become resigned, whereas in such a situation an economic worker simply changes jobs. In Europe, in a bureaucratic culture, it is rare for civil servants to find a job in the competitive economy, for a variety of reasons: the prestige of holding public office is higher for the individual, the preference for ideal values over wealth acquisition, the competitive economy does not provide a performance-independent long-term perspective, and becoming an entrepreneur is risky, and it is not possible to find a job in the competitive sector with specific public administration-related qualifications. Furthermore, the internal network of relationships based on a favors-commitment relationship in public administration is another reason why it is difficult to move from public administration to the competitive sector. The characteristics of the favors - commitment internal network of relationships based on the obligation of favor are that it is formed by a series of mutual assistance and can be established between certain positions, and that the official must abide by its unwritten rules, otherwise they will join forces against him and the system will expel him, which may lead to the weakening or even loss of his position (Forgács, 2019; Sallai, 2022)

Steps and characteristics of decision-making

The decision-making process always starts with the identification of the cause of the action and ends with the selection and implementation of one or more variants of action, which may have different characteristics and be carried out in different ways. Problems may be analytical or closed problems, the latter having a solution that can be found logically, and deviation from it being the point at which the link between the parts is broken. The other type is diffuse, multicausal problems, where there is no single solution, but rather, due to their complexity, multiple solutions are required (Zoltayné Paprika, 1999; Weiss, 1991). These include, for example, organizational and process problems, where the solution to the problem may require multiple solutions to be applied simultaneously. A problem arises when the decision-maker discovers that the perceived current state is different from the desired one, so that the emergence of the problem depends on the decision-maker's perception. Problems can be placed on a straight line according to their severity, with crisis situations at one end and opportunities at the other. Some of the steps in the decision-making process are important and others are less important or can be dispensed with. There are two steps that are part of any decision-making process: recognition and evaluation choice.

I. The first phase is problem identification, which can involve two steps: at this point, the decision-makers in the organization recognize that the current state of affairs is different from the one they want in the present or the future and decide to eliminate this difference, thus starting the problem-solving and decision process. The recognition of the problem, which includes the initiation of the decision-making process, can be greatly influenced by the characteristics of the decision maker(s) and the organization, which are:
   1. The psychological characteristics and cognitive abilities of the decision maker:
      - Does they perceive, and if so, how, the signals that indicate a problem?
      - How much information (signals) can they process?
      - What are his/her attitudes and values about the perceived problem?

(A leader overwhelmed by 'crisis' problems is unlikely to recognize all the possibilities because stress can narrow his thinking. The question is what threshold the signals must reach for the decision-maker to recognize the problem.)

   2. According to the characteristics of the organization, the tools and methods used by the organization to detect signs of problems are important for decision-making. This may include monitoring certain indicators, studying the environment, partners and competitive and institutional actors, etc. It is important to ask what automatic mechanisms exist to trigger the decision-making process and what methods and incentives are in place to facilitate the identification of opportunities and problems, and what elements and characteristics of the organization's internal environment prevent this.
   3. The characteristics of other organizational decision-makers and stakeholders affected by the problem are worth paying attention to during the decision-making process because, in the case of a conflict of interest, some decision-makers may obstruct the detection of signals of the problem (for example, if they are interested in the existing status quo) or block the decision process from being initiated.

II. The second step in the identification phase is the diagnosis: this is when the problem is clarified and formulated. In crisis situations, this step is often neglected by decision-makers due to time constraints and cognitive limitations. Once the problem has been diagnosed, the decision-making process is effectively under way, and resources are mobilized to solve the problem.
III. The third stage of the decision-making process is the design of the solution. There are three possible ways to develop a solution:
   1. to find an alternative or alternatives that represent a ready-made solution to the problem.
   2. develop a completely new solution to the unique, novel problem.
   3. adapting a ready-made alternative to solve the problem.

The development of the solution requires the most effort, commits the most resources. This can be accomplished through one of two activities or by combining the two. The first activity is the search for alternatives that provide a ready solution to the problem. Since alternatives are not available (Simon, 1982), and since there is no chance of finding all the alternatives that might provide a solution, it is necessary to decide which activity can be carried out in which area, for how long and with how many resources. In the solution design process, new alternatives may be developed for novel or unique problems where no single ready-made alternative can be found or where the search for alternatives has failed. Alternatives may exist which can only be adapted or reworked to solve the problem (e.g. the installation of a purchased information system).

IV. The final stage of the strategic decision-making process is the selection phase, when the alternatives are already given and only a choice has to be made. Even if an organization has the right methods for analyzing, evaluating and choosing alternatives, it can easily fail if it makes mistakes in identifying and diagnosing a problem (e.g. fails to recognize it, does not recognize it in time, or defines it wrongly), or does not spend sufficient time and resources in searching for alternatives or developing a new solution (Zoltayné Paprika, 1999).

The Healthy Organization Model

The Healthy Organization Model (also known as the Joyful Organization Model) was developed jointly by Imre Lövey and Manohar S. Nadkarni based on their experience as organizational developers on five continents and is still used in the context of organizational development and organizational consulting. The model provides a comprehensive holistic framework for a better understanding of organizational health and illness and provides a novel way of analyzing organizations where it can be used to create a joyful and therefore effective organization (Lövey & Nadkarni, 2003).

The Healthy Organization Model defines organizational health as a holistic condition in which the following six key criteria are met simultaneously and at high levels:

- Satisfies the needs of its customers by providing high value to the customer, thus legitimizing its existence and being able to sustain itself from the continuous incoming revenues.
- Satisfies the needs of its members, its employees, by creating an environment where members develop and know they are important, so they can achieve their individual goals while also achieving the organization's objectives.
- Satisfies economic requirements (financial requirements such as profitability) by using resources in the most efficient and effective way to achieve objectives.
- It strikes a balance between these three fundamental objectives by creating a structure and culture that helps to ensure that the three objectives are taken into account together in the decision-making process.
- It grows, thrives and evolves over time, enhancing its capabilities and/or capacities to meet increasingly complex challenges.
- Living in harmony with its environment.
  (Lövey & Nadkarni, 2003)

According to the model, in the dimension 'Indecision Making - Effective Decision Making', if an organization is characterized by indecision making disease, then the decision-making process in the organization takes too long. By the time a decision is made, circumstances may have changed. Because the organization's decision-making mechanisms do not respond to environmental challenges in a timely manner, this can lead to significant losses or lost benefits (Concordia 2010).

I have chosen this model of organizational analysis because the Healthy Organization Model is capable of exploring an organization's strengths ('health') and areas for improvement ('disease') along 20 dimensions, providing a detailed analysis of an organization across a large number of dimensions at a time. The model can measure deviation from the ideal state ('health') not only in one direction (negative), but also 'too good', as not only deviation in the negative direction can cause dysfunction but also overuse of the positive side. The creators of the model also address the co-occurrence of organizational diseases: they have worked out which organizational disease may co-occur with which other diseases. This can help with the prevention of organizational diseases, because it is possible to take care that if a disease is not already present in the body, it does not develop. A warning sign may be that if there is a disease that has already developed, then more attention can be paid to preventing the diseases that are likely to occur with it before it develops. The model has Hungarian implications (one of its creators) and results in the competitive sector, so it may be possible to compare results in the public and competitive sectors.

Research questions

The aim of my overall research is to use the Healthy Organization Model to explore, based on the results of some organizations in central administration, what strengths and areas for improvement are present in the different dimensions in the public administrations under study. What factors, processes and characteristics are found in public administration in which the public administration organizations are effective and efficient, and in which are there deficiencies and less efficient operations? Diagnostic research on these organizations would fill a gap in public administration, because at present there is no unified development methodology for public administration that includes several dimensions and their possible interrelationships and interdependencies. In this paper, I will present the ways of working, mechanisms, good practices, good examples, difficulties and obstacles related to decision-making, with possible causes. What factors help or hinder informed decision-making in some central administrations?

Qualitative research: the interview

The research method was an interview, including a semi-structured interview, for which I prepared an interview guide based on the Healthy Organization Model with main and sub-questions based on the dimensions of the model. The interview questions (mostly the main questions) are open-ended questions related to the dimensions of the model, in order to avoid suggestive questions, to give leaders a sense of what answers are expected and to allow them to express their thoughts more freely on the topic (dimension). And the sub-questions on the given topic (in this case, decision making) were about what is working very effectively and efficiently and what is causing difficulties for the organization and for the own unit, department in the organization. What do you think is the reason for the way it works? I interviewed leaders at different levels, almost all of them in person, on one or more occasions. The interview took about 1-1.5 hours. With a few exceptions, the leaders contacted were open to being interviewed and answered the questions asked honestly. Interviews were conducted in 2023 and 2024.

The interviews with leaders provide a basis for seeing which dimensions and statements are not applicable in public administration or are applicable but only with changes to the original questionnaire items. The results of the interviews can be used as a basis for rewriting the items, or even the dimensions, of the original questionnaire for the competitive sector. Some concepts cannot be applied to public administration in a one-to-one way (e.g. customer, market).

The management interviews could therefore provide the basis for a questionnaire adapted to public administration, suitable for a larger sample survey.

The main analytical aspects of the interviews are

- What is exemplary in the unit, department, division (it is effective and efficient, it could be a good example for other units, other organizations).
- What the leader interviewed is not satisfied with or thinks is not working effectively, is difficulty (areas for improvement).
- What reasons, suggestions for solutions, other emerging issues (e.g. specific organizational or unit characteristics) could they mention?

The sample and its characteristics

In order to find the interviewees, I used several sampling procedures:

- Access-based sampling, where the sampling is decided by the group, institution or location to which the researcher has access.
- Convenience sampling, where individuals who are currently available are included in the study, i.e. in this case, which leaders in which organizations were open to being interviewed.
- I also used the snowball sampling method, which is to go through one person under study to the next, through that person to the next, and so on. In this case, at the end of the interview, I asked the leader, or staff member in the organization who they thought would be open to this interview in the organization or in another organization.

I have processed the results of the research anonymously and in aggregate, and the identities of the leaders and their personal responses are confidential. The table below shows the distribution of organizations and leaders in the sample subject to confidentiality.

Table 1.
Interviewees by organization

Organization	Number of interviewees
Organization 'A'	2 people (Head of Department, Head of Division)
Organization 'B' + back office of Organization 'B'	8 people (Head of Department, Head of Division, Deputy State Secretary) + 2 people (Director and Head of Division)
Back Office 'C'	2 people (Head of Division, Head of Department)
Organization 'D'	1 Head of Division

Note. Author's own editing.

Organization B was over-represented in the sample, with many more interviewees in this organization. This is a large organization with many specializations and professions, so the sample was heterogeneous within the organization as well, because leaders from many different specializations were interviewed.

In those organizations where fewer interviewees were interviewed, they were still able to provide a sufficient amount of information about the functioning of the whole organization, as they were interviewed about the whole organization and their own unit, and also because these interviewees work at different management levels, and so the picture is even more complete because they have a view of the organization at different levels.

Presentation of results

In this paper, I will present in detail the decision-making process and the positive and negative examples and suggestions to help decision-making, based on the interviews.

Part of the interviews were conducted, and part of the findings are the result of research carried out in the framework of the Home Affairs Research Council's 'Research in Home Affairs' academic internship programme.

The interviews as a whole show that public administrations are characterized by the fact that they implement government decisions. In most cases, decision-making takes place at different levels of management. There is a regulated hierarchy in decision making, where decisions are made by those who have the authority and competence to make the decision.

I have analyzed the responses to the interview questions on decision-making along the following analytical criteria, based on which I present the ways of working, good practices, difficulties, obstacles, possible causes, barriers and facilitators to decision-making and suggestions for improving decision-making mechanisms.

- Do you have the data and information to make informed decisions? To what extent is information overloaded or a lack of information?
- Are decision-making powers clear?
- Do decision-makers at their level take responsibility?
- Are alternatives clearly visible and analyzable?
- Are the decision criteria present?
- Are decisions taken on time or are they delayed as long as possible? If not, what is preventing it?
- To what extent are the decisions comprehensible to the actors in the next decision chain?

Availability of data and information for informed decision making, information overload, lack of information

Based on the management interviews, there is generally sufficient information available for informed decision making in the organizations surveyed. Possible decisions are documented in writing, in notes, which can be countersigned and annotated. There is also an obligation for written documentation between subordinates and their line leaders, which is usually preceded by a verbal discussion. For example, it is particularly important for a middle manager/leader to explain (thus provide information) to his subordinates on the outcome of decisions.

Inadequate information is available for sound decision-making when time pressure (short deadlines) across departments, divisions, units, organizations is also reflected in decision-making. Because there are short deadlines for decisions, so decisions have to be taken quickly, and therefore decision levels may be missed in the decision-making process and/or decisions may be taken on the basis of less information. Leaders should take care - especially when decisions have to be made at short notice - not to deliberately leave people or disciplines out of the decision-making process. And also, leaders should not make the mistake of thinking they know everything. They should seek to obtain the professional information they need to make informed decisions from their subordinates, from other disciplines, who are knowledgeable. Information overload is manifested in many leaders as the need to absorb and process too much information in too little time in order to make decisions. In many organizations, a very senior leader often has to use evenings or weekends to read and decide on the large volume of technical material required, because of the deadlines. It is not only at senior management level that leaders often have only a few hours to review and comment on a lengthy piece of material.

In one of the organizations, the lack of information was marked, based on the experience of the interviews. In this organization, senior management does not inform leaders below them about decisions taken at senior management level, especially about the results of decisions concerning the vision and strategy of the organization. In organizations where the flow of information is inadequate, leaders should pay particular attention to preparing preparatory material, sending them background material that can be shared by e-mail. Issues related to information and data for informed decision making, as revealed by the interviews, are mainly influenced by the time factor. The amount of information could be sufficient if there was a time frame in the decision-making process to obtain it or to process the (large amount of) information that is available.

Clarification of decision-making authorities

According to the interviews, in the majority of the organizations, decision-making is based on a hierarchy, where decisions are taken by those who have the authority and competence to make them. Decisions can be taken at different levels of management. There are decision-making situations where the unit leader makes a proposal, the head of department approves it, and the Deputy State Secretary takes the decision. And if the decision issue is at that level, the final decision is taken by the highest level of management in the organization, such as the Minister or Secretary of State. There are decision-making situations where unit managers and heads of division may take the decision if they have the authority to do so. It was also observed during the interviews that even at the level of the administrator, it is possible to make a significant contribution to the decision-making process by making proposals. There is also a hierarchy in decision-making at lower levels (direct manager-subordinate level). An organization is likely to have a lack of clarity about decision-making powers, because in that organization it is often the case that leaders pass tasks (and thus decision-making about the task) to each other. A possible solution to this may be to clarify job responsibilities. It is necessary to describe very carefully, precisely and clearly who is responsible for what task, for what decision, and what exactly falls within the remit of which level of management. Care should be taken to ensure that there is no overlap in the clarification of job titles, responsibilities and powers. This would prevent tasks and the associated decisions from being 'tossed around' between leaders, management levels or departments/units/

organizations. Clarifying and clarifying the job roles will also help to ensure that everyone at the relevant level whose opinion and role would be needed in the decision-making process is effectively involved.

Responsibility of decision-makers for decisions at their level

Except for one organization, decision-makers at the relevant management level take responsibility for the decisions taken. In the interviews with several leaders, it appeared that in order to facilitate the assumption of responsibility, leaders usually ask their subordinates to be informed about everything that happens in their department/department or unit, for example about the progress of the current task, possible solutions, correspondence, because leaders can only take responsibility for what they know and are aware of the details.

In an organization where buck-passing is present, a possible reason may be that a leader is not really in a position to make a decision. The leader is cautious, the leader has little information to make an informed decision, may be afraid of the consequences and wait for someone else to make the decision, or may not make the decision alone and have to wait for another party or department to make the decision. Overlaps and gaps in decision-making powers create opportunities for delegation and subdelegating of tasks and decisions, and with it, the shifting of responsibility and the failure to take responsibility. Therefore, clarification of job roles can also play a role in promoting the assumption of responsibility, so that it is clear who is responsible for a given decision or task.

Clearly visible and analyzable alternatives for making informed decisions

Alternatives to informed decision making were found to be present in the decision-making process of the organizations interviewed in the study. As there are usually discussions and brainstorming sessions between leaders and subordinates, there may be suggestions and ideas that may not have occurred to the leader (heads of department, heads of division), but which they considers appropriate. According to the leaders interviewed, questions can be asked at almost all levels of management to help them make the best decision, thus helping them to think through and even think further about decision alternatives.

Based on the interviews, the involvement of professionals in the preparation of decisions is exemplary and recommended. And indeed, it is worth paying more attention to decision preparation in an organization in order to make informed decisions. In central public administrations, it is typical for departments to operate within their own areas of expertise and competence, with highly qualified, experienced professionals in subordinate (non-managerial) positions. Their expertise and experience are key in the decision-making proposals. It is therefore worthwhile for leaders to involve them in the preparation of decisions, in the development of alternatives (well-supported versions A, B, C). This can not only lead to the right decision for as many people as possible, but can also help to maintain motivation, as it can make subordinates feel that their work, their opinions, their ideas, their expertise in the area are important to the organization. It can be prestigious and create a sense of appreciation that they can contribute with their expertise and experience even to the implementation of major government decisions.

Presence or absence of decision criteria

The leaders interviewed in the organizations surveyed in the study may have a variety of decision criteria. A particular discipline may take decisions or make recommendations to senior management within its own profession, if the decision is taken there. Leaders also mentioned that the decision-making criteria are not clear when decisions requiring cooperation with other organizations, departments, divisions or units give rise to professional disagreements between disciplines on aspects that are important to them. If they cannot reach a decision and the major disciplines are in competition with each other, a very senior leader takes the final decision on the matter. It is also common, as reported in the interviews, that no decision criteria are applied, a decision is taken without a chain of command, without hierarchy/decision levels, even without any decision preparation. This may be due to reasons such as the quality and type of the task, the political decision, the personal attitude of the decision-maker, the existence of personal conflicts between decision-makers. Clarification of roles and responsibilities can also help in the decision-making process, as personal conflicts and attitudes could play less of a role under the right rules.

In one organization, senior management is characterized by a systematic failure to consider decision-making aspects (in the same organization, there is also a lack of communication of strategic and future-oriented decisions). For decisions that are not professional (not even political) but generally operational, operational, lower-level managers have no possibility to make suggestions, and senior management ‘makes the decisions alone’. This can have the consequences of hampering the professional work of the organization, creating human difficulties, extra costs for the organization or wrong decisions. Staff (managers, subordinates) are significantly affected by being left out of decisions, by not listening to and ignoring their points of view, and by a lack of knowledge of the organizational strategy and vision, i.e. not knowing what they are doing their job for, what the purpose of their work is. Employees may therefore feel that they are not doing their job well and their satisfaction and commitment may be reduced. In this organization, the professional areas are increasingly involved in professional decisions, giving room to the disciplines in professional issues and decision situations, which can be the beginning of a positive change. In addition, senior management should pay particular attention to communicating their decisions and involving other levels of management below them, not only in professional decision-making. In this organization, it may be necessary to strongly improve the decision-making process and communication of the results of decisions throughout the organization, not only to eliminate decisions that subsequently prove to be flawed, but also to maintain and increase staff satisfaction and commitment.

At the same time, it can be worthwhile for an organization to pay attention not only to what is absent, but also to very clear points of decision. For example, in a very small organization, a decision within their authority can be made quickly because there is a common mindset between the leader and his/her subordinates, and there is usually consensus among staff, including the leader, on principles and legislation, and the leader is clearly in charge of the decision taken at that level. There is a risk here of groupthink, which tends to occur when a group has a strong culture and thinks alike. It is therefore important to be aware that this could have the consequence of leading to a wrong decision if a multi-stakeholder approach is neglected. This can be prevented, for example, by leaders being aware of the phenomenon of groupthink and using methods that promote a multi-stakeholder approach (e.g. the DeBono 6 Hats method).

Adherence to deadlines for decisions

Several leaders mentioned that decisions are not taken on time, which can sometimes or often happen in some organizations. One reason for this is that decisions can get stuck at one level of the decision-making hierarchy. Decisions can not only get stuck in the organizational hierarchy, but can also slow down the decision-making process, where the higher the level of decision-making, the more decisions can be slowed down due to the heavy workload (backlog of tasks).

Another reason for stalling or slowing down decisions may be the time needed to get through too many hierarchical levels. Because while going through the hierarchy levels and getting to the person who develops possible alternatives, points of view or solutions for the decision, they may have much less time to complete the task than the time it took to get to the decision-making task. The time taken to deliver the task then takes time away from the professional work, as there is a given deadline for making decisions. Other possible causes of stagnation and slow decision-making may be a lack of responsibility on the part of leaders, delegation of responsibility, and an overload of tasks and decisions due to a heavy workload. The solution mentioned was to delegate decision-making powers appropriately without delegating responsibility. However, this is not always applicable because legislation regulates what leaders can or cannot delegate. For example, in one organization, reducing the number of hierarchy levels within reason has been used successfully to avoid slowing down decisions. Shortening the administrative path so that the task reaches the person who solves it as soon as possible, thus taking the burden off another (probably overburdened) leader and giving the person who solves the task more time to find a solution or proposal for the task, because they will know about it earlier.

Clarity of decisions for those involved in the decision (actors in the decision chain)

In the units, departments and divisions of the leaders interviewed, there is usually an opportunity to pass on information, communicate and ask questions, so decisions taken at these levels are generally understandable.

Decisions taken at the highest level (government level) may lack clarity of details, difficulties of interpretation, the decision is unclear. In such cases, the professional areas need the opportunity to ask questions in order to implement them properly. Furthermore, the professional part could be applied in line with expectations, but questions cannot be asked at this level. As the administrative bodies implement the decisions of the government, this can be a major problem for the units (specialties) in the central administration where they are found. A channel of communication could be set up to allow professional areas to raise questions in these cases, so that the decisions needed for implementation can be informed and appropriate. There are already good practices at lower levels, e.g. departments/divisions acting as a bridge between units/departments dealing with the same issues, sectors but with a different disciplinary approach. The staff in the bridging department have some level of terminology knowledge of each of the specialized areas and help them to communicate with each other and to reach a common solution/ decision.

It was mentioned during the interviews that there have been cases where there are exceptions to the decision, i.e. there are people who are not covered by a decision. Here it is worth paying great attention to ensure that there are no exceptions to a decision and that everyone is covered by the decision. If, for some reason, it is necessary to grant exceptions to a decision, they should be in writing and justified, so that the people concerned feel less unfairly excluded or not excluded from the decision. It can also help to understand decisions if the leaders who make them strive to be clear. Decisions should not be changed once a decision has already been made, and decisions should be made quickly and consistently by senior and top leaders in an organization.

Proposals for an informed decision-making process for leaders who take decisions

In addition to the suggestions set out along the different analytical aspects, the following can help leaders to make informed decisions:

Leaders should also acquire knowledge of decision psychology, so that they can identify the mechanisms and cognitive biases that drive decisions in a timely manner, especially when they have to make a large number of decisions quickly.

As in several organizations there is a very high workload of leaders and especially of senior leaders, but the volume of tasks and decisions cannot be reduced, a wider time limit could be given for a task or decision.

Leaders and senior leaders could be given time in their working hours to deal with areas, topics and disciplines that affect their work, which they would like to do or have done in the past, but which they have neither the time nor the opportunity to do because of the workload, especially in management. Such tasks could provide them with a recharge, reducing the risk of burn-out.

Summary

Decision-making in public administration can be considered bureaucratic in comparison with the literature (Weber, 1947) because public administration operates according to rules, and thus decision-making is regulated. Management levels are hierarchical, and the decision-making process is also hierarchical in organizations. Leaders are accountable for their decisions in their official duties.

In the area of decision making, I came across examples of efficient operations, processes, methods and several mechanisms to be improved in the decision-making process during the management interviews. In the majority of the organizations in the sample, decision-making is well regulated in terms of the level of management, the decisions that are taken, and the decision hierarchy is generally respected, and there is adequate decision preparation. In almost all organizations, decision-making is hampered by time pressures (short time for decisions, the need to make decisions quickly, short deadlines that are difficult to meet) and other resulting difficulties. These include, for example, the co-existence of information gaps and information overloads, failure to respect decision hierarchies, the omission of disciplines and people from decisions, which can lead to an increase in uninformed decisions and decisions that later prove to be wrong. In addition, in many organizations, decisions are slow, and decisions get bogged down in the decision-making hierarchy. The emergence of difficulties and problems related to decision making may suggest that organizations may have varying degrees of the organizational disease of 'indecision making'. The organizational disease of 'indecision' is often found in the competitive sector together with the diseases of 'bureaucracy' and 'risk aversion' (Lövei & Nadkarni, 2003), but both bureaucracy and risk aversion are specific to public administration in general. They cannot be considered as an organizational disease below a certain level, but here bureaucracy is part of the way of functioning. Public administrations do not need to take risks in order to survive, because their survival is guaranteed by the state. Bureaucracy, on the other hand, is an organizational culture that is characteristic of public administration as a whole (Weber, 1947; Forgács, 2019). Handy classifies it as a role culture, where the specialized areas operate according to their own expertise and competence (Klein, 2001). However, care must also be taken against overuse of these, because they can then become an organizational disease in public administration. Examples are very high levels of risk aversion, lack of accountability, or when bureaucracy has already made it impossible for an organization to function with too many rules, too many levels of hierarchy, etc. Problem-solving thinking is built into the decision-making process. And decisions are made by people, so the quality of human capital plays a significant role in human resource management. The interviews with the leaders interviewed suggest that both subordinate and managerial levels are involved in decision-making processes in some way, so that decision-making in central administrations is a process that requires a high level of human capital as part of cognitive functioning. The interviews suggest that decision-making requires highly qualified professionals with a high level of expertise in their field, who, even in collaboration with each other, develop documents based on the analysis of the data and information on which decisions are based. Although public sector salaries are lower than in the competitive sector, professional tasks (e.g. decision preparation) can motivate staff to use their expertise for the benefit of the organization (value creation) by giving them a role in the analysis and proposal of an important, even high-profile, decision.

Research limitations and future research plans

The limitation of the research is that one organization is over-represented in terms of interviewees, however, many specializations and several professions are found in the organization, which is considered appropriate in terms of heterogeneity. They presented perspectives from multiple disciplines and professions during the interviews.

The next options for further research could be:

1) Extending the qualitative research. A possible research direction could be to interview leaders in more central public administration bodies and to include territorial public administration organizations in the sample. They may have different difficulties from central administrations.

   The number of interviewees working in the back office could be further extended to make the sample of leaders as heterogeneous as possible, and to reveal more specificities of central and regional administrations.
2) Adapting the questionnaire of the Healthy Organization Model to the public administration: rewriting the items in the language of the public administration and, where necessary, adding public administration-specific items to a dimension, and even creating public administration-specific dimensions and the corresponding items.
3) The results of the adapted questionnaire for public administration could be compared with the results obtained in the competitive sector.

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Ethics

The data will be made available on request.

Corresponding author

The corresponding author of this article is Nikolett Nánási-Pintér, who can be contacted at pinter.nikolett88@gmail.com.