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## Regional HRM Trends in Private and Public Sectors: A Comparative Approach

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyses the similarities (convergence) and differences (divergence) in human resource (HR) practices in the private and public sectors in 32 countries over a 12-year period. The paper starts with New Public Management (NPM) overview and its critiques and then discusses HR convergence, divergence and cross-vergence tendencies. Using the Cranet database of HR practitioner-employee ratio, performance appraisal systems use and application, unionization levels and training days metrics, analysis focuses on the three groupings of NPM countries, Central and Eastern European countries and all other countries. The hypothesis that HR practices of private and public sectors differ less in NPM countries than in the other two groups of countries is partially supported.

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Convergence; divergence; human resource management; new public management; private sector; public sector

Researchers and professionals have long studied the similarities and differences in private and public sector institutions. Typical private ownership features such as profit orientation, competition and efficiency (Mullins 1999) contrast with public sector features of a fundamentally bureaucratic system of strict regulations and rigid hierarchy, providing equal and standardized public and community services for masses relying on local or national budgets (Crawshaw, Budwar, and Davis 2017). These differences are reflected in human resource management (HRM) in the private and public systems (Olsen 2008), resulting in out-dated public sector HRM due to its rigidity, bureaucracy and inability to adapt to the changing competitive environment. The introduction of New Public Management (NPM) reforms used in the private sector was intended to address heightened bureaucracy and improve the public sector's HRM to become more "business-like". Since NPM was borrowed from the private sector, public sector institutions were expected to operate similarly to private sector

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institutions. This paper examines whether public sector institutions in the specific Eastern European region countries that have adopted NPM have changed their HRM and become similar to private sector HRM (convergence) or have remained unchanged (divergence).

Examining NPM orientation is important because NPM aims to reduce the differences between private and public sectors, increase the potential for more accurate planning and accountability (Hood 1995) and introduce and apply conscious performance management (Hanif et al. 2016; Lowe and Wilson 2017). Debate continues on NPM's novel characteristics, as some of these ideas appeared in the United States as early as the 1960s (Hood 1995) and new trends – such as Partnership Public Management, Social Investment (SI) and New Public Service (NPS) – have emerged in parallel with NPM (Yerkes and Van den Braken 2019).

First, we define NPM and show its implementation in specific groups of countries with different economic and historic conditions. Next, global convergence, divergence and cross-vergence HRM practices trends in private and public sectors from 2004 to 2016 are revealed, based on data from 32 countries in the Cranet database. The aim of the study is to demonstrate how HRM practices in private and public sectors have converged or diverged in countries that use NPM. With a comparative approach this paper analyses the continuing convergence-divergence debate at both sectoral and regional levels, revealing the characteristics and features of HR trends in the private and public sectors of three global regions in the 21st century.

### ***New public management (NPM)***

In the 20th century, the normative, bureaucratic, Taylorian system which was based on formal and rigid regulations of the public sector was dominant in the developed world such as Anglo-Saxon 'pioneer' countries. However, in response to worsening economic conditions, a new model of public management (NPM; Hood and Jackson 1991) emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, gaining ground first during Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's administration in the UK, and in municipal governments in the United States. Soon, governments of New Zealand and Australia adopted the new model (Gruening 2001) as well. The extensive execution of NPM reform programs and the addition of reform items to the agendas of most OECD countries and other nations started in the 1980s (Gruening 2001).

According to NPM, the key to modernization is the transfer of business solutions and methods that work successfully in the private sector into the public sector (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Olson, Guthrie, and Humphrey 1998). In the United States, NPM is described as a 10-point model

(Osborne and Gaebler 1992) to modernize the public sector. That model emphasizes decentralization, efficiency, results orientation, performance appraisal, customer orientation, market orientation and entrepreneurial spirit. Other NPM-models have different foci (Ferlei et al. 1996). For example, according to the ‘Thatcher-model’, the financial and managerial control, strict audit and liberalization are claimed to be the drivers and main tools of efficiency, whereas in the decentralization model, flexibility, outsourcing and strategic management play prominent roles (Demmke, Hammerschmid, and Meyer 2006; Gaule 2010), and the Search for Excellence model is based on excellence, emphasizing bottom-up principles and collective culture

- NPM principles were substantially restructured in Anglo-Saxon countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and USA) in the 1980s and 1990s when a new emphasis was placed on efficiency, effectiveness and clear HRM accountability (Lapuente and Van der Walle 2020) and the tools of controlling the quality of service and customer satisfaction were introduced. Public sector reforms became the models for transforming European countries. However, implementation of these principles was determined by national market economies, administrative culture and the institutional environment. For example, in Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) NPM focused on quality improvements through increased citizen participation (Christensen and Laegreid 1999; Ibsen et al. 2011; Kure and Malmose 2017; Hall 2016). In the European Union (EU) countries in continental Europe (France, Italy and Germany), the wave of reforms including NPM-driven modernization “addressed domestically recognized needs to reduce the size of government and make administration more efficient” (Heichlinger et al. 2018, pp. 8). It was also observed that changes of government (Kuhlmann 2010) and the EU integration process induced different tendencies in HRM (Ongaro et al. 2018).

Assessment and results of NPM in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries (Estonia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania) are mixed, perhaps due to the assumption that NPM should be introduced only in contexts that already have the required administrative conditions for NPM reforms (Dan and Pollit 2015). Various reforms, from radical reforms in Estonia, incremental reforms in Poland to a mixed version in Lithuania (Bouckaert et al. 2009) have been introduced in CEE countries. NPM in these CEE countries is expected to increase in popularity because it focuses on values that have become important after regime change, such as focusing attention on serving the customer (Table 1).

**Table 1.** NPM in different countries.

Country groups	Countries (year of NPM implementation)	Common features	Key characteristics	Key tools
Anglo-Saxon countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UK (1980s)</li> <li>• Australia, New Zealand (1980s)</li> <li>• USA, Ireland (early '90s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separation of provision and production</li> <li>• Customers (one-stop shops, case management)</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> <li>• Decentralization</li> <li>• User charges</li> <li>• Personnel management (incentives)</li> <li>• Privatization</li> <li>• Improved accounting</li> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Performance measurement</li> <li>• Changed management style</li> <li>• Contracting out</li> <li>• Freedom to manage</li> <li>• Separation of politics and administration</li> <li>• Performance measurement</li> <li>• Improved financial management</li> <li>• Vouchers</li> <li>• Strategic planning and management</li> <li>• More use of information technology</li> <li>• Accountability for performance</li> <li>• Performance auditing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving efficiency and effectiveness</li> <li>• Ensuring accountability and tight budget control</li> <li>• Introducing NPM principles leads to convergence between private and public sector</li> <li>• A special mixture of the old bureaucratic administration and NPM evolves</li> <li>• Partial implementation of NPM reforms where and what the context allows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deregulation</li> <li>• Shrinking the state</li> <li>• Agencification</li> <li>• Performance management</li> <li>• Private sector management techniques</li> <li>• Structural devolution</li> <li>• Agencification</li> <li>• Performance and value based management</li> <li>• Increased collective bargaining</li> <li>• Reformed forms of employment</li> <li>• Participation of citizens</li> <li>• New management techniques</li> <li>• Quality improvement programs</li> <li>• Change of organizational system and culture</li> <li>• Empowerment and private partnerships</li> <li>• Outsourcing</li> <li>• Country specific radical or incremental reforms</li> <li>• De-centralization</li> </ul>
Scandinavian countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denmark (1990s)</li> <li>• Norway (early 90s)</li> <li>• Sweden (mid 80s)</li> </ul>			
Continental European countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• France (early '90s)</li> <li>• Italy (early '90s)</li> <li>• Germany (early '90s)</li> </ul>			
Central European countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estonia (2nd half of 90s)</li> <li>• Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania (mid 2000s)</li> </ul>			

### ***Trends of different HR approaches: convergence, divergence and cross-vergence***

HRM is a fundamental critical management function of multiple roles for organizational survival and development. Staff representation and impact on actual HRM practice, however, are context-dependent, meaning they are outcomes of management decisions influenced by different styles, ideologies, characteristics, and external and internal organizational conditions (Brewster 2004; Pfeffer 2005; Torrington et al. 2014; Ulrich 2014).

Due to the spread of globalization, management principles models such as HR and technology transfer between companies and government institutions (e.g. EU rules and laws) have become increasingly common practices. This situation has inevitably put research focus on convergence (similarities), divergence (differences) and cross-vergence between societies, companies, nations and individuals.

The theory of convergence, divergence and cross-vergence is not new for HRM. Representatives of the universalist trend (Brewster 1999) believe that technology development (Kerr et al. 1960) blurs cultural differences and promotes convergence between nations and sectors, a theory increasingly accepted in HR. There are two options for European HR convergence: either European HRM is approaching the HRM model from the US, or a single European HRM model is emerging (Andolsek and Stebe 2005). The theory of cross-vergence claims that while many HR practice areas are similar in both sectors, important differences arise from the financial position and value-oriented nature of the private sector (Parry et al. 2005).

It is not a new idea to draw attention to similarities and differences in HRM practices of private and public organizations, which are clearly distinguished by their ownership. Public sector institutions are established and controlled collectively by members of political communities at various levels of government, while entrepreneurs and owners are the main managers of private companies (UN 2005). Differences and similarities can be observed in HR practices of both sectors (Szabó and Szakács 2015).

### ***Research questions and hypotheses***

This study examines the differences in five HRM strategies applied in the private and public sectors in three groups of countries (e.g. NPM, CEE, and All Other Countries (AOC)) with different political-economic backgrounds (Brewster, Mayrhofer, and Farndale 2018). The five HRM practices are the employee-HR practitioner ratio, application of performance appraisal systems, use of results of those systems, level of unionization and the number of training days per employee.

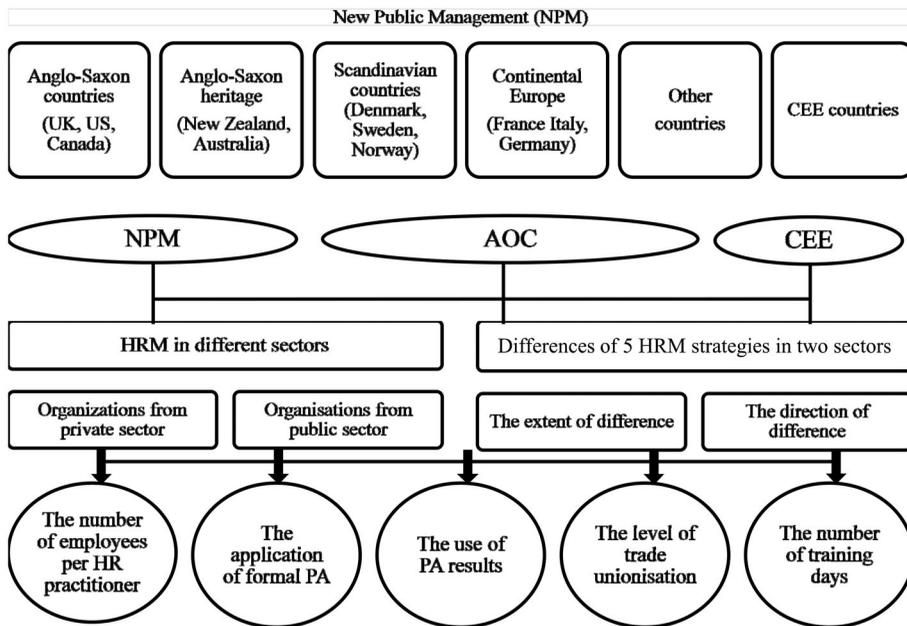


Figure 1: Our research model

As NPM had a history of at least 20 years, it is reasonable to assume that differences in HRM strategies in private and public sectors at the start of the 21st century were already diminishing in NPM countries. However, CEE countries were just starting to introduce key NPM features and tools to transform public sector HRM practices. For this reason, differences between HRM strategies in the two sectors are likely to change most in this CEE group of countries. Our study adopts the model shown in Figure 1.

HR professionals with their value-creating contribution are increasingly part of the top management team not only implementing but forming the business strategy (Ulrich and Grochowski 2018). Today, HRM operates within a specific organizational framework (such as traditional central HRM, strategic partnership, shared service center, Dowling, Festing, and Engle 2017; Paauwe 2004). As employee numbers increase, the number of HRM employees also increases, even if not linearly. In NPM countries where HRM has been given a greater role and has independent strategic functions, there are more HR staff (Starling 2011). We hypothesize:

H1: The change of differences in HR efficiency indicators (number of employees per HR employee) in the private and public sectors of NPM countries show a diminishing trend in the study period compared to CEE and AOC country groups.

In traditional HRM systems, performance evaluation is qualitative and primarily related to payroll and remuneration systems. A modern performance evaluation system integrates goal targeting, progress monitoring, training employees and leaders, and developing career plans. An important

NPM philosophy element has been its focus on performance orientation and competitive pay (Dresang 2002) with rewards being justified.

H2: The change of differences in application rates of performance appraisal systems in the private and public sectors of NPM countries show a diminishing trend in the study period compared to CEE and AOC country groups.

Armstrong (2006) says performance management strategies tools include performance metrics such as the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton 1992) and the performance prism (Neely, Adams, and Kennerley 2002). Purcell et al. (2003) concludes that successful organizations firstly have a strong set of values and organizational culture and secondly employ qualified and experienced managers who are able to implement HRM policies and practices. These skills are essential for implementing a successful performance management system.

Another often examined question about performance evaluation is how a performance management system can support strategic goals. Cozzarin and Jeffrey (2014) found the complex system of modern HRM practices such as flexible job, re-training, teamwork and inspiring payroll systems resulted in significantly higher productivity than traditional HRM practices.

H3: The change of differences in use of performance appraisal systems results to support HR decisions in the private and public sectors in NPM countries show a diminishing trend over the study period compared to CEE and AOC country groups.

There are countries in which trade unions have strong influence and social acceptance (e.g. northern Scandinavian countries), but the opposite is also possible (Bernaciak et al. 2014) with evidence that trade union importance has declined in recent years (Cranet 2011, 2017). Among other things, structural transformation of economies in which traditionally highly organized industries are being pushed back and changes in social values as a result of new individual advocacy strategies have played a significant role. In many countries this decline is smaller or not significant in the public sector (Mujica 2019). Specifically, the emergence of 'reconciliation' strategies that exclude or replace the trade union with effective management of conflicts that previously surfaced more strongly at organizational level have impacted on this trend. Public sector union membership rate is generally higher than in the private sector.

H4: The change of differences in level of (trade) unionization in the private and public sectors of NPM countries show a diminishing trend in the study period compared to CEE and AOC country groups.

The number of training days is a significant organizational feature. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2015) examination of training and development practices of more than 500 companies found HR is responsible for training in most companies. To compete successfully in international markets in today's conditions, it is important that employees

have distinctive key competencies (Dowling, Festing, and Engle 2017, pp. 175). Low/high investment in training (i.e. number of training days) is also reflected in the competitiveness of specific organizations and countries (Torrington et al. 2014, pp. 276).

H5: The change of differences in the number of training days in three groups of private and public sector employees in NPM countries show a diminishing trend in the study period compared to CEE and AOC country groups.

## Methods

### *The Cranet database, survey and statistical methods*

The Cranet database is used for this study. Cranet is a nonprofit research network providing scientific data about the contextual nature of HRM (Dewettinck and Remue 2011) offering spatial and time-based HRM comparisons through longitudinal analyses (Lazarova, Morley, and Tyson 2008). Founded in 1988 by Brewster (1995) and operated by Cranfield Business School on the initiative of the International Labor Organization, Cranet pioneered HRM research in Europe. There are 42 member countries from Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe and North and South America.

Cranet focuses on comparative HRM, the similarities and differences between countries, and identifying specific HRM trends (Brewster, Morley, and Bučiūnienė 2010). Cranet's original research question was whether a universal global HRM is more effective than a customized national HRM strategy (Brewster 1995). Universal thinking had been widespread, with followers presuming the methods used successfully in the US could be applied in any part of the world (Beer et al. 1984; Fombrun, Tichy, and Devanna 1984). Comparative research on US HRM models in different cultures investigated this convergence theory (Budhwar and Sparrow 2002). Around the same time, Brewster (1995) proposed a European model (Gooderham and Nordhaug 2011), arguing for HRM contextuality, divergence. Hofstede (1998), Bandura (2001) and Fisher et al. (2008) supported divergence, revealing the effects of national cultural values, attitudes and behaviors on managerial leadership styles and HRM practices in diverse cultural contexts (Brewster, Sparrow, and Vernon 2007; Reiche 2012).

Cranet data is fundamentally ex-post (Usunier, Van Herk, and Lee 2017) with HR functions and practices using global, regional and country-level data. The contextual research paradigm differs from the former HRM research paradigm of a priori data, as data is analyzed to identify patterns that make HR practices unique or similar in specific contexts. Reflecting the network's theoretical background and comparative methodology, Cranet was the first empirical research evidence of contextual HRM characteristics (Dewettinck and Remue 2011).

The Cranet methodology has expanded but has not otherwise changed significantly in the eight data collection periods from 1989 to 2014–2016. Cranet surveys (Cranet International Research Questionnaires) are completed by senior HRM staff in the organization. The survey contains more than 60 objective, factual, closed questions mostly with a forced choice of pre-defined responses to facilitate descriptive statistical analyses. The survey has seven parts: characteristics of the respondent in the HRM department, sourcing strategy and practices, employee and career development, compensation and benefits, employee relations and communication, general organizational data, and respondent demographics.

Data over 12 years in three consecutive Cranet databases (2004, 2008 and 2016, respectively) are used in this study. Data from 32 countries were formed into the three groups. The *NPM* group consisted of the Anglo-Saxon countries of Australia, Canada, New-Zealand, UK and USA. The *CEE* group consisted of the former socialist countries of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. The *All other countries (AOC)* group consisted of all other countries in the database (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Nepal, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tunis and Turkey.)

To test the hypotheses, Pearson's Chi-square test, Cramer's *V* values, adjusted standardized values and independent samples *t*-test were used with IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The commonly used hypothesis test, the independent samples *t*-test, was used to test convergence of the expected values of two basic populations on the basis of samples (Pintér and Rappai 2007). We used this test where values for two groups to be compared were available to test if they were statistically identical (Tables 2–5). The Chi-square test (independence test) and the Cramer index (Pintér and Rappai 2007) are suitable to test the relationship between low-level or non-metric variables (Sajtos and Mitev 2007). We used Chi-square tests to compare the use of certain HRM fields in the two sectors in each group (Table 6).

## Results

H1: Employees per HR practitioner. The number of employees per HR practitioner was calculated from survey items “Approximately how many people are employed (on the payroll) by your organisation?” and “Approximately how many people are employed in the personnel/human resources (HR) department by your organisation?”

Table 2 shows that in NPM countries the ratio was higher in the private sector for all periods (an average of 157, 121 and 120 employees per HR

**Table 2.** Number of employees per HR employee.

Country group	Sector	2004		2008		2016	
		N	Average	N	Average	N	Average
NPM: New Public Management group	Private	1300	157***	379	121	486	120**
	Public	540	121***	222	96	202	92**
CEE: Central and Eastern Europe group	Private	501	135	504	125	879	140
	Public	124	160	132	120	258	129
AOC: All other countries group	Private	2529	129	1960	159	2490	128
	Public	931	146	328	155	667	127

NPM: New Public Management group; CEE: Central and Eastern Europe group; AOC: all other countries group  
 \* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

practitioner for the first, second, and third research periods, respectively) than in the public sector (121, 96 and 92). As expected, this reflects higher efficiency in the private sector compared to the public sector. T-tests show the difference between the employee per HR practitioner ratio in private and public sectors was statistically significant in the first and the last periods. The pattern in CEE countries differed, as the number of employees per HR practitioner in public (160, 120, 129) and private (135, 125, 140) sectors was contrary to our expectations for efficiency. Furthermore, changes in the sectors took different trajectories.

For NPM countries, the difference between public (121) and private (157) sectors ratios in 2004 was 36, while the difference (92, 120, respectively) in 2016 was 28, which shows a decrease in differences of 8 in the period. For CEE countries, the difference between public (160) and private (135) sector ratios in 2004 was 25, while the difference (129, 140) in 2016 was 11, reflecting strong (36) increase in differences over time. As a result, the HR efficiency indicator of the private sector is ahead of the public sector in this group of countries as well. The difference between the value of the ratio in the public (146) and private (129) sectors in 2004 in AOC countries was 17, while the difference (127, 128) in 2016 decreased to 1, showing an increase of 18 and change of direction between the indicators.

While the change of differences in the value of the indicator in the NPM countries slightly decreased, in the CEE and AOC countries a significant increase was identified with a change of directions in efficiency indicators between sectors, so both Hypotheses 1a and 1b are supported.

H2. Application of formal appraisal system. The survey item “Do you have a formal appraisal system for the following categories of the workforce?” had Yes/No response options for each of the staff categories of management, professionals (without managerial responsibility), and clericals and/or manuals. Table 3 shows the results.

For managers in NPM countries in 2004, there was a difference of 2% between formal performance appraisal use in public (88%) and private (90%) sectors, compared with a significant difference of 3% (97, 94%) in the opposite direction in 2016, however, by 2016 performance appraisal in

**Table 3.** Formal appraisal system use.

Countries	staff member category	Sector	2004 (%)	2008 (%)	2016 (%)
NPM	Managers	Private	90	89	94*
		Public	88	88	97*
	Professionals	Private	90***	90*	94
		Public	84***	86*	96
	Clerical/manual workers	Private	84***	90**	89*
		Public	77***	84**	93*
CEE	Managers	Private	85*	52***	70
		Public	78*	71***	67
	Professionals	Private	81	57***	73
		Public	81	71***	72
	Clerical/manual workers	Private	81	63	71***
		Public	80	66	57***
AOC	Managers	Private	87***	74***	80***
		Public	83***	57***	64***
	Professionals	Private	86	72***	77***
		Public	84	55***	59***
	Clerical/manual workers	Private	83*	70***	72***
		Public	85*	56***	57***

NPM: New Public Management group; CEE: Central and Eastern Europe group; AOC: all other countries group  
 \* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

the public sector exceeded that in the private sector. The rate of change is therefore a total of 5%. For managers in CEE countries, a difference of 7% in 2004 and a difference of 3% in 2016 shows a decrease of 4%. In AOC countries, there was an increase of 12% in the change of differences in formal appraisal application for managers, incorporating an increase from 4% in 2004 to 16% in 2016 in the difference. Thus, hypotheses H2 (i)a is not supported but H2(i)b is supported.

In the category of professionals in NPM countries in 2004, there was a 6% difference between formal appraisal application in the public (84%) and private (90%) sectors, compared with the 2% difference (96, 94%) in 2016, reflecting a total change of 8% in differences – including change of directions. In CEE countries there was no difference between the sectors in 2004 and only 1% difference between the two sectors in 2016. AOC countries showed an increase in differences of 16% for professionals from 2% in 2004 to 18% in 2016. Thus H2(ii) is not supported and H2(ii)b is supported.

Clerical/manual workers in NPM countries in 2004 showed a 7% difference between formal appraisal use in the public (77%) and private (84%) sectors, compared with a difference of -4% (93%, 89%) in 2016, which together means 11% in change of differences. Clerical/manual workers in CEE countries showed a 1% difference in formal appraisal use in the public (80%) and private (81%) sector in 2004, but a 14% difference in 2016 between public (57%) and private (71%) sectors. The differences over the 12-year period increased by 13%. As there was a 13% increase in differences in AOC countries, both Hypothesis H2(iii)a and b are supported.

H3. The use of performance appraisal results. The survey item “Is the appraisal data used to inform decisions in the following areas: pay, training and development, career moves, and workforce planning?” each had Yes/No options. [Table 6](#) shows the results for each country group for the three periods in each of the four areas of performance appraisal use.

In the first, pay, category in NPM countries in 2004, there was a 14% difference between formal appraisal use in public (57%) and private (71%) sectors, compared with the 12% difference % (66%, 78%) in 2016, a change of 2%. In CEE countries, the 4% difference between public (74%) and private (78%) sectors in 2004, compared with the 15% difference (60%, 75%) in 2016 reflects an 11% increase. In AOC countries, the 11% difference in 2004 increased to an 18% difference in 2016. Hypothesis H3(i)a and H3(i)b are supported.

In the second training and development category in NPM countries there was a 3% difference between the use of formal appraisal results in public (92%) and private (95%) sectors in 2004, compared with a 5% (82, 87%) difference in 2016, a 2% increase. In CEE countries, the 14% difference between public (59%) and private (73%) sectors in 2004, compared with the 14% difference (57, 71%) in 2016 shows no change. In AOC countries there was a 5% increase from a 15% difference in 2004 to a 20% difference in 2016. Thus, Hypothesis H3(ii)a not supported, while H3(ii)b is supported.

In the third category of career movement in NPM countries in 2004, there was a 12% difference between formal appraisal results use in public (75%) and private (87%) sectors in 2004, unchanged at 12% difference (72, 84%) in 2016. In CEE countries, the 11% difference between public (48%) and private (59%) sectors in 2004 compared with the 18% difference (55%, 73%) in 2016, a 7% increase in differences. AOC countries showed a 16% increase from a difference of 8% in 2004 to a difference of 24% in 2016. Thus, both Hypothesis H3(iii)a and H3(iii)b are supported.

We had no data for the fourth workforce planning category in NPM countries in 2004, but there was a 20% difference between the use of formal appraisal in public (50%) and private (70%) sectors in 2008, compared with a 17% difference (50, 67%) in 2016, a 3% decrease. In CEE countries, the 5% difference in public (48%) and private (53%) sectors in 2008 compares with the 21% difference (40, 61%) in 2016, a 16% increase in differences. In AOC countries the difference in use of formal performance appraisal results for workforce planning fell by 7% (the difference decreased from 21 to 14%). Hypothesis H3(iv)a and H3(iv)b are supported.

H4. Level of trade unionisation. The item “What proportion of the total number of employees in your organisation are members of a trade union?” was included in the survey. [Table 4](#) shows that public sector trade unionisation is significantly higher

**Table 4.** Level of trade unionization: percentage of employees who are union members.

Countries	Sectors	2004		2008		2016	
		N	%	N	%	N	(%)
NPM	Private	1382	20***	411	14***	462	9***
	Public	592	48***	247	37***	197	25***
CEE	Private	548	27***	746	16***	938	18***
	Public	145	41***	176	38***	306	34***
AOC	Private	2535	38***	2016	35***	2290	31***
	Public	1008	65***	436	73***	763	63***

NPM: New Public Management group; CEE: Central and Eastern Europe group; AOC: All other countries group.

\* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

than in the private sector in all country groups in all time periods. Unionisation is around twice as high in the public sector than in the private sector in NPM countries in all time periods.

In NPM countries over the 12 years there was a decrease of 14% in the two sectors, as the 28% difference in public (48%) and private (20%) sectors in 2004 compares with the 14% difference (25, 9%) in 2016. In CEE countries, there was a 2% increase in differences, i.e. 14% difference between public (41%) and private (27%) sectors in 2004 compared with 16% difference (34, 18%) in 2016. In AOC countries an increase of 9% was the result of 23% difference between public (65%) and private (38%) sectors in 2004 compared with 32% (63, 31%) difference in 2016. Thus, Hypothesis H4a and H4b are also not supported.

H5. Number of training days. The number of training days in the three staff member categories of management, professionals, and clerical and/or manual was included in the survey with wording “Approximately how many training days per year do employees in each staff category below receive on average?” Table 5 shows the average number of training days for each category for each period for each country group.

In the number of manager training days category in NPM countries, there was a 1.1 day difference in public (6.1) and private (5.0) sectors in 2004, compared with 1.2 days (7.2; 6.0) in 2016. In CEE countries, there was a 0.2 day difference in public (7.4) and private (7.2) sectors in 2004 compared with 0.6 days (public: 7.2, private: 7.8) in 2016, a moderate 0.8 day increase. In AOC countries, there was a 0.4 day increase comparing the 1.3 day difference in public (7.3) and private (6.0) sectors in 2004 and the 1.7 day difference (9.2, 7.5) in 2016. Thus, hypothesis H5(i)a and b are supported.

The number of professional training days in NPM countries differed by 0.7 days between public (6.1%) and private (5.4%) sectors in 2004, compared with 1.8 days (7.9, 6.1) in 2016, an increase of 1.1 day. CEE countries saw a 0.5 day difference between the public (6.3%) and private (6.8%) sectors in 2004 compared with 0.6 days in the opposite direction (8.4, 7.8) in 2016, an increase of 1.1 days. AOC countries saw a 0.8 day difference in

**Table 5.** Number of training days.

Countries	Positions	Sector	2004		2008		2016	
			N	Average	N	Average	N	Average
NPM	Managers	Private	861	5.0***	230	6.2***	442	6.0**
		Public	326	6.1***	120	11.2***	168	7.2**
	Professionals	Private	847	5.4**	231	7.8*	437	6.1**
		Public	322	6.1**	122	10.4*	165	7.9**
	Clerical/manual workers	Private	841	3.5	229	4.8***	429	7.3
		Public	310	3.8	119	10.6***		
	Physical	Private	688	4.6***	177	6.6	165	5.8
		Public	237	3.5***	97	7.5		
CEE	Managers	Private	448	7.2	536	9.4*	961	7.8
		Public	103	7.4	127	7.1*	330	7.2
	Professionals	Private	454	6.8	540	9.9***	965	7.8
		Public	106	6.3	143	6.4***	329	8.4
	Clerical/manual workers	Private	423	4.2	514	6.0***	954	5.6
		Public	103	4.2	132	4.2***		
	Physical workers	Private	416	3.6	488	6.3***	324	5.0
		Public	82	3.1	104	3.1***		
AOC	Managers	Private	1990	6.0***	1400	10.4***	2447	7.5***
		Public	640	7.3***	265	6.5***	683	9.2***
	Professionals	Private	1949	6.1***	1337	11.9*	2418	8.1**
		Public	611	6.9***	243	8.7*	682	9.6**
	Clerical/manual workers	Private	1891	4.1***	1342	8.3***	2411	7.3
		Public	613	4.7***	233	4.6***		
	Physical workers	Private	1631	4.4	1081	10.2***	689	7.6
		Public	528	4.1	203	3.5***		

NPM: New Public Management group; CEE: Central and Eastern Europe group; AOC: all other countries group.\* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

In the 2016 survey, clerical and physical workers were merged to one category. This row summarizes the two categories in the private sector, and in the next row summarizes the same two categories in the public sector.

2004 public (6.9) and private (6.1) sector training days, compared with 1.5 days difference in the sectors (9.6, 8.1) in 2016, an increase of 0.7 days. Thus, hypothesis H5(ii)a and b are not supported.

In NPM countries, the number of clerical/manual worker training days differed by 1.1 days between public (3.5) and private (4.6) sectors, compared with 1.5 days (5.8, 7.3, with manual workers included) in 2016, an increase of 0.4 days/year in differences between sectors. For CEE countries, there was no difference in public or private sector training days (4.2) in 2004, compared with the 0.6 day difference (5.0, 5.6) in 2016, a 0.6 day increase. In AOC countries, there was a difference of 0.6 days between public (4.7) and private (4.1) sectors in 2004 compared with the difference of 0.3 days (7.6, 7.3) in 2016, a decrease of 0.3 days in differences. Thus, hypothesis H5(iii)a is supported while H5(iii)b is not supported.

## Discussion

Since its introduction, the innovative NPM model has become well-known globally. Many countries have adopted its main idea of adapting and implementing tools used successfully in the private sector in their public system

**Table 6.** Performance appraisal results use in four different HR fields.

Country groups	HR fields using appraisal results	Sector	2004 (%)	2008 (%)	2016 (%)
NPM	Pay	Private	71***	83*	78***
		Public	57***	75*	66***
	Training& development	Private	95*	91***	87*
		Public	92*	82***	82*
	Career movement	Private	87***	88***	84***
		Public	75***	64***	72***
	Workforce planning	Private	– <sup>a</sup>	70***	67***
		Public	–	50***	50***
CEE	Pay	Private	78	78	75***
		Public	74	77	60***
	Training& development	Private	73***	69*	71***
		Public	59***	60*	57***
	Career movement	Private	59**	67	73***
		Public	48**	61	55***
	Workforce planning	Private	–	53	61***
		Public	–	48	40***
AOC	Pay	Private	77***	83***	73***
		Public	66***	57***	55***
	Training & development	Private	90***	80***	82***
		Public	75***	68***	62***
	Career movement	Private	82***	78***	79***
		Public	74***	63***	55***
	Workforce planning	Private	–	59***	55***
		Public	–	38***	41***

NPM: New Public Management group; CEE: Central and Eastern Europe group; AOC: All other countries group. <sup>\*</sup>*p* < .1; <sup>\*\*</sup>*p* < .05; <sup>\*\*\*</sup>*p* < .01.

<sup>a</sup>The survey changed slightly between data collecting periods. In the second and third periods, the survey included questions about resource planning in connection with the fields where appraisal results were used. This topic is missing in the first survey.

for smoother and more efficient functioning. NPM induced and motivated the launch of HRM reforms. NPM critiques have been published and new HRM solutions and models have evolved.

Due to globalization some HRM professionals presume there is convergence between public and the private sectors in NPM-countries globally and nationally, whereas others disagree saying convergence and divergence tendencies are simultaneously present. Our analysis used the Cranet database in three surveys over a 12-year period from 2004 to 2016 to compare private and public sectors in NPM, in non-NPM CEE and AOC countries. To remain consistent with our long term hypotheses, we decided against analyzing the 2008 data set that reflects the global financial crisis. Our goal was to analyze and compare five key HRM elements to test the hypotheses that change of differences in HR solutions in the private and public sectors of NPM countries shows a diminishing trend compared to the two non-NPM countries groups.

The first three HRM practices examined were the number of employees per HRM practitioner, the application of formal performance appraisal systems for management, professionals and clerical/manual categories of employees, and the use of performance appraisal results in decisions related

to pay, training and development, career movements and workforce planning. The remaining two HRM practices examined were the level of trade unionization and the number of training days for management, professionals and clerical/manual workers.

Hypothesis 1 found the change of differences in the *HR efficiency indicators* (number of employees per an HR employee) in NPM private and public sectors diminished in the study period compared to CEE and AOC countries. Thus H1(a) and H1(b) were also supported.

Hypothesis 2 found the change of differences in *application rates of performance appraisal systems* in all three investigated groups of NPM private and public sector employees diminished in the study period compared to AOC countries, except for clerical/manual group in CEE countries. NPM countries apply performance appraisal systems in all three employee categories (managers, professionals and clerical/manual workers) more often than in CEE and AOC countries.

Hypothesis 3 found the change of differences in *use of performance appraisal systems results* in NPM private and public sectors to support three HR decisions (pay, career moves, and workforce planning) diminished over the study period compared to CEE and AOC countries. Three of the four H3 sub-hypotheses were supported, only one supported in AOC countries and not in CEE countries. In addition, while the change of differences in NPM countries is small, in both non-NPM group of countries these changes are increasing.

Hypothesis 4 found the change of differences in the *level of (trade) unionization* in NPM private and public sectors has not diminished in the study period compared to the non-NPM countries. This is the only exception of the five variables in both groups of countries, where the hypothesis is not supported. Although the general trend that trade unions have reduced their role in more countries is confirmed, general collective agreements are being “replaced in more and more places by personalized agreements” (Ligthart, Pendleton, and Poutsma 2018, pp. 300). The decrease in proportion of trade union members (directional convergence) is prevalent in both sectors of each group of countries. However, our hypothesis was not confirmed because the rate of change (decrease) among sectors of organizations of low level in NPM countries is the highest.

Hypothesis 5 found the change of differences in the *number of training days* in the three groups of private and public sector employees in NPM countries has diminished in the period compared to CEE and AOC countries only among managers (i). Changes of the manager variable in both sectors were small in almost all country groups, but change of differences in NPM countries is the smallest. Moreover, there is a shift in the opposite direction compared to the other two country groups, supporting our hypothesis. At the same time,

**Table 7.** Summary of hypothesis findings.

Hypothesis: The change of differences in the 5 HR practices used in the private and public sectors of NPM countries show a significantly less diminishing trend compared to the other two groups of non-NPM countries		CEE countries (a)	AOC countries (b)
1	Number of employees per HR practitioner	S	S
2	Application of performance appraisal (PA)		
	i. Management	NS	S
	ii. Professionals	NS	S
	iii. Clerical/manual workers	S	S
3	Use of PA results in:		
	i. Pay	S	S
	ii. Training and development	NS	S
	iii. Career moves	S	S
	iv. Workforce planning	S	S
4	Trade unionization	NS	NS
5	Training days:		
	i. Management	S	S
	ii. Professionals	NS	NS
	iii. Clerical/manual workers	S	NS

S: hypothesis is supported; NS: hypothesis is not supported; NPM: New Public Management group; CEE: Central and Eastern Europe group; AOC: all other countries group.

the hypothesis relative to the group of clerical/manual employees was supported only in the CEE and not in AOC countries. Finally, the hypothesis regarding professionals was supported in neither of the country groups. Table 7 summarizes key hypothesized findings.

The majority of all 24 sub-hypotheses expectations were met. Of the five hypotheses, H1 was fully supported, H4 was fully refuted, and H2 and H5 were partially supported. H3, the use of performance appraisal results in HR decisions, was almost totally supported, since only one sub-hypotheses related to training and development in CEE was not supported.

On the one hand, the use of performance appraisal results in supporting key HR decisions can be considered a critical area because it touches on a wide range of HRM features. On the other hand, the current study assumes it plays a key role in bringing the public sectors' management practices closer to those of the private sector, which is among the 'common features' of the NPM idea.

Limitations of the study include the risk that the data may not exactly represent each country due to differences in data collection methods in the 32 participating countries on each occasion. Further, we grouped the countries of Cranet database into just three groups. Future research may consider grouping countries by their economic configurations such as liberal, mixed, emerging or coordinated market economies, or other country combinations.

In summary the change of differences between the HRM practices in the private and public sectors over the 12 year period are as follows:

- NPM countries' changes are mostly small and declining
- AOC countries' changes are mostly moderate and increasing

- CEE countries' changes are the largest and most elements are increasing. The changes that began in the CEE region at the time of regime change which influenced HR practices in both sectors by the middle of the second decade of the 21st century are mainly different from those in NPM countries and slightly different from those in AOC countries in both sectors.

Taking all this into account, given the long debated HRM convergence-divergence context in both the private and public sectors, we assume the differences we have identified are stronger and more lasting across country groups than those within the private and public sectors in the same groups. However, verifying this assumption may be the task of further research.

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