Transforming government through innovation in civil service. The case of *Madrid Talento*

Óscar Cortés Abad
Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid) ✉ 🔶

Antonio Sánchez Díaz
Madrid City Council ✉

EN Abstract. The aim of this article is to reflect on reforms in public talent management to enhance legitimacy and trust in institutions, with a particular focus on local administration. The study seeks to understand how public talent modernization initiatives contribute to institutional transformation. To this end, the case of the Madrid City Council and its initiative, Madrid Talento, within its strategy to transform public employment, has been chosen. The methodology includes qualitative techniques such as interviews with management officials and a review of the most relevant documentation. The results show how certain applied initiatives help improve the institution's performance and contribute to its deeper transformation.
Keywords: Public talent, local government, Madrid Talent, human capital, civil service.

Transformar la Administración innovando en el empleo público. El caso de *Madrid Talento*

ES Resumen. El objetivo de este artículo es reflexionar sobre las reformas en el talento público para mejorar la legitimidad y confianza en las instituciones, con especial foco en la Administración local. El estudio pretende entender cómo las iniciativas de modernización del talento público contribuyen a la transformación institucional. Para ello se ha elegido el caso del Ayuntamiento de Madrid y su iniciativa Madrid Talento dentro de su estrategia para transformar el empleo público. La metodología incluye técnicas cualitativas de entrevistas con los responsables de gestión y una revisión de la documentación identificada como más relevante. Los resultados nos muestran cómo determinadas iniciativas aplicadas contribuyen a mejorar el rendimiento de la institución y sirven para profundizar en su transformación.
Palabras clave: Talento público, Administración local, Madrid Talento, capital humano, función pública.

Summary: Introduction. 1. Human capital in the transformation of local government. 1.1. Administrative action after COVID-19. 1.2. Specific issues on the local agenda. 1.3. The importance of aligning human capital with the local agenda. 2. Levers for building a new model of public talent. 2.1. Reorganizing talent structures. 2.2.Attracting external talent. 2.3. Retraining internal talent. 3. Methodology. 4. Case study: Madrid Talento as a tool for transforming the human factor in Madrid City Council. 4.1. Starting point. Definition and implementation of the transformation strategy. 4 .2. The Madrid Talent initiative as a tool for developing the strategy. 4.2.1. First dimension. Planning. 4.2.2. Second dimension. Attraction. 4.2.3. Third dimension. Selection. 4.2.4. Fourth dimension. Care. 4.3. Discussion. 4.3.1. Administrative restructuring to reorient the creation of public value. 4.3.2. Attracting talent for a more citizen-friendly and inclusive administration. 4.3.3. Renewing the culture to innovate and strengthen trust in institutions.
5. Conclusions. 6. Bibliography.

1. Introducción

Public administration is one of the fundamental cells of society. Not only because it is necessary to have someone who works objectively for the general interest in a democratic society (art. 103.1 CE), but also because a structure is required that acts to guarantee rights and impose obligations. It has long been debated in academia to question whether the model of administrative bureaucracy formulated by Weber more than a century ago is the ideal one for public governments to continue contributing effectively to the creation of public value. This has led to a succession of reform paradigms based on this model of legal and managerial rationality, although without significantly altering the core pillars that have remained firm to this day (Arenilla, 2017; Abellán, 2015; Cortés, 2020).

Career civil service is one of those pillars. It is essential due to its role as a guarantor of impartiality and its technical competence in ensuring services that can be provided effectively. In a changing context, its modernization is essential, given that those dedicated to civil service are the primary asset of public institutions[1]. This is even more so in the case of local government, where needs are felt with more immediacy and the obligation to modernize is more pressing, which is why it has usually been at the forefront of administrative reform; in areas as diverse as adopting technology (Criado, 2004), integrity and good governance policies (FEMP, 2019), and process innovation and reengineering (Pardo-Beneyto, 2018).

In this paper, we reflect on administrative modernization from the perspective of public talent management. We will do so through a case study: the *Madrid Talento* initiative of the Madrid City Council, the results of which we present below. This research will serve to illustrate the changes that can be addressed in talent management in larger institutions, identifying which initiatives can work and how they contribute to institutional transformation.

To this end, we have divided the article into four parts. In the first part, theoretical, we will outline the challenges of human capital reform in public entities in general and in local government in particular. Next, we will describe the chosen methodology, which is based on the case study. In the third part, we will present the results of the research, identifying the most significant projects, their results, and a discussion of the aspects that have served to improve institutional performance. Finally, in the conclusions, we will describe the most relevant lessons learned from this experience.

2. Human capital in the transformation of local government
2.1. Administrative action after COVID-19

Environment is one of the fundamental elements in determining how the Administration's actions are shaped (Kuhn, 1970). An environment that fits little to nothing with the parameters of stability pointed out by Mintzberg (1984) these days and whose most recent and notable manifestation is the COVID-19 crisis. This crisis reveals some of the characteristics of chaos and uncertainty, volatility, complexity, fragility, incomprehensibility, and non-linearity described by Cascio (2020). They force institutions to face a series of "wicked" problems, characterized by their diffuse scope, the absence of a definitive solution, or the lack of precedents from which to learn (Rittel and Webber, 1973).

In one of its latest analyses of government, the OECD highlights the enormous effort made by public institutions to combat the systemic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to this organization, most institutions were not prepared for a crisis of this magnitude, but they reacted nonetheless. However, this came at the cost of adding pressure on public finances and oversimplifying the decisions taken (OECD, 2021a).

This context tested the institutional capacity to innovate and "think outside the box" by offering solutions to problems for which there was no instruction manual (Arenilla, 2021). However, it also highlighted old problems within an administration that had been struggling since the effects caused by the Great Recession (2008-2013): the eternal mistrust that hinders collaboration in composite states (Kuhlmann *et al,* 2021), a bureaucracy that had not been updated or simplified, and digitization, which had progressed but insufficiently. The difficulties in procuring medical supplies, the closure of in-person services in offices, the slowness in processing basic aid such as ERTE (Temporary Files in employment regulations) or IMV (Minimum Vital Income), the deficit in data management, or the failure of some solutions such as the Radar Covid application are representative examples of these issues to which we are referring.

From the perspective of people management, which is the subject of this paper, it is worth highlighting the undeniable efforts of civil servants, which have been recognized by society[2] or the efforts to implement teleworking systems, which largely enabled the continuity of administrative activity by up to 60% (OECD, 2021a: 17) and which were consolidated with the regulation of this figure, although without yet overcoming the necessary relationship of trust between supervisors and their employees that it demands (Vicente Vicente, 2023). However, there was a shortage of talent in specialized areas, certain job structures were rigid, and public managers had few tools at their disposal to redistribute staff or adjust staffing levels to the needs of the service (Cortés and Catalá, 2020b).

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[1]   In Spain, there are more than three million people who can represent up to 60% of the budget depending on the administrative sector (Pla, 2015).

[2]   Which rated healthcare workers, scientists, teachers, and police officers positively (Ipsos, 2022).

2.2. The specific problems of the local agenda

Let's start by identifying the specific issues that local authorities face and that drive their need for transformation.

Achieving a livable city requires a new service model, based on consensus among political and social actors, that serves to shape and strengthen the social structure and integrate different groups. This requires the sustainability of local finances, which have been weighed down by imbalances from previous crises and have increased considerably to respond to the pandemic emergency (OECD, 2021a).

Sustainability also has an environmental dimension related to mobility or urban planning, resource management, infrastructure, or population distribution. Depopulation, together with aging, low birth rates, and inequality, once again challenge the pillars of welfare and the service model (OECD, 2021b). The city as a space for coexistence must channel the participation of its citizens in municipal affairs, encourage interaction between institutions and residents, and facilitate transparency and accountability in the context of greater polarization, in which public debate and the quality of institutions is weakened (The Economist, 2021).

The other major issue facing local authorities is the advance of digitalization, a process that has accelerated significantly since the pandemic. From the point of view of their impact on organizations, technologies are transforming the essence of business and internal processes. Artificial intelligence, digital services that citizens increasingly demand to be simpler and more personalized, data- and evidence-based management and decision-making, vulnerabilities and risks arising from technological overdependence, technological assets as a selling point for city positioning, and support for those who are left behind are all challenges on the agenda of local authorities in this moment of digital disruption.

2.3. The importance of aligning human capital with the local agenda

The challenges facing local government cannot be addressed without a municipal government geared toward transformation. However, as Castillo (2020:13) points out, "the changes have not translated into changes in the way our public institutions operate, which have not undergone a similar transformation to become the essential infrastructure that provides credibility and security in the compliance of services to society as a whole."

Institutional transformation is imperative to achieve the good administration established in Article 41 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights: good administration translates into positive impacts for people, and the quality of the services they receive is decisive for their trust in their institutions (Campos, 2022). Good administration means providing security and trust at a time when (almost) everything is uncertain and power is increasingly diffuse (Naim, 2013); leading and invigorating public-private collaboration networks, combining and distributing efforts, building solutions that integrate majorities with an open and collaborative perspective; innovating to find solutions by thinking *outside the box,* using new approaches to solve old problems and for *exploratory governance* with which public systems can tackle their agenda (Longo, 2020).

At this point, Arenilla (2017: 313) raises the inevitable question: "Is it possible to reform the administration without reforming its civil service?" The municipal administration is on the front line of citizen services and therefore must be empathetic and responsive to those who raise issues, make suggestions, and submit complaints to the various departments. These same citizens demand from the administration services that are comparable in efficiency and simplicity to those they receive when they use a private company. This is a primarily human activity that requires activating individual skills such as creativity, curiosity, and risk-taking and connecting them in an environment that facilitates the trust necessary for collective talent to deliver results. Public professionals, regardless of their field of expertise, must be trained to solve increasingly complex problems in the midst of this "perfect storm where change prevails over stability, hypotheses over certainties, and exploration over the mere application of rules" (Longo and Albareda, 2015: 56).

Given that, as Longo and Albareda (2015:35) point out, "the concept of good administration is inherent in the reflection on the values of public service," the transformation of the administration has much to do with a cultural change, in which emerging values overlap with classic values: part of the post-bureaucratic scenario that administrations will face is conditioned by a repositioning of values, in which those related to sustainability parameters such as efficiency, accountability for results or flexibility are achieving more weight, along with others such as openness, transparency, accessibility, participation, or initiative. This rebalancing process raises many ethical dilemmas and conflicts between entrenched ideas and customs and emerging new concepts. It is public professionals who shape institutional culture and must exercise the *public ethos*.

Good administration "must improve the quality of people's civic culture, because otherwise we will be wasting a magnificent opportunity to have a positive impact on improving citizens' living conditions" (Rodríguez Arana, 2013: 34). It is in public professionals that society must see itself reflected, a society that is diverse and pluralistic and marked, well into the 21st century, by the so-called digital revolution.

Public professionals are also the digital citizens referred to by Prensky (2001): both those of the present (*millennials*) and those of the future (*digital natives*) will inevitably be marked by the cultural codes, behavioral patterns, or informal rules of digital culture (Himanen, 2001). Challenges such as those posed by artificial

intelligence or data don't just belong to technologists. In one way or another, it will be public professionals who determine the regulation of these systems, supervise their operation, use them in decision-making, or will have to accompany those who are lagging behind.

3. Levers for building a new model of public talent

Recently, various organizations have continued to recommend addressing the issue of human capital within administrative reform either from an institutionalist perspective due to the need to strengthen institutional capabilities (OECD, 2020; McKinsey, 2021) or from an instrumental perspective due to the role that the human component will play in innovative solutions in the hands of the public sector, such as those based on artificial intelligence (Council of the European Union, 2020).

The truth is that in Spain, a public employment reform is one of the major pending issues that, for various reasons, has not been successful, despite some serious attempts such as the 1984 reform or the 2007 Basic Statute of Public Employees (Castillo, 2020). The reasons are diverse: the times of *politics* versus *policies,* the wear and tear of altering a well-established professional *status quo* versus results that are difficult to sell politically, or the fragmentation of competences (Cortés and Catalá, 2020b).

Below, we highlight the main lines of work proposed by the academic and professional debate on the relationship between the transformation of civil service and institutional transformation. This will help us to situate the theoretical framework of this work.

3.1. The restructuring of talent structures

Talent structures are closely linked to institutional performance. The starting point reflects the characteristics of traditional bureaucratic administration: a rigid architecture lacking in versatility, in the form of a vertical pyramid with more than 70% of positions assigned to medium- or low-value functions (Losada and Albareda, 2017).

This presents administrative institutions with two major challenges. The first is the high average age of the workforce: more than half of employees are over 50, *baby boomers* and *Generation X* who entered active service during the expansion of the 1980s and 1990s. Retirements will occur in waves, and in the coming years a large number of jobs, many of them requiring medium or low level of skills, will become vacant (Areses and Valdés, 2019).

A second challenge is digitization and its impact on jobs that can be robotized. According to Ramió (2018), robotization could lead to the disappearance of one million public employees in the coming years, approximately 33% of the current workforce. In addition, it would be necessary to provide staff with *flexicurity,* including a mix of specialization and versatility (flexibility) plus stability (Losada and Albareda, 2017), especially in regional and local government.

Public administrations need to consider the profiles that will be necessary in the coming decade and orient their strategies in that direction. The wide variety of ways in which the public sector produces value (Moore, 1995) is decisive in terms of profiles that have been adjusted in recent years as the administration has grown and faced new challenges. What has remained unchanged is the essential mission of serving the general interest with objectivity and applying the principle of legality (art. 103.1. CE), which involves functions in the exercise of public powers: planning and regulation, inspection and control, collection and monopoly of force. But it also involves the provision of services linked to rights that the market can hardly provide and the formulation of public policies.

For all this, the profiles that have traditionally nourished public sector staff at senior levels are and will continue to be necessary: lawyers, economists, and political scientists. However, according to Ramió (2019), many of the profiles that have traditionally been recruited, with medium or low qualifications, will no longer be necessary and he suggests that they will be replaced by robots of all kinds: clerks, service providers (citizen services), universal service regulators, secretaries and assistants, etc. As a new development, the public sector will need to incorporate to their staff professionals in the areas of emerging employment, perhaps in line with the ten professions most in demand by companies, all with a marked digital profile[3].

3.2. Attracting external talent

A survey highlighted the interest in working in the civil service among Spanish university students: one in four preferred it to working for a multinational company or being an entrepreneur (Axa and Gad 3, 2016). This interest varies depending on the segment (profile and age), labor market conditions (employability, unemployment rate, or job insecurity), but also on the government's ability to make itself known to potential candidates and offer conditions that satisfy them. Attributes such as Stability, functional variety, and professional development in certain segments, such as those aged 36-50, are valuable in contrast to the private market (El País, 2022).

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[3] According to The Power Business School (2022), specialists in e-commerce, data scientists, web analysts, cloud architects, cybersecurity specialists, lawyers specializing in data protection and privacy, artificial intelligence specialists, CRM experts, automation engineers, and digital marketing specialists would be in high demand.

According to the literature, there are many factors that affect the quality of talent recruitment processes. Their long duration, the low predictability of vacancies and exam dates, the backdoor of temporary contracts, non-inclusivity, or excessive bureaucracy hinder the efficiency of current processes (Crespo, 2021; Cortés and Catalá, 2020b) but can be corrected with a good dose of planning, management by objectives, procedural redesign, professionalization of selection boards and digitization of tasks.

3.3. The reskilling of internal talent

Reskilling is essential to orient existing public employment towards new needs as they arise, shifting the focus "from training processes that take place in a formal context to individual learning trajectories" (INAP Social Training Community, 2021: 14).

In an environment marked by continuous, rapid change, where uncertainty is the only certainty, the continuous updating of skills is essential, and even more so in the case of public employees who will remain in the institution for 30 or 40 years. Professional life becomes a continuous process of learning and unlearning, especially in areas where technical obsolescence is more pronounced or when vertical or horizontal mobility occurs.

These skills can be grouped, as Trujillo (2021) points out, into those for civic development, personal and professional development or digital transformation. In the latter case, not only because public employees are citizens and would fall within the 80% basic digital skills target that the European Commission (2021) has set for the population as a whole, but also because specific skills referred to by the European Economic and Social Committee (2020) would be considered, which provide a broad and multidisciplinary dimension of network governance in which the administration acts with a clear and active role (García Solana, 2017). At the same time, administrations should consider establishing processes to periodically accredit skills when accessing a new job (Cortés and Catalá, 2020b).

The brain drain of specialized talent in which the Administration has invested resources is a strategic problem, especially in certain profiles that are in high demand in the market due to their high level of training, prestige, and knowledge of the inner workings of the administration. There are few levers that the administration can pull, including: an attractive career path that invests in skills upgrading, strengthening the prestige and *ethos* of civil servants, and professionalizing management to attract high-level talent.

4. Methodology

The literature review has provided us with the theoretical framework for the subject of study in this paper: how do reforms in public talent management contribute to institutional transformation? To answer this question, we have chosen to use a case study methodology which, as Yin (1981) pointed out, consists of selecting real and relevant experiences to be studied exhaustively over a given period of time, thus allowing conclusions to be drawn that could be useful to the academic and professional community.

Once the research question had been established and the literature review carried out, we chose the case study, justifying our choice (Yin, 2018): the *Madrid Talento* policy for the transformation of human resources at Madrid City Council. The choice was made for several reasons. First, it is a large institution, one of the most important and significant in Spain, with nearly 40,000 employees (28,000 if we exclude public companies), a budget of more than €5.5 billion, and serving more than 3.3 million inhabitants. Secondly, the choice of a local entity allows us to study an administration that is close to the citizen and has to respond to changes that happen in society, but in this case with a size that is large enough to be compared to other types of central or regional administrations that may be undergoing institutional transformation processes, implementing reforms in people management. The case has been limited to the period 2019-2023, which coincides with two relevant events: the duration of a municipal term of office, which covers the entire cycle of government management; and a period in which a unique event (the COVID-19 crisis) has occurred, allowing us to study people management and institutional transformation in environments of disruptive change.

The chosen method combines two qualitative research techniques, the details of which are shown in Table 1. First, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with those responsible for implementing the strategy under study. These interviews provided direct insight into the key milestones of the case and the opinions of its managers, identifying the most relevant instruments, some of which were subsequently studied in the research. The interviews were conducted using a pre-prepared script of questions and in an open conversation format to achieve the specific objectives set out in this study.

After the interviews were conducted, a documentary review was carried out of the main plans, strategies, and regulatory instruments that, in the opinion of the interviewees, were decisive in understanding the case in question. This work has complemented the previous one in terms of expanding the information received through the interview and, in turn, has given rise to further questions to the selected managers in response to new doubts that may have arisen.

Table 1. Research development.

Method	Details
Semi-structured interviews	*Interviewees*: – Deputy Director General of Planning – Deputy Director General of Selection – Deputy Director General of Management Transformation and Service Inspection – Deputy Director General of Madrid Talento School *Questions asked:* – What are the objectives set out by the *Madrid Talento* policy? – What are the key milestones that you consider most relevant in the development of the policy? – What are the most relevant projects in your area of management within this policy? – What are the results of each of the most notable projects within your area of management? – How do you think the initiatives that have been launched are helping to transform the institution?
Documentary review	*Most relevant documents studied* – Human Resources Management Transformation Strategy at Madrid City Council and its Autonomous Bodies – Assessment of the implementation of the Human Resources Management Transformation Strategy over its three-year period of validity, 2020-2022 – Agreement of September 22, 2022, of the Governing Board of the City of Madrid approving the composition and functioning of the Permanent Selection Committee – Decree of August 23, 2021, of the delegate of the Department of Finance and Personnel, amending the instruction on the functioning and operation of selection boards in the Madrid City Council and its Autonomous Bodies – Agreement of March 18, 2021, of the Governing Board of the City of Madrid, approving the guidelines for the electronic processing of selection processes within the scope of the Madrid City Council and its Autonomous Bodies – Resolution of May 31, 2021, of the General Coordinator of Budgets and Human Resources approving the Instruction establishing the planning criteria and procedure for the appointment of temporary civil servants and the hiring of temporary staff – Madrid City Council digital training plan

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Case study: *Madrid Talento* as a tool for transforming the human factor in Madrid City Council

5.1. Starting point. Definition and implementation of the transformation strategy

We begin our analysis of the case with a study of the *Human Resources Management Transformation Strategy at Madrid City Council and its Autonomous Bodies*. This initiative aims to modernize the management of people who work at the capital's City Council, with the goal of moving towards a new comprehensive human resources management model that will increase efficiency. The aim is to change the organizational culture on the basis of medium- and long-term planning, provide job stability, digitally transform procedures to streamline and simplify them, and train staff in accordance with organizational needs, all built on solid ethical values (Madrid City Council, 2020).

Table 2. Diagnosis of the human resources situation in Madrid City Council in 2019.

Problem	Description
Imbalances in job postings	2,314 positions authorized by public job offers without being announced Lack of calls for stabilization processes
Imbalances in the selection process	Slow progress and unfilled positions in strategic competitive examinations Cumbersome paper-based processing
Lack of planning	High volume of vacant positions without full budget allocation
Obsolete structure	Aging workforce (over 50 years old) Exorbitant number of professional categories

Source: Prepared internally based on Madrid City Council (2020).

The strategy is structured around four axes of action. The first axis is planning, which incorporates measures with a medium- and long-term structural impact, based on a detailed analysis of the municipal workforce situation. The second axis includes measures for professional development, job provision, job performance, social action, and labor relations for municipal staff. The third axis is digital transformation as a tool for modernization and streamlining management, with the aim of improving processes and implementing them in a digital environment to improve relations between the administration and citizens. The fourth and final axis comprises measures aimed at transforming human capital, such as those relating to training pathways or the establishment of values in the context of a democratic society at the service of citizens (Madrid City Council, 2020: 10).

The health crisis triggered by the pandemic clearly affected the implementation of the strategy during 2020 and part of 2021, hindering or delaying some of the planned actions. However, these difficulties also prompted the creation of alternatives ways to achieve the objectives, with new solutions being implemented: For example, the operation of the provision, selection, and negotiation bodies was promoted through electronic means, and the Virtual Training School was promoted, not to mention the promotion of teleworking, which allowed the service to continue without interruption during that period. In fact, in September 2020, an agreement was reached on criteria for the provision of teleworking services in the City Council, which went on to regulate the remote working modality for the 12,000 jobs eligible for this provision. To reinforce this system, the Digital Training Plan was approved, under which the *Madrid Talento* School and the Madrid City Council's Autonomous IT Agency (IAM) have been developing a digital skills training program since 2021, open to more than 28,000 municipal employees, on Microsoft 365 tools.

Many measures were included in the strategy that brought about its transformative purpose: the review and updating of job descriptions (RPTs) based on the simplification of the processing of modification files; the approval of the first RPT for all staff in accordance with the new Agreement regulating the classification and organization of staff; the process of fully funding vacancies; the digitization, streamlining, and decentralization of the processes for filling positions; and the streamlining of the processing of extraordinary remuneration.

5.2. The *Madrid Talento* initiative as a tool for strategy development

In this context and within the strategy, the *Madrid Talento* project emerges with its own identity and personality, focusing specifically on the implementation of innovative practices in the field of people-centered selection, training, and organizational transformation.

According to those interviewed, *Madrid Talento* aims to achieve "a new concept of human resources in the public administration (...) attracting and nurturing the talent necessary for Madrid City Council to provide the best service to citizens." The most recognizable change found in the interviews conducted has to do with "putting the employee at the center, by strengthening corporate values and identity, which reinforces the feeling of pride and belonging and projects an attractive, innovative, and purposeful organization to the outside world that is worth working for." This implies significant communication activity in two areas: externally, towards the new generation of talent; and internally, towards current employees, within a circular sense of knowledge management that accompanies the generational replacement that the organization is undergoing.

Four dimensions are analyzed when studying this project:

5.2.1. First dimension. Planning

The first challenge, according to those interviewed, was to replace talent in an orderly and planned manner, prioritizing professional categories that would add value and be necessary for at least the next two decades, driven in part by the retirement of a large number of employees (up to 800 by 2023). Hence, planning criteria were established for the incorporation of new staff, both in public job offers and in the appointment of temporary staff to fill vacancies: priority for A1 and A2 profiles in cross-cutting categories (legal, economic, or others created as a result of subsequent category reviews), STEM (architects, engineers, ICT, healthcare) or sectoral (social, cultural, etc.) categories, with priority given to citizen services (districts).

We have identified two tools used for planning: a scorecard, whose indicators are included in periodic or situational reports to exploit the information from the databases for management (reports on the projected age of the workforce, internal promotion coverage, etc.) and sectoral planning audits to make the best and most accurate decisions based on evidence and data. It is worth highlighting the development of human resources planning tools based on attracting and retaining talent in accordance with the implementation of a competency-based public employment model.

Another important issue in planning is the review of professional categories, eliminating, adapting, or creating those that require new skills, services, or technologies.

5.2.2. Second dimension. Attraction

One of the keys to this experience, according to those interviewed, was the conception of *Madrid Talento* as a major communication campaign through which Madrid City Council takes to the streets in search of future professionals, speaking their language and showcasing the appeal of a large organization that is worth working for.

To this end, since 2022, a team of more than 150 volunteers from 26 professional categories has been formed to promote career opportunities in two environments traditionally considered to be sources of public employment: universities and professional associations. The City Council has sent its professionals to more than 70 public and private centers and faculties and to eight regional professional associations to publicize its projects. Over the last year, nine educational centers have been visited to give a talk entitled "A vocation for public service. What is the civil service?" to students from the 4th year of secondary school to the last year of high school, in both public and private schools. In addition, university internships were promoted by formalizing 20 agreements in 2024.

The launch of the "Would you like to work with us?" channel on the municipal website in February 2022 was another milestone in this area of study. Through this channel, personalized advice is provided via written conversations or video calls with a recently hired civil servant to resolve any questions or concerns that may arise about the respective access processes. Profiles have also been launched on social media (LinkedIn and Instagram) where news and content are shared, with more than 7,800 and 1,100 followers, respectively. Likewise, and to this end, at the end of the study period, a *Madrid Talento* channel was created on the WhatsApp messaging system to disseminate content to more than 3,500 users. An institutional advertising campaign has also been rolled out with the support of the Municipal Transport Company (EMT) and bus shelters in public spaces, consisting of the design and subsequent dissemination of 12 videos in which some of the best talents have participated under the slogan "Are you coming? Take the plunge and apply." This action has been complemented by attendance at job fairs and forums where professional opportunities are publicized, and by joining the networks of public and private human resources managers, which is generating a virtuous interrelation of good practices in people management. Together with the Bertelsmann Foundation, the "Inspiring Companies" program seeks to bring the professional world closer to the educational sphere and improve academic and professional guidance opportunities for young people.

5.2.3. Third dimension. Selection

Another objective set out in this case study is to streamline the recruitment process and build loyalty among potential candidates. In this regard, the interviewees highlight the Agreement of September 22, 2022, of the Governing Board of the City of Madrid, which approves the composition and functioning of the Permanent Selection Committee, a permanent body with specialized personnel dedicated to personnel selection, which can act through delegated committees. In addition, the Decree of August 23, 2021, of the delegate of the Government Area of Finance and Personnel was approved, modifying the Instruction on the Functioning and Action of the Selection Boards in the Madrid City Council and its Autonomous Bodies, which sets the streamlining, professionalization, and unification of criteria and schedules as its objectives. The role of the secretary who drives the process is reinforced, the number of members of the selection board is reduced from 6 to 5, specific training is provided for them, and the selection boards are required to adhere to the processing schedules set out in the selection plan. Furthermore, participation as a member of selection bodies and collaboration in the various tasks are now governed by new scales that encourage the streamlining of processes and the dedication and rigor of those participating in the corresponding bodies.

Another milestone highlighted by those interviewed is the Agreement of March 18, 2021, of the Governing Board of the City of Madrid, which approves the guidelines for the electronic processing of selection procedures within the Madrid City Council and its Autonomous Bodies. This instrument regulates, with full legal guarantees, the electronic completion of all the procedures involved in a competitive public examination, from the announcement of the exam to the appointment of new civil servants. Among its most notable measures is the general criterion that the sessions of the selection boards will be electronic and that entrance exams may be conducted using technological means. In addition, candidates in the selection processes of the Madrid City Council have an electronic channel for submitting applications and paying fees, which has been in operation in the processes announced since then.

Another initiative highlighted by interviewees is the greater agility in the management of job pools and temporary employment lists achieved thanks to the Resolution of May 31, 2021, of the General Coordinator of Budgets and Human Resources, which approves the Instruction establishing the planning criteria and procedure for the appointment of temporary civil servants and the hiring of temporary staff As a new feature, the criteria for appointing temporary staff are established, directing the replacement of staff exclusively towards categories classified as priority, with a higher average age or fewer staff in relation to the workload, and avoiding the creation of scattered selection processes for a small number of positions. In this way, the appointment of temporary staff to fill vacancies is aligned with specific medium- and long-term planning criteria.

Another action has been to prioritize the incorporation of people with disabilities in order to guarantee real equality of opportunity. An initiative was launched to hold selection processes for people with intellectual disabilities, with the advice of specialized organizations.

5.2.4. Fourth dimension. Care

Promoting internal talent, expanding career opportunities for staff, and increasing their qualifications and motivation are some of the objectives of *Madrid Talento*. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the call for applications for internal promotion (up to 3,803 positions), which is facilitated by new general rules that provide for the opening of pathways between the general and special administration scales (equating civil service and career positions) and simplify tests and syllabuses.

The *Madrid Talento* School is one of the cornerstones of the modernization and cultural change process. It launched a line of support for exam preparation, through tutoring and the creation of exam banks with automatic answers from the public competitive examination syllabus. In addition to this upskilling measure, there are other initiatives aimed at reskilling to move to a much more dynamic model that adapts to the needs of the services and allows for further study in certain cases through training itineraries focused on personal qualification. Examples of this are the courses on digital skills and "Communicate with Talent."

Since 2019, there has been a shift in the balance between face-to-face and online training: more virtualized between 2019 and 2021 (launch of new formats such as webinars, podcasts, training pills, virtual library, etc.) and a return to face-to-face training from 2022 onwards as more competency-based training is introduced, based on soft skills that require physical classroom attendance. This approach incorporates a dictionary of competencies that is linked to training activities, so that each training course has a corresponding competency that it can help to reinforce.

Another unique feature found in this research is the linking of a physical container with the initiative and the brand built around it. Espacio Madrid Talento is a building open to innovation, which manifests itself in a multipurpose auditorium where a wide variety of activities are carried out: institutional events, recording of videos for dissemination on social media, organization of coaching sessions, talent cafes with relevant groups or actors, audiovisual dissemination programs, or team meetings, etc. These activities serve to connect all kinds of academic, management, business, and cultural talent.

Special attention should be paid to the integration of new civil servants and their professional support. In 2022, an onboarding or welcome plan was developed, which includes measures already implemented, such as the provision of selective courses, induction training for those categories that do not have such courses, and the organization of certificate award ceremonies for new civil servants by the mayor or the area delegate, as well as other new measures such as the publication of content on the municipal website, such as the welcome manual, guides for those responsible for the services that receive staff with guidelines for the first few weeks, and forms that facilitate the bureaucratic process of incorporation.

In terms of support, a mentoring program has been identified in which mentors are assigned to new employees. The mentor advises, teaches, guides, and helps the mentee in the development of their professional skills and abilities, creating a relationship in which experience and knowledge are transferred from one to the other. This service is aimed at new employees in professional subgroups A1 and A2 and has a network of internal mentors who are volunteers and specifically trained for this purpose.

Another initiative highlighted by the interviewees is the organizational commitment and satisfaction survey conducted among municipal employees. It serves to identify their concerns and their degree of satisfaction with organizational actions, as well as to detect possible sources of conflict that may arise in the units, improve internal communication, leadership, and team management, and identify strengths and areas for improvement on which to build an action plan linked to the revitalization of internal talent.

Along these lines, another initiative identified is the launch of the "*Madrid Talento* Awards" to recognize innovation and performance by municipal officials and work teams. The aim is to reinforce the sense of belonging, showcase best practices, and recognize individuals or entities that have provided a special service to the city of Madrid.

5.3. Discussion

Next, we will compare some of the results of this field research with aspects of the theoretical framework in order to attempt to answer the question we posed. Based on the results of the *Madrid Talento* policy during the period studied, we will seek to understand which initiatives have contributed most to institutional transformation, given that this is a fully implemented case study, which allows us to gain a better understanding of its results. According to the interviewees, at the end of 2021, the degree of implementation of the approved measures was 91.4%; in 2022, it was 98.4%, and by the end of the period, full compliance had been achieved. Therefore, during the study period, there had been a complete reorientation of personnel policy.

5.3.1. Administrative restructuring to refocus the creation of public value

Firstly, there has been significant administrative restructuring and a major effort in the strategic management of vacancies during the period under review, taking into account two basic pillars of transformation: the impact of aging and digitization. These factors have influenced planning that has formed the basis for the regular public job offers approved during the period analyzed, totaling 9,826 positions, of which 4,868 are internal promotions, according to data collected from the various offers during this period. Added to these are public job offers for the stabilization of temporary employment, derived from basic state regulations, which total 3,230 positions in 140 professional categories. A reduction in the final number of professional categories of civil servants has been addressed up to 43 %, from 258 to 146 categories, of which 61 % correspond to group A and 51% to scientific-technological or STEM profiles (Madrid City Council, 2023).

A few years ago, the OECD reminded us that "in the context of the major changes facing the Spanish public administration, the workforce must be seen as a strategic tool and a partner for change" (OECD, 2014: 287) and encouraged reforms to the current public employment model in our administrations. Preventing the gap from widening further is a strategic mandate on the agenda for the modernization of public administrations (Campos, 2019). Undertaking an administrative restructuring such as that carried out through the *Madrid Talento* initiative allows us to delve deeper into the dynamics of reform and innovation to improve efficiency and performance when addressing challenges on the local agenda. The measures studied are in line with providing the necessary staff to close the gap between the challenges of the 21st century and institutional capacity in terms of resources, culture, and procedures.

5.3.2. Attracting talent for a more citizen-friendly and inclusive administration

The case shows that fighting for talent requires concerted action by public administrations on several fronts. First, building a community of stakeholders in public employment. The measures analyzed have resulted in the number of applications submitted to participate in selection processes at the City Council increasing from 25,549 in the 2015-2018 period to 142,688 in the 2019-2022 term (Madrid City Council, 2023).

This expansion in the potential pool of people interested in public service is possible if the selection process is streamlined and does not constitute an insurmountable barrier for candidates. The results of the simplification and rationalization measures have made it possible to increase the number of selection processes managed in the indicated period from 43 to 269. The number of annual selection processes completed has risen from 13 in 2019 to 40 in 2023. In terms of positions, 981 were advertised from 2015 to 2018, compared to 3,194 from 2019 to 2022 (City Council, 2023). If we add the positions in ordinary public job offers to those derived from temporary job stabilization offers (3,230) that were announced from September to December 2022, the total number of positions announced between 2019 and 2023 stood at 7,317.

In addition, access to municipal civil service has been improved to make it more inclusive. In 2022, 32 people with disabilities were hired in the categories of general service operators and internal trades personnel. The syllabus, instructions, and exams have been written in easy-to-read language to enable candidates to understand the content. Following this initial experience, the recruitment of a further 24 people is now in its final stages and the next call for applications is ready to be launched.

This improves the relationship between the public administration and society, not only in the sense that initiatives to attract people interested in working as public employees strengthen that link, but also because new staffing needs in areas such as citizen services, education, social services, or digitization require public entities to be closer to certain sectors or market niches.

5.3.3. Renewing the culture to innovate and strengthen trust in institutions

Public professionals are responsible for channeling relations with citizens, practicing the necessary empathy, and promoting participation and collaboration. Public professionals are the face of institutions, the point at which the moment of truth occurs in the provision of a service, a key element in the perception of quality, where constitutional values are reflected.

The selection process does not end with the completion of tests, but continues with the subsequent integration of the person into the organization. The ability of institutions to do this and keep internal talent motivated and up to date will largely determine their success or failure. This is even more true in a scenario of competition for talent, where the administration has structural burdens that prevent it from competing on equal terms with the private sector, especially in certain high-level positions. One such burden is the remuneration policy, which is currently restrictive and characterized by insufficient equity and a focus on political aspects over salary (Arenilla, Llorente, and Redondo, 2022).

The *Madrid Talento* program has made an effort to renew the qualifications of its professionals and invest in internal talent, which is key to cultural transformation. Since 2019, each training plan has renewed 25% of its actions compared to the previous one, so that by the end of the period studied, it is practically new. All of this contributes to activating and connecting the knowledge of human capital, turning them into agents who contribute to transforming the organizational culture into an innovative culture.

This case shows how measures have been taken to support employees throughout their careers. The mentoring network we mentioned earlier currently has 100 mentors from various areas of government. A total of 200 processes have been initiated (86 in 2024), of which 133 have been completed with an average of four

sessions. Work climate studies show a high degree of employee commitment (3.97 out of 5), with the dimension "commitment to public service" standing out with an average score of 4.50, which is also the value with which employees most identify. In terms of municipal staff satisfaction, satisfaction with colleagues (4.23) and superiors (3.78) stands out. Given that citizens' trust in institutions is largely determined by the quality of their human capital, their prestige—which reflects on their legitimacy—depends on the existence of professionals who perform their duties in an exemplary manner, internalizing and practicing the appropriate values (Gomá, 2009).

Table 3. Summary: Madrid Talent and municipal transformation.

Dimension of study	Most relevant initiatives	Contribution to municipal transformation
Planning	Restructuring of professional categories, prioritizing A1 and A2 profiles in cross-cutting categories (STEM)	Administrative efficiency Policy reorientation, closing the gap between needs and ability
Attraction	Conceptualization as a brand Promotional volunteering Web channels, messaging, and social media Institutional advertising campaign	Repositioning and strengthening ties between the institution and society
Selection	Creation of a Permanent Selection Committee with delegated committees Reformulation of the procedure (promotion of the secretary, electronic processing, tribunals, calendars) Inclusion of people with disabilities	Ensuring that the municipal institution reflects society
Care	Promotion and flexibility of internal promotion Skills training (dictionary and modality) Physical space as a stimulus for innovation Support for new employees (onboarding and mentoring) Strengthening commitment (survey and awards)	Competitive training Refreshing the organizational culture (innovation) Prestige and legitimacy of the institution

Source: Own elaboration.

6. Conclusions

In the coming years, public administrations will have to embark on a necessary path of measures and reforms to become institutions with new principles, values, and rights that are inclusive, flexible, results-oriented, innovative, and digital (Castillo, 2020; Cortés and Catalá, 2020a). Success in this process will largely determine the effectiveness of public action in terms of performance and results and will be conditioned by the quality of its public professionals.

The aim of this paper has been precisely to contribute to academic and professional knowledge by showing what tools public institutions have at their disposal to drive transformation through talent management. It responds to a very specific context: that of an environment subject to disruptive change that forces administrations to innovate and transform themselves. Reviewing the literature, we have identified a series of factors that are having an impact on the local agenda and affecting the necessary modernization of local administrations. Furthermore, we have identified a series of levers that the literature considers possible to activate in the field of public talent to achieve institutional transformation.

The case chosen was the *Madrid Talento* initiative. A number of lessons can be learned from studying this case. First, as demonstrated by the case chosen, it is feasible to manage based on strategic vacancy planning and the simplification of professional structures, an approach that is in line with the job restructuring that an innovative administration needs to pursue. Secondly, we have learned that digitization drives and streamlines the selection process, eliminating bureaucracy and promoting the transparency that candidates need. Thirdly, we have seen that it is possible to innovate in public employment management, broadening the limited perspective of traditional personnel administration: the *Madrid Talento* case incorporates a brand-building perspective in which marketing, content creation, and the management of a physical container have an impact on attracting external talent and cultural change. Fourthly, we have learned that private sector techniques such as mentoring can be incorporated to nurture internal talent.

Furthermore, among the success factors that help to understand these results, it is worth noting the strong institutional support, the broad consensus with union representatives, the clear attribution of responsibilities to organizational structures, agile planning and approval (barely 5 months), the successful connection between

budgetary and personnel policies, simplicity in defining actions without methodological or doctrinal burdens, and continuous and flexible monitoring of implementation.

The Madrid City Council has decided to provide a solution, within its strictly local jurisdiction, to human resource management problems, from an innovative and, to a certain extent, bold perspective. However, the study logically has its limitations. The most important of these is the specificity of the case addressed, which poses difficulties when extending it to other types of local entities due to the unique nature of the Madrid City Council in terms of its size and its own regulatory framework; and to other public entities because not all of them are as citizen-oriented as the municipal administration, nor is there such a visible presence of civil servants on the street who have to respond more immediately to social needs that have grown exponentially in the last decade. Other limitations are the variables pre-established by basic state regulations that affect relevant aspects such as the replacement rate or selection regulations, which it has been impossible to act on due to a lack of powers.

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Óscar Cortés Abad

Doctor of Law from the University of A Coruña and industrial engineer from ICAI. Professor in the Department of Public Law I and Political Science at Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid, accredited by ANECA as a University Professor. He was an advisor to the Minister of Justice between 2014 and 2018 and has held other positions in the state public sector. He currently heads digital communications for the Madrid City Council.

Antonio Sánchez Díaz

Civil servant in the Senior Corps of Civil Administrators of the State. Educated at institutions such as ICADE, ESADE, and IESE, his most recent positions have been Director General of Coordination of the Peripheral Administration of the State and Director General of the General Mutual Insurance Company for Civil Servants (MUFACE). He is currently Director General of Human Resources Planning and head of the Madrid Talent initiative, which aims to attract external talent to Madrid City Council and nurture internal talent.