



The civil service careers of university support staff and new public management: A qualitative study from Chile

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Abstract

New public management policies have been in effect in Chile since the 1980s, influencing the development of human resources policies and procedures, particularly within higher education institutions. While the impact of these policies on academic staff is evident, their implications for non-academic personnel who operate under the same regime as

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public servants remain unclear. This research aims to investigate the relationship between new public management principles and the career beliefs of non-academic personnel in Chile. Utilizing focus groups, this study analyzes the perceptions of career trajectories among the collaboration staff at the country's most prominent public university. Finally, the results are discussed.

Abstract

Points for practitioners

Our study calls on public sector professionals to recognize the distance between legal frameworks and policies that manage public servants' careers and organizational cultures that have funded a traditional civil service career model. Thus, those who work in the public sector need to strengthen the agency capacity of civil servants by expanding their professionalization. Likewise, career flexibility and merit ideas must be critically addressed, especially in developing countries, as in the case analyzed.

Keywords

Career, new public management, Chile, public universities

New public management (NPM) reforms have significantly affected public institutions worldwide, including the transformation of higher education through the application of market-oriented principles such as economic, efficiency and effectiveness (Carvalho, 2018). The massification of access to higher education, the internationalization of organizations and the growth of the culture of control (Deem, 2020) are examples of these reforms.

Regarding the NPM impact on human resource policies, the main intervention area of the reforms, in higher education a 'competitive university' has appeared (Verger and Pagès, 2018). This concept has generated work overload and detrimental working conditions for academics (Ferreira, 2022; Hasrati, 2022) through the introduction of governance forms based on their own individual responsibility (Rawolle et al., 2017). Therefore, NPM has affected the traditional pattern of managing people in public services, such as universities, characterized by standardized, paternalistic practices and collectivist industrial relations (Mendoza et al., 2020).

As in other contexts (Deem, 1998; Siekkinen et al., 2020), in Chile, where the NPM paradigm was established through the military dictatorship of Pinochet in the early 1980s (Fardella et al., 2019; Salazar et al., 2022), universities have assumed the reforms and, at the same time, dissented from them. This is reflected in the case of academics who have incorporated the NPM principles in their work, but not completely (Fardella et al., 2015; Waring, 2013).

Considering the experience of academics and the fact that the introduction of NPM in human resource management in Chile has not generated the expected theoretical effects (Morales, 2014), the lack of evidence available for university support staff¹ regarding the integration of NPM is noteworthy. Thus, it becomes interesting to observe the NPM reforms and their relation to non-academic workers because, in Chilean state universities,

they have the status of civil servants, which means that they should have a career based on the category of permanent civil servants with stability and the right to promotion.

To meet this objective, we analyzed the link between NPM principles and the perceptions of the non-academic staff at the University of Chile regarding a civil service career, understood as the activities and experiences related to the work that the organization offers to its employees and that allow them to achieve their objectives (Hall, 1976).

By examining the gap between NPM principles and the beliefs of non-academic staff, this study will contribute to a better understanding of the effects of NPM on people management in public universities. Furthermore, our focus on the Chilean case will provide valuable insights, complementing existing knowledge on NPM implementation in Latin American countries with unique civil service characteristics. Most of these countries have implemented successive reforms, diverging from conventional models and embracing pragmatic approaches (Siklodi, 2014). Thus, delving into the Chilean case would advance the global understanding of implementing human resources practices based on NPM in higher education, particularly from the viewpoint of support staff.

Higher education, NPM and civil service careers

The careers of higher education support staff, and within higher education as a whole, underwent significant changes during the Chilean military dictatorship. In the early 1980s, the ‘de facto’ government implemented a comprehensive restructuring, promoting the expansion of the private sector’s presence within the entire educational system, particularly in higher education (Salazar Muñoz and Rifo, 2020). This liberalization, coupled with educational freedom and the increased flexibility to establish higher education institutions, including universities, were key features incorporated into Chile through the 1980 Constitution.

Following the restoration of democracy in 1990, reforms focused on creating new institutional structures and processes to respond to collective problems and objectives in a democracy, guided by the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of the public sector (Alberts et al., 2021). These reforms, characterized by the liberalization of education, the integration of the private sector and the focus on results, produced a massification in the following years never seen in the history of the country until the crisis of this massification process, beginning in 2011 (Iturrieta, 2018; Salazar et al., 2022).

In the area of employment in higher education and in the public sector in general, reforms aimed to transition from a personnel administration to a human resource management approach based on decentralization, professionalization of the managerial function, and increased flexibility within the personnel system (Marques, 2020; Wicaksono, 2019). This entailed the introduction of merit-based competitive hiring practices for positions previously filled through free appointments, thus professionalizing the hiring process for top executive management (Alberts et al., 2021). Additionally, an appraisal system linked to training and performance was implemented (Méndez, 2021).

While academic staff partly embraced these reforms (Fardella et al., 2019; Fardella et al., 2015), there is no report regarding non-academic staff. Nevertheless, challenges

can be anticipated. In the technical support units of universities, the introduction of NPM-based human resources approaches faced resistance from the leadership, as these reforms overlooked the deeply political culture of traditional Chilean universities, where leaders are often appointed based on political rather than academic criteria (Salazar et al., 2022). Similarly, the difficulties developing countries encounter when implementing NPM have been previously described, as the approach was initially designed for advanced capitalist nations (Haque, 2020).

Even so, after 40 years of reforms in Chile, higher education institutions have grown significantly, together with the participation of private institutions. While there were 10 universities in 1981, as of September 2022 Chile boasted 58 universities, comprising 18 state universities and 40 private universities (MINEDUC, 2023). Likewise, in the case of people management in the state, while Chile has been characterized by the development of a results-oriented culture, it continues to face difficulties in the development and promotion of people, particularly in the separation of political and career positions, management at subnational level and labor relations (Egaña et al., 2021).

The careers of higher education support staff

Managerialism-related organizational reforms and NPM resulted in the predominance of non-academic staff in the last 20 years due to functions associated with transparency and accountability (Pick et al., 2012). Given the technical relevance and growth of support staff (Gander, 2018), higher education institutions have had to make efforts for their development (Gander et al., 2019) to ensure the performance outcomes of the institution.

Regarding support staff's careers, the relevance/importance of gender emerges as a notable aspect. Just as challenges in women's career advancement at universities have been recognized among academic staff (Caretta et al., 2018), women in administrative roles also face similar issues (Gardner et al., 2014), encountering different barriers compared to their male counterparts (Hancock and Hums, 2016).

Research reports indicate that women working on sports and leisure campuses encounter obstacles in their careers, including limited respect from others, lack of recognition and support networks, conflicts arising from attending to people, non-standard working hours, and discrimination in a masculinized work environment. However, there are also facilitators, such as opportunities for interaction with people, flexible working hours, management responsibilities and access to specialized training (Bower and Hums, 2003). Similarly, Gardner et al. (2014) found that involvement in student affairs acted as a facilitator for the careers of female support staff, while limited opportunities for development and promotion were identified as barriers. Ricketts and Pringle (2014) highlighted skill recognition, positive relationships with management, and confidence as facilitators, while barriers included limited development opportunities and subjective discrimination.

Jo (2008) analyzed women administrators' careers and found that poor supervision, limited promotion opportunities and demanding working hours hindered their career advancement. Tessens et al. (2011) identified similar challenges among female managers, including excessive administrative workloads and inadequate support, highlighting a

contrast with male counterparts, who could concentrate on unit leadership while women were expected to assume multiple roles.

For female support staff, facilitators appear to be diverse, encompassing flexibility, training and management commitment through leaders and supervisors. However, obstacles exhibit greater commonality, particularly related to work schedules, discrimination and limited promotion prospects.

There are also subjective factors considered as obstacles to the career of support staff. A study conducted in the United States, observing the case of 2000 higher education staff, established that the perception of mid-level administrators about their professional and institutional life has a direct impact on their satisfaction (Rosser, 2004) and therefore on their career.

Won et al. (2013) also recognized subjective factors as career facilitators, identifying career-related experience for sports campus administrators. Likewise, Johnsrud et al. (2000), in their study focusing on mid-level administrators in the university system, confirmed that confidence plays a key role as a career facilitator, while the lack of support is identified as an obstacle.

Job satisfaction is also identified as a factor impacting the careers of administrative staff. A quantitative study conducted in the Netherlands (Renkema et al., 2009) established that job satisfaction is positively related to employees' intentions to participate in development opportunities at work and negatively related to career-related activities. In other words, individuals satisfied with their job tend to seek opportunities within their current employment. Jo (2008) similarly identified the crucial role supervisors play in job satisfaction among female staff and their intentions to leave.

The role of job satisfaction is also described by Waller et al. (2014). They found that a significant percentage of women did not actively seek promotion opportunities due to the high degree of job satisfaction with their careers (Henderson et al., 2013). On the other hand, Pick et al. (2012) identified that new organizational reforms related to managerialism in Australian public universities had a negative effect on the job satisfaction of general staff.

Individual effort is also recognized as a career impact factor. Indeed, high educational level, dedication to the job and investment in themselves are identified as career facilitators for employees. In contrast, an overly structured promotion system was identified as a barrier (Nabi, 1999). Within the individual dimension, gender differences also emerge, with men making greater investments in their development to become managers than women (Sagas and Cunningham, 2004).

Other factors identified as barriers are a pessimistic attitude, exhaustion, weak links between performance and promotion, salary, career alternatives, limited opportunities for development, work/family conflict, relationship with the supervisor and institutional fit (Kont and Jantson, 2013; Marshall et al., 2016). As for facilitators, mentoring has been outlined as a critical factor in career development (Bozionelos, 2004), as well as the psychological work contract (Aydin et al., 2008). Likewise, Aljehani and Javed (2021) emphasize the significance of clarity in career pathways, pathway components, initiation into pathway development, senior management support and the role of human resource management in career development.

Finally, Kuskü (2003) was able to establish that there are differences in job satisfaction between academic and non-academic staff. Support staff highlighted their relationships with colleagues, communication and cooperation with other groups, work environment and salary. The study concluded that to non-academic personnel, the public servant identity is more important for social security reasons than identification with the university, differing from academic staff (Kuskü, 2003).

The University of Chile and civil service careers

The University of Chile, founded in 1842, is the main and oldest state institution of higher education, national and public, comprising more than 50,000 people. At the end of 2022, this community consisted of 43,779 students, 5131 academics and 10,637 people belonging to the support staff (Table 1).

Regarding organization, the University of Chile is composed of 14 faculties, 5 institutes depending on the Rectorate, 4 artistic companies, a University Clinical Hospital, and 2 primary and secondary education schools, which could explain why non-academic staff outnumber academic staff.

The organization and governance of the university follow regulations established by the Pinochet dictatorship during the 1980s, a period during which universities in different parts of the world underwent significant changes (Flórez-Parra et al., 2019). The development of the University of Chile changed considerably through the liberalization of its educational policies. In 1981, the 'de facto' government totally restructured and fragmented the state or public universities into regional headquarters and decreed complete freedom in higher education to create private universities. As a result of the intervention to the University of Chile and the State Technical University, in 1984, there were 261 institutions of higher education (González and Vargas, 2022). In addition, professional institutes and technical training centers were created by law. Thus, the University of Chile lost its regional headquarters and was confined exclusively to the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, the country's capital, also changing its institutional status.

This profound and unconsulted change to the university community shook the foundations of this higher education institution. As a result of these regulations, different units

Table 1. University of Chile personnel.

Staff	Current appointments	Percentage
Academic staff	5131	32.54
Non-academic staff	10,637	67.46
Managers	248	2.33
Professionals	3823	35.94
Technicians	2561	24.08
Administrative staff	2088	19.63
Auxiliaries	1917	18.02
Total Personnel	15,768	100

Source: <https://uchile.cl/transparencia> in the 'Dotación de personal' section, February 2022.

were detached and became new universities; for example, the Instituto Pedagógico, which first became the Academia de Ciencias Pedagógicas de Santiago and later the Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación (Universidad de Chile, 2023).

The university is headed by a rector who, in turn, presides over the University Council, the highest collegiate executive body, composed of the rector, the deans of the faculties and two representatives of the president of the Republic. A third institution linked to the government of the University of Chile is the University Senate – installed in 2006 – a higher regulatory-strategic collegiate body representing the university community, composed of 27 academics, 7 students and 2 support staff members elected by their peers. In this regard and according to the governance models described by Flórez-Parra et al. (2019), the University of Chile follows a mixed model that combines elements of the academic governance, stakeholder and accountability models.

Regarding its regulatory nature, the University of Chile is an autonomous legal entity, a higher education state institution, national and public (Universidad de Chile, 2023), with academic and non-academic staff working as public servants. Specifically, there are differences within the university regarding issues associated with the management and administration of each university body, with repercussions for a civil service career itself, such as career development opportunities. There are at least two reasons for this difference. On the one hand, there is a strong autonomy in the management of faculties and institutes. On the other hand, the current system means that university organizations have a different economic development depending on their capacity to generate their income; this phenomenon is reflected in a diverse structure in the availability of funds for many university activities, including the support staff's careers.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of NPM principles on the perceptions of non-academic personnel regarding their careers. To achieve this objective, a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was conducted, as this perspective enables an analysis beyond what can be quantified (Fuster Guillen, 2019).

Participants

Civil servants, administrative personnel and managers of the 14 faculties and 5 institutes of the University of Chile participated in the study, totaling 38 people. The University Senate sent an invitation to the deans' offices and directorates to include people working in economic management positions or equivalent. To invite administrative personnel, the request was sent through the Federation of Civil Servants' Associations of the University. Of the 38 people invited, 28 (73.6%) participated in the research, 14 managers and 14 administrative workers.

Technique and instruments

The focus group technique was employed to facilitate dialogue on a specific subject, lived and shared through common experiences (Guest et al., 2017) – in this case, perceptions regarding careers.

Four focus groups were conducted, each lasting 90 min. The composition of these groups was determined based on the managerial and non-managerial level of the staff and the presence of policies for civil service career development within the faculties and institutes, defined from each dean's report. As a result, the groups were categorized as follows: (a) managers from areas with NPM policies; (b) non-managerial staff from areas with NPM policies; (c) managers from areas without NPM policies; and (d) non-managerial staff from areas without NPM policies.

Data collection procedure

The focus groups were held during December 2020 through meetings using the Zoom platform and were conducted by University of Chile's researchers and senators. At the beginning of each group, informed consents were reviewed and confirmed, ensuring the confidentiality of the information.

A guideline was used for the development of the focus groups. Some examples were: 'What do you understand by "civil service career" in the context of the university?' In the case of managers, they were also asked: 'Do you consider that the support staff in your unit are satisfied with the civil service career?'

These questions and statements were prepared and validated by the Transdisciplinary Networks Unit of the university's Vice Rector's Office for Research and Development.

Data analysis

After the focus groups, the data were transcribed and the content analysis was applied. It was based on a qualitative matrix, which allows an analytical reading of the data in order to find recurrent tendencies and data in an action, situation or discourse and to investigate how these dynamics are organized and understood. (Giesecke Sara-Lafosse, 2020). On one hand, the matrix considered the following dimensions: perception of civil service career, civil service career practices, career obstacles and expectations. In parallel, the perceptions were analyzed considering the principles of NPM traditionally identified in people management, such as the decentralization, professionalization and flexibility of civil service careers. (Marques, 2020; Wicaksono, 2019).

After receiving the reports of focus groups, the researchers analyzed each document independently and then highlighted and transcribed to the matrix the relevant information based on the dimensions.

Results

Perception of civil service careers

Regarding the concept of civil service careers, participants' perceptions show both similarities and differences. There is consensus that civil service careers encompass policies and actions related to various aspects, including admission, training, well-being, participation, work-family conflict and exit from the organization.

In terms of civil service career practices, managers from units with human resource practices mentioned initiatives such as salary structures to avoid income disparities based on job positions. In contrast, managers from units without such practices mentioned initiatives like defining job profiles and implementing decentralized policies for personnel development and quality of life.

Despite the negative evaluation of career development by civil servants, those from units involved in career development highlighted the importance of training, as it has allowed them to advance in their careers and achieve a better income. In contrast, non-academic staff from units without career development practices did not identify any specific practices in this area.

Although there is agreement on the dimensions covered by a civil service career responding to a human resource management consistent with NPM guidelines, there are differences in its meaning. Civil servants, regardless of their academic unit, perceive civil service careers as an integrated system that guarantees equal opportunities, job stability and objective functions in the university. They prioritize principles such as centralization and job security over decentralization and flexibilization. On the other hand, managers of units involved in career development consider it a management tool, while also emphasizing its relation to staff well-being. They advocate for regularizing processes and providing job stability, while adhering to the principles of civil service statutes, including professionalization and decentralization of human resource management, alongside job security – a more traditional approach (Gander et al., 2019).

Obstacles in civil service careers

As for the obstacles in civil service careers, the managers of units with activities related to this concept identified these main obstacles: (a) limited economic resources hindering career development actions; (b) lack of will, resulting in little initiative of the authorities for decision-making related to career development; and (c) differences between academic units regarding resources and needs that hinder the coherence of the implementation of policies. In this sense, this group emphasizes the challenge of centralized policies and a system favoring the transversality of processes with a direct reach to all academic units. Nevertheless, for the managers of units that do not carry out activities related to civil service career development, the lack of resources for the implementation of a civil service career is an obstacle.

In the case of non-managerial staff, the situation is much more critical since they consider the obstacles to be not only economical, as stated by the managers, but also political. Regarding the perception of non-managerial staff belonging to units that do not carry out civil service career practices, they agree on the lack of will from university authorities, and the main challenge is the mainstreaming of career development policies. Finally, for focus group 4, the generation of a civil service career policy should be co-constructed between civil servants and authorities to understand the diversity of forms of work and internal organization existing in the different academic units.

In conclusion, in the case of civil servants, there are important challenges in the area of transparency in the processes and decisions to guarantee equal opportunities in the

development of their careers. This may be related to the finding that in the Chilean case and the particular model of university governance, the authorities respond more to political criteria (Salazar et al., 2022), limiting the career projection of permanent staff and, incidentally, the values that sustain human resource management under the NPM paradigm, such as suitability and merit.

Likewise, participants highlight the challenge of decentralization of policies, a characteristic of the NPM-based human resource policies. While this principle can be observed in the perceptions of civil servants, there are limitations to progress related to political will and resources available.

Expectations regarding civil service careers

Regarding the expectations of a civil service career, the managers of units with activities related to this concept consider it fundamental to build transversality at the central level, establishing parameters for each area of the civil service life cycle. As for the managers who do not belong to units with career development, there is agreement on the need for a central policy. Thus, they report that a civil service career should cover the entire work life cycle, regardless of the type of contract or appointment.

Non-managerial staff belonging to units with civil service career development also expressed the need to build a central and transversal policy, but with the addition of established processes of control and compliance with legal regulations, especially in issues related to retirement. Finally, the personnel who do not belong to units that carry out civil service career activities stated the need for a central human resources unit working permanently and not subject to the election process of the different directors, complemented by the local human resources commissions elected by civil servants. For this focus group, there should be a balance between the autonomy of the local units to make their own decisions and the centralization of human resources functions around the career. This autonomy would solve particular problems and overcome the usual tasks existing in the local human resources units, which only follow instructions from the central authority.

Discussion

The participants' perceptions of a civil service career indicate a predominantly traditional view, where the responsibility for offering equal opportunities for career advancement lies with the centralized organization – in this case, the university. This perception reveals a gap between the principles of NPM reforms implemented since 1980 and the views of civil servants concerning their career development. The prevailing ideas of centralization and security diverge from the flexibilization and decentralization principles of NPM.

Furthermore, the participants' perception of the dimensions covered by a civil service career aligns with traditional career characteristics such as promotion, reward, mobility and training, but fails to mention key NPM principles like suitability and merit. (Gander et al., 2019; Ricketts and Pringle, 2014).

Therefore, it is possible to establish that the participants' perception of a civil service career is based on the idea of a career supported by the administrative statute, the legal framework for public employment in the state's civil administration in Chile. This statute mainly regulates labor relationships at the University of Chile. In this sense, the administrative statute develops the idea of a civil service career based on the category of permanent civil servants, with stability and the right to promotion. However, according to the perceptions of civil servants, these characteristics are absent in the University of Chile's case. This is consistent with the reality described for the Chilean public sector, as the evidence shows that a civil service career, for various reasons, has become precarious (Rajevic, 2014). Public employment is undergoing a laborization understood as the application of rules of the private world to the public sector in the relationship between the state and its servants (Gómez González, 2019).

Interestingly, the participants do not mention suitability and/or merit as crucial aspects of civil service careers despite their historical significance (Barría, 2009) and reinforcement through NPM-inspired human resource reforms. (Egaña et al., 2021; Morales, 2014). Indeed, the only ideas expressed in the participants' discourse are job stability, seniority and promotion, omitting references to skills and abilities.

With regard to the obstacles in a civil service career, they mention economic issues associated with the financing of practices to strengthen civil service careers, the political will to assemble practices and the different realities coexisting among the units of the University of Chile.

Civil servants set the responsibility on the institution by mentioning as obstacles the budget, the policy and the characteristics of the university itself. Thus, this study differs from and complements previous studies, which emphasized issues associated with gender and identity, the tension between objectivity and subjectivity, and job satisfaction (Gander et al., 2019).

Therefore, according to the results of this study, the support staff of the University of Chile perceive that political-administrative factors cause the difficulties they face in developing their careers, but not by individual or subjective factors.

No group of participants mentioned issues related to gender or other aspects of personal identity. This is relevant because gender inequality has been identified as an obstacle in the career of support staff in higher education (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Caretta et al., 2018; Gardner et al., 2014), and it has also been a problem for both the academic staff and the students (Benavidez et al., 2018; Buquet et al., 2018).

Even though participants point out that a civil service career should guarantee equal opportunities, they do not mention inequities related to gender. This may be explained by the non-recognition of a problem observed in different contexts of society rather than its non-existence.

Another difference between the population studied and the literature is the recognition of job satisfaction. In the case of the University of Chile, there are no references to the topic. Moreover, the affective dimension does not appear in the discourses despite its relevance in other university contexts (Jo, 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Renkema et al., 2009; Waller et al., 2014). Something similar occurs with the concept of subjectivity, present in other studies about the career of support staff but not mentioned in the case studied, where it is said that

the career should follow a centralized model. General guidelines should be given, and, eventually, adjustments made to respond to the context of the unit rather than to individual subjective characteristics. This idea, again, is in line with a traditional model of people management in the administration and contrary to the principles of NPM.

Along the same lines, the expectations are not only related to the dimensions developed by a policy but also to the form agreed. So, even with some nuances, the idea of the existence of a central unit to develop policies to be applied by the different units and with control functions arises. This idea, shared by the participants, is interesting because it seeks to replicate the traditional career concept by demanding management centralization, a principle opposed to the reforms promoted by NPM. Thus, it is possible to consider that what would be observed in the case of the University of Chile is the existence of a hybrid career model (Gander et al., 2019), where characteristics of traditional careers – represented by the administrative statute – are integrated with more contemporary careers, represented by the human resource policies of NPM.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the perceptions of support staff and managers of the main public and state university in Chile, it was established that the perceptions of civil servants regarding their career respond to a traditional, centralized, regulated and paternalistic one, and the institution should almost exclusively ensure its development (Mendoza et al., 2020). This indicates a clear distance from the principles of decentralization, professionalization and flexibilization, characteristics promoted by managerialist reforms in public employment.

So, considering career perceptions, obstacles and expectations made it possible to see a gap between the beliefs of the staff and the principles of NPM, even more pronounced than in the case of the academics, who have integrated part of the ideology.

Thus, the negative evaluation of civil servants about their career responds to their perception. It is a belief opposed to the principles of NPM, which are implemented through legal, administrative and budgetary structures and are reproduced through social and cultural frameworks. Observing civil servant career perceptions, their obstacles, and expectations has revealed the presence of a traditional perspective on careers. Furthermore, it is evident that the challenges and expectations stem from this traditional outlook, even though discussions and evidence recognize that implementing such a model has not been feasible (Rajevic, 2018).

Overall, the results allow institutions of higher education and other public services to better understand the expectations of an important group of workers who demand greater transparency, equity and the replacement of a model that, for the administration, seems to be outdated. It will also allow practitioners to recognize the contradictions observed in people management in the state, where two perspectives collide in the regulatory, political and, most certainly, subjective framework.

Although it was possible to meet the objective proposed, it is necessary to address the limitations of this study. Among them, we can identify the specificity of the participants, including union representatives and human resources managers. On the other hand, the obstacles and expectations of civil servants were identified from the participants'

perceptions of a civil service career and its practices. Therefore, the research results are obtained from the participants' knowledge and not necessarily from the policies and practices that are implemented at the University of Chile.

Even so, despite the progress made by this research concerning the civil service careers of support staff in Chile and the implementation of NPM reforms, it remains imperative to conduct comparative studies among other public universities in the region. Specifically, examining the dynamics between academic and non-academic staff is crucial. Moreover, exploring other dimensions of the reforms, such as control systems, is essential to advance and address a practical problem with significant implications for higher education.

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Data availability statement

Due to the nature of this research, participants of this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

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Note

1. People working in support roles in universities have been named in different ways in the literature. In this study, the concept 'support staff' will be used and includes indistinctly managers, professionals, technicians, administrative and auxiliary staff.

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