Network-Based Coordination of Civil-Service Training: Lessons from the Case of Estonia

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Abstract

The focus of this article is on the coordination of civil-service training in a decentralized civil-service system. The Estonian case is studied. The article investigates network-based coordination, analyzes the power sources of the central coordinator and discusses the opportunities and limitations of creating coherence through network-type cooperation. The article concludes that the key power sources for the central coordinator are financial, human and technical resources paired with knowledge, leadership and commitment. The case study shows that, in a decentralized civil service system, a common understanding on training and development can be fostered by intense collaboration through networks.

Keywords:

civil service training, coordination, networks, power sources

1. Introduction

Employee training is an important function of human-resource management (HRM). It is relatively well studied in the private-sector context. The public-sector HRM literature on training remains more modest. Although there is a quite considerable body of knowledge available on some spheres of civil-service training – for example, related to the implementation of public-management reforms (e.g. McCourt and Sola 1999; Wise 2002; Kroll and Moynihan 2015; Lucking 2003; Witesman and Wise 2012), the substance of training programs (e.g. Lavtar 2008; Vukovic et al. 2008; Van Wart et al. 2015) or the fate of training budgets during cutbacks

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(Cayer 1986; Maor 2000; Felstead et al. 2012; Lodge and Hood 2012; Metsma 2014) – the specifics of training in the public-sector context are still not well addressed.

The lack of research is most evident in relation to the systemic perspective in training. While private-sector HRM is mostly concerned with the functioning of single organizations, public-sector organizations constitute elements of larger systems. The smooth functioning of the public sector as a whole is important, although the nature and tasks of the organizations it comprises are very diverse. Such a systemic perspective has become even more important after the overwhelming New Public Management reforms in the West (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011) and post-communist reforms in Central and Eastern Europe (Bouckaert et al. 2008) that challenged the underlying principles and values of the administrative systems.

The core issues raised by the public-management reforms address the balance between centralization and decentralization, fragmentation of the public sector and its capacity to act in a coordinated way, both in terms of public policies and coherent functioning of the civil service. Due to private-sector-inspired reforms governments are no longer as single employers and have led to the delegation of different HRM decisions to the level of individual organizations (Lægreid and Wise 2015). Although such decentralized HRM systems are more flexible and adaptive to organizations' needs, they are also more unstable and poorer in securing unity, common values and shared culture in the civil service (Coggburn 2005). In this context, the role and levers of central agencies in coordinating the civil-service systems have emerged as a key question of public-sector HRM, among other topics also in the field of civil-service training that is a crucial means for achieving shared values and culture (Tönnisson and Paabusk 2005).

While in a centralized system, the central coordinator has strong, hierarchical instruments to steer the civil-service training, a coordinating unit in a decentralized training system (if it exists at all) must rely on more horizontal instruments and network-based collaboration with other public-sector organizations. Indeed, recent years have seen the rise of network structures and network-based governance (Lewis 2011). Network-based coordination has its unique logic of management with its strengths and weaknesses. The central concern of network-based coordination is related to the type of power sources that the central unit can use to foster coherence in a decentralized system. However, very little is known on the possibility to apply such a network and power perspective to the coordination of civil service, in general, and to the functioning of civil-service training, in particular.

Therefore, the goal of the article is to study the possibilities of a coordinated approach in civil-service training within a decentralized system. The case of the Estonian civil-service training system is analyzed. A few studies have dealt with the Estonian civil-service training system before. Tönnisson and Paabusk (2005) have presented pros and cons of a decentralized training system based on the Estonian case and analyzed its impact on establishing shared knowledge. Randma-Liiv et

al. (2013) have focused on structure, evolution and functioning of the civil-service training system. Metsma (2014) has analyzed the impact of cutback management on civil-service training. Sarapuu et al. (2015) have discussed the functioning and challenges of the system established to develop top-level civil servants in Estonia. This article goes more in depth and concentrates on the possibilities of the Ministry of Finance as the central coordinator to create unity in a civil-service system in which the responsibility and management autonomy for training is delegated to individual ministries and agencies. The empirical discussion draws on studying the Ministry's cooperation with the network of public-sector training managers. Cooperation with the network is a key coordination instrument for the Ministry. The leading research questions of the article are: first, what are the power sources of the Ministry of Finance in coordinating the decentralized civil-service training system? Second, what are the possibilities and limitations for fostering coherence of civil-service training through cooperation with the network of public-sector training managers? Based on the analysis, generalized observations and lessons for the civil-service training discourse are drawn.

The analytical framework of the article combines three branches of literature – the knowledge on civil-service training, the theoretical discussion on coordination and the theory on the power sources in governance networks. The synthesis of these different branches of academic discussion allows the analysis of civil-service training from a systemic perspective. The empirical analysis is based on desk research (the analysis of previous studies, public documents and other secondary sources) and in-depth interviews with Estonian civil servants. Interview respondents included three training managers and an advisor working for the coordinating unit while the network of training managers' network was established (coordination function was in the Government Office at that time). Semi-structured interviews were carried out from November to December 2016. The respondents were asked about the goals, decision-making, history, strengths and weaknesses of the network. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to elaborate on their understanding and experience of the network and its functioning.

The article starts with a theoretical overview, which sheds light on civil-service training systems and coordination. The theoretical framework is followed by the presentation of the case study of the Estonian civil-service training system, with focuses on the role and power sources of the Ministry of Finance and its cooperation with the network of training managers in coordinating the system. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Civil service training system

Training is a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skills and attitudes through learning experiences, to achieve effective performance in an activity or a range of activities (Garavan 1997). Civil-service training can be divided into pre-service and in-service training (Lavtar 2008). Pre-service training is related to the education acquired before entering the civil service. In-service training is received once in the service. In this paper the focus is on in-service training. In general terms, in-service training is designed to acquire and/or update the specific skills which are necessary to efficiently fulfill a specific function within the public service (Freibert 1998, 30). Training is an instrument to ensure that knowledge and values are kept up to date (Lucking 2003).

The content and management of civil service training is closely related to the characteristics of civil-service systems. There are two main types of civil-service systems – the career system and the position-based system (Bossaert et al. 2001). A career-based approach requires a more centralized training system (Lavtar 2008) because training is a mandatory element and a prerequisite for career development. In a position-based system, the organization of training is more decentralized, and in most cases, individual ministries and agencies carry the main responsibility for training their civil servants (Bossaert et al. 2001; Lucking 2003). In practice, the civil-service systems are usually hybrids of the two ideal types but can be linked more to one or the other of the types according to their characteristics.

In terms of function, Randma-Liiv et al. (2013) have divided the in-service training into three levels: the individual level, the positional/organizational level and the level of the civil service as a whole. First, training on the individual level provides civil servants with opportunities to move to new positions and develop their careers through developing their skills and competencies (Randma-Liiv et al. 2013). The opportunity to participate in this kind of training events is especially important in countries with position-based systems, where the posts are open to external recruitment and training is not a determinative element in the system. Employees recruited from the private sector may lack some knowledge and skills necessary to make a career in the public sector, but high-quality training can compensate this deficit (Op de Beeck and Hondeghem 2010). Second, on the positional/organizational level, training is related to the implementation of tasks and focuses on developing skills and competencies necessary for fulfilling the objectives of a particular organization (Randma-Liiv et al. 2013). Training on this level is especially important when a country is going through a reform or is facing other challenges that require organizational change (Farazmand 2009). Finally, on the system level, the role of training is more value-based. In this regard, the main role of the civil service is to attract and retain a high-quality and high-performing workforce, to raise civil ser-

vants' awareness of their role and responsibility and to support the development of shared values and knowledge in the civil service. Homogenous training is required on these occasions (Randma-Liiv et al. 2013). The focus of this article is mainly on the system level.

2.2 Coordination of civil service training

Civil-service training policy is usually designed in the nexus of the central coordinator, individual public organizations and the central training institution. First, the central coordinator is responsible for the development and training of civil servants on the policy-making level (Trendafilova 2008). It is a central coordinating body for the entire civil-service human-resource management. Second, the responsibility for civil-service training has increasingly been delegated to individual public-sector agencies for organizing training activities specifically tailored for the needs of the organizations. Third, a central civil-service training institution (Lucking 2003) gets input for its activities from the central coordinator for developing, organizing or delivering training. A central training institution may be part of the hierarchical structure of central government or belong to the central coordinating unit's governing area (OECD 1997; Bossaert et al. 2001).

The roles and relationships between those actors are influenced by the characteristics of civil-service systems. A decentralized setup of civil service, where the making and implementation of training policy are dispersed between many actors, requires careful horizontal coordination in order to balance out the shortages of the system. Coordination – “the alignment of tasks and efforts of multiple units in order to achieve a defined goal” – can be induced, sustained and nurtured by a central coordinating organization (Verhoest et al. 2005, 4). In the civil-service training context it means advancing a common understanding of civil-service culture, values and ethics. Improved coordination in the civil-service training system contributes to improvements in efficiency, costs savings, avoiding oversupplies, overlaps, reducing gaps and spreading nation-wide standards, while retaining the benefits of decentralized decision-making and implementation (Lucking 2003). Therefore, the role of a central coordinator in a decentralized civil-service training system is to develop coherence in the system.

The task of creating coherence in this mix of objectives and actors is a tricky one. The central coordinator's ability to ensure it depends on available coordination instruments and its power sources. One option is advancing coordination through an intra-governmental network. The central coordinator and other members in such a network are connected through both the network itself and the wider government system. The level of influence that the central coordinator has within a network depends on the “power structure” of the network and the coordinator's “power sources”. Power structure describes how different actors occupy different roles in networks and how their opinions carry weight in the decision-making pro-

cess (Agranoff 2006). The power sources can be divided into two: formal power sources and informal power sources. The formal power sources are based on:

- legally derived authority – e.g. legal authority (Agranoff and McGuire 2001), legitimacy (Purdy 2012), legal mandate (McGuire 2006; Cristofoli and Markovic 2016; Keast and Mandell 2013) and hierarchy (Metcalf and Lapenta 2012);
- access to different resources – e.g. financial, human, technological etc. (McGuire 2006).

The informal power sources are based on:

- knowledge, information and expertise (Agranoff 2006; Heritier and Lehmkuhl 2008; Røiseland 2011; Metcalfe and Lapenta 2012; Purdy 2012);
- leadership (McGuire 2006; Røiseland 2011);
- commitment to the network (Agranoff 2006; Røiseland 2011);
- prestige and government affiliation (Agranoff 2006).

These power sources have a function – they help to get things done in a network setting. Power can be used to improve the joint action or to empower others to participate more effectively (Purdy 2012). Furthermore, power both prevents and facilitates action: it can exclude actors, ban points of view and close off potential actors outside of the network. Some authors have marked power dimensions as power over, power to and power for (Agranoff 2006; Purdy 2012) which also describe the different roles that the participants can have in networks. “Power to” means the ability to get things done. The “power over” refers to a direct relation of subordination. From the “power for” dimension, authority can be used to sanction the participation of stakeholders who might otherwise be marginalized. These roles can be formal and informal and are important in explaining the distribution of power and the different sources of power (Røiseland 2011). For example, resources affect how well-informed or expert the participants are because information and knowledge resources are needed to comprehend and analyze issues (Purdy 2012).

A combination of theoretical knowledge on civil-service training, coordination and networks offers an analytical framework to study the coordination of civil service in general and the functioning of civil-service training in particular. The case study below looks in depth at the Estonian civil-service training system, with a focus on the role and power sources of the Ministry of Finance in coordinating civil-service training and the network of training managers, in order to shed light on the possibilities to foster coordination through network-type cooperation.

3. Coordination of training in the Estonian civil service

3.1 The Estonian civil service training system

Estonia is a small country with an area of 45,227 km² and a population of 1.29 million. The Estonian public sector employs a total of 135,300 people. The open, position-based civil-service system makes up only a small part of the entire public-sector workforce and covers the people working for the ministries, government agencies, local-government institutions and a few other state institutions – that is, the people at the core of the public sector. In 2015, there were 29,113 people working in the civil service (Rahandusministeerium 2016).

The Ministry of Finance is the central coordinating body of HRM issues and has the most important role in holding the civil-service system together, steering its development and guaranteeing coherence (Randma-Liiv et al. 2013). The line ministries form strong administrative actors that have considerable leverage over the issues belonging to their area of governance, including HRM (Sarapuu 2011). Until 2015, the Centre for Public Service Training and Development operated under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. According to its statute, the Centre was supposed to function as a central training institution. However, in practice, the Centre operated, and continues to operate, as any other company in the training market. The development of civil-service top executives is somewhat autonomous from the rest of the training system – the Top Civil Service Excellence Centre as a structural unit of the Government Office is responsible for the recruitment, selection and development of top executives (see Sarapuu et al. 2015). As the study of top public managers in Europe demonstrates, in a large number of European Union member states a movement towards a special status and special conditions for top public managers is seen (Kuperus and Rode 2016). However, this article examines the general civil-service training and will not focus on top executives, as their training and development has been thoroughly analyzed already (e.g. Sarapuu et al. 2015; Randma-Liiv et al. 2015).

Previous studies have pointed at several deficits of the civil-service training system. The management of training is fragmented, cooperation between different actors is irregular, and the quality of training depends on the competences of the agency purchasing the training (Randma-Liiv et al. 2011). In 2013, the Ministry of Finance published The Green Paper on the Personnel Policy of the State as an Employer that mapped the existing situation, problems and policy options in personnel policy, including civil-service training. In 2014, the White Paper on the Personnel Policy of the State as an Employer was published, which was the first comprehensive HRM document, and, among other things, addressed civil-service training. However, as of 2017, the principles of the White Paper have not been implemented. Estonia has not one but many civil-service systems, as each ministry has developed its own approach to personnel management (Meyer-Sahling 2009). This has result-

ed in a wide variety of training and development policies and practices across the public service that is likely to lead to very different professional knowledge, skills and values of public servants (Randma-Liiv et al. 2013). The decentralized nature of the system is well apparent when analyzing the division of civil-service training expenses – in 2015, only 3.8 % of them were made by the Ministry of Finance on the central training program, 4.2 % by the Government Office on the top civil servants development program, and altogether 92 % of civil-service training expenses were carried by single central and local government institutions (Rahandusministeerium 2016). Consequently, Estonia is an excellent case to study coordination in the context of an open decentralized civil service. Indeed, according to Meyer and Hammerschmid (2010), who compared HRM practices in Europe, Estonia has one of the most decentralized organizations of public-sector HRM.

3.2 The role and power sources of the Ministry of Finance in coordinating civil-service training

The Ministry of Finance's legal mandate derives from the Civil Service Act, which declares that the Ministry steers the development of civil service in Estonia. The Act also provides for a decentralized organization of training and an individual responsibility for competence. An official is required to replenish his or her professional knowledge and skills for the competent performance of functions, and the immediate or higher supervisor decides on the need for an official to participate in the training (Civil Service Act, § 31). The Statutes of the Ministry of Finance state that the Public Administration and Public Service Department within the Ministry develops policy, prepares draft legislation and coordinates the activity of state authorities in the area of the organization of public administration, the development of public service, personnel relations and official statistics. With regard to civil-service training, the Ministry has defined its mission as creating an environment and conditions that support systematic and effective training in public-sector organizations in order to guarantee professional knowledge, skills and values of public servants.²

Regardless of the legal mandate, the Ministry has limited authority and instruments to coordinate civil-service training in Estonia. The instruments that it has are mainly based on informal power sources. First, the Ministry can steer the system by designing and steering common policies and principles. As the principles of the White Paper have not been implemented yet and there is also no common training strategy in the civil service, this instrument has been largely underemployed. Nevertheless, throughout the years a few instructional materials have been centrally produced to support training managers in their work and to create common principles, e.g. a handbook of the training manager and the best practice of training and development. One adviser in the Public Administration and Public Service Department is responsible for the overall coordination of civil-

2 Civil Service Website <http://www.avalikteenistus.ee/?id=10660>.

service training: developing training principles, producing training materials and conducting surveys, analyzing legislation, planning the central training program, organizing training and development events outside the central training program, collecting data, cooperating with the network of training managers and ensuring the availability of training information.

Second, coordination through gathering, analyzing and circulating training information is a possibility. The Ministry of Finance annually gathers general statistics about training activities in individual public-sector organizations and disseminates it through publications, seminars, information days and the central web of civil service. The statistics are gathered through a common enterprise resource-planning system, and manually, as well, since not all institutions use the system. The Ministry also occasionally conducts surveys and studies. Gathered information is expected to be used for the development of the training system and for systematically evaluating training needs and the effectiveness of training activities. However, the analysis of training needs and the effectiveness in the civil service as a whole has been rather modest and irregular due to limited resources.

A third possibility is coordination through planning and implementation of central training activities. The Ministry of Finance administers the central training program by contracting specific horizontal training activities out to the external providers, for example training on civil-service values and ethics, Estonian language, policy-making skills and human-resource management skills. The central training program can be seen as a basis for creating common practices, knowledge, skills and values across the civil service. For the implementation of the central training program, financial resources of the European Social Fund are used: 85 % of the total funding comes from the European Union and 15 % from the Estonian state budget. In 2015, the budget of the central training program was 291,000 Euros, and the target group was approximately 118,400 public servants (Rahandusministeerium 2016). The impact of the central training program is rather moderate due to very limited funding, which allows to reach only a small share of the target groups.

Last but not least, the Ministry can foster coordination by cooperating with the network of public-sector training managers. The next subsection will focus on this coordination instrument more in detail as it is a lever that supports the implementation of all the other coordination activities. All in all, the Ministry of Finance's sources of power in coordinating the Estonian civil-service training system can be summarized as seen in Table 1. The coordination instruments used by the Ministry have been limited in many cases to technical operation without strategic policy design. It becomes apparent also in the use the resources of the European Social Fund for planning and implementing central training activities. At the same time, the Ministry has relevant resources for more strategic activities, such as information (incl. statistics), expertise to analyze this information and channels for spreading

the results (e.g. the central web page of civil service). However, the lack of human resources limits the Ministry's coordination ability.

Table 1

The Ministry of Finance's (MoF) power sources in coordinating the civil-service training

	MoF power source	Power source's function in a network setting	MoF instruments for fostering coherence
Formal power sources	Legal mandate	Right to make decisions and to require information	Designing common training policies and principles; gathering and analyzing training information
	Access to different resources (financial, technological and human)	Ability to get things done	Human resource for coordination activities; financial resource to provide central civil-service training program; financial and technical resource to support the functioning of the network
Informal power sources	Knowledge, information and expertise	Ability to comprehend and analyze issues	Sharing available information and best practices within the system, employing information for planning coordination activities; finding common training needs and analyzing training effectiveness
	Leadership	Ability to bind actors together	Attracting the training managers' interest in systemic issues; binding the training managers into a common information sphere; introducing common policies and principles
	Commitment to the network	Ability to bind actors together	Contributing actively to the functioning of the network of training managers
	Government affiliation and prestige	Sending a message that this network is important, hence improving joint action	Raising the prestige of the network of training managers by active participation and by engaging the network into training policy-making

Source: author's compilation; based on Agranoff and McGuire (2001), Agranoff (2006), McGuire (2006), Heritier and Lehmkuhl (2008), Randma-Liiv et al. (2011), Røiseland (2011), Purdy (2012), Metcalfe and Lapenta (2012), Keast and Mandell (2013), Randma-Liiv et al. (2013), Cristofoli and Markovic (2016).

3.3 Cooperation with the network of training managers

In all of the coordinating activities listed above, the Ministry of Finance cooperates with the network of public-sector training managers. The network was first initiated by 23 training managers in 2001. Push for cooperation derived from the National Audit Office's critical evaluation of the quality of civil-service training. The training managers decided to start meeting regularly to discuss mutual problems, as they lacked knowledge and experience on how to develop and operate training sys-

tems on an organizational level. The central coordinator (the Government Office at that time) encouraged the cooperation. The intention was to form an informal and flexible body of professionals whom to consult and involve in policy-making. The central coordinator also hoped that network members would then develop their training systems according to similar principles. Another deliberate decision was to make participation in the network voluntary.

The network is composed of training managers from the public-sector organizations, mostly ministries and government agencies. Written principles of the network state that only a person whose main tasks are related to the development and training of public-sector personnel can participate in the network. In 2017, it had 60 members, among them also four officials from the Ministry of Finance. The network aims to contribute to the awareness of the principles of lifelong learning, support organizations in developing their training systems, develop the professional skills and knowledge of the network members, submit proposals for adult training and development legislation and the preparation of instructional materials and participate in the development of professional standards for training managers. The Ministry of Finance has involved network members in the development of personnel and payroll accounting systems. Also, network members have organized study trips abroad and joint study visits to various public-sector institutions and private-sector companies.

The network's activities are managed and coordinated by an elected board, comprising three members. Elections are held every two years. To ensure continuity, a new board comprises one member from the previous board. All decisions in the network are made by consensus or by majority voting. In order to induce the participants' commitment, meetings rotate monthly among the network members' organizations. Through the years, the network's activities have been supported financially by the central coordinator. Furthermore, the network has used the Ministry's web platform to store materials and a mailing list to share information.

By 2017, the training managers' network has formed into an entity with a clear structure and clear operating rules. In most of its characteristics it resembles a cooperative network. Keast and Mandell (2013) have defined cooperative networks as informal, voluntary based and initiated for information-sharing. In contrast to Keast and Mandell's description of cooperative networks, the training managers' network is not a short-term entity, and the participants do share common goals. From a managerial point of view it resembles a shared-governance/participant-governed type of network (Provan and Kenis 2008) – it is governed completely by the members that make up the network, decision-making in the network is decentralized, goal consensus is high, and cooperation is based on the training managers' own initiative. Indeed, the interviews revealed that network members highly value eye-to-eye meetings and have a strong sense of belonging whilst being a member.

The representative of the central coordinator has encouraged the cooperation by using its central position but has not deliberately taken a leading role. Nevertheless, there are some elements of a lead-organization model (Provan and Kenis 2008) in operation – the Ministry of Finance has important resources and an important function in the network. Its financial and technical support has enabled the network's existence. The central coordinator has successfully made use of its position and leadership skills and has bound training managers together into a network. Its participation, leadership, commitment to the network and prestige has attracted new members and has supported the network's sustainability through the years. The central coordinator has information, knowledge and expertise about training policy developments and new initiatives. This was especially important in the early years when the network started its activities. The interviews revealed that the central coordinator's mere participation in the network already improves joint action. Members value the network due to the Ministry of Finance's participation. During the interview it was even stated that the central coordinator's participation is an indication of necessity and topicality of the network.

The network provides a valuable communication mechanism for the public-service training managers. The participating training managers have come to know each other through joint activities that have facilitated the sharing of training information and best practices. It has also served as a communication channel between individual public organizations and the Ministry of Finance. Study trips abroad have widened the training managers' knowledge on international experience. Also, mutual training events have supported the development of professional skills and knowledge of the network members. As for the issues covered in the network, interviews revealed that now that the training systems have institutionalized, it is vital to find new and interesting topics for the network as a whole, especially for old members. There have been occasions of members leaving because the network does not offer anything new. Similarly, being an active member can be rather time-consuming and may affect the decision to participate. During the course of its existence, there have been frequent discussions over the size of the network, the principles of inclusion and exclusion, cooperation with other institutions etc. However, the interviewees said that managing a growing network is challenging. The study revealed that when the network got bigger and personal contacts among network members declined, trust also declined.

4. Discussion

In a decentralized system, network-based coordination offers many opportunities for the central coordinator to foster coherence. In the case of the Estonian civil-service training, the central coordinator can make practical use of the network of training managers in two ways. First, the network serves as an institutionalized communication channel between individual public organizations and the central

coordinator. The central coordinator can disseminate and receive information from the network. Second, the network is a body to consult with. Consultation is equally important to the central coordinator and to training managers, who value the opportunity to have a say, as they are the ones who implement the training policy. Participation in decision-making is also likely to increase the ownership of individual training managers and thus facilitate the implementation of central guidelines. Sharing information and involving training managers helps to ensure that they understand the training principles similarly.

In addition to these two main functions, there are other reasons for a central coordinator to be interested in the continuation of this type of professional network. The mere existence of the network is expected to support the creation of coherence in civil-service training. The network brings otherwise autonomous organizations together into a common sphere of information and knowledge. Collaboration in this format offers an opportunity to interact with colleagues from other organizations, create personal contacts, learn from the experience of others and find common solutions – all of this supports organizations in improving their training systems. Also, cooperation and different activities in the network develop the members' professional skills and knowledge.

Collaboration through the training managers' network offers opportunities, but it also has numerous limitations for fostering the coherence of civil-service training. First, not all training managers participate in the network activities, which makes its impact rather uneven (Randma-Liiv et al. 2013). For the same reason, the training managers' network cannot be the one and only advisory body for the central coordinator. The central coordinator must make an extra effort to include those who are outside the network. Second, the training managers' network is a soft coordination instrument, and its impact on civil-service training can be relatively vague and unpredictable because participating organizations remain autonomous in human-resource management decisions. Organizations maintain their independence, and neither the central coordinator nor the network carries legal powers to make individual institutions bound to recommendations made or ideas spread in the network. Third, since the network's activities are based on the members' initiative, its sustainability and content depends on the members' time and commitment. Here lies a challenge for the central coordinator – how to contribute to the better functioning of the network? The Estonian case shows that the central coordinator should provide relevant and topical content for the network's activities. After most of the institutions had built up their training systems, the central coordinator diminished its role as the content provider. However, new challenges could derive from the changing environment (e.g. new training methods) and the training managers' role (e.g. how to become a strategic partner to the management). Fourth, the central coordinator is expected to devote resources to supporting the structures that enable the existence of the network, e.g. manage the mailing list and website, support financially and ensure that the statute is up to date.

Altogether, a combination of hard and soft coordination instruments could serve well to attain coherence of civil-service training in a decentralized system. The assumption is that the coordinating unit is equipped with sufficient formal and informal power sources in order to perform a harmonizing function in the system. Importantly, coordinating activities presuming legal mandate and authority can be enforced and supported by softer collaboration-based instruments. To enforce common training principles, collect statistics or conduct surveys, the central coordinator can rely on network-type cooperation.

5. Conclusion

In a decentralized civil-service system, where there are no comprehensive centrally imposed obligatory measures for ensuring the coherence of civil-service training, a common understanding of training and development policies and practices can be expanded by intense collaboration through networks. Collaboration is likely to serve equally well both the central coordinator who can spread relevant information and collect input and individual organizations that can participate in policy design and get to know each other through joint activities which facilitate the sharing of training information, best practices and values. However, in order to achieve a desired effect, the central coordinator must have sufficient financial, human and technical resources paired with knowledge, leadership and commitment to the issue. As formal power sources as well as strong top down instruments are limited in a decentralized system, the central coordinator must make active use of its informal power sources. The establishment, developing and retaining civil-service-wide networks, proves to be a good opportunity to strengthen the informal power sources of the central coordinator.

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