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What competency management in the French civil service ?

Gilles Jeannot, Yves Lichtenberger

Résumé : après un rappel de la manière dont la question des compétences a été abordée dans les entreprises française les auteurs indiquent comment ces principes sont en contradiction avec certains principes de la fonction publique comme le concours en sortie de formation initiale mais comment ils sont congruents avec d'autres comme le principe de la carrière. Il présente les avancées limitées du programme de gestion prévisionnelle des emplois, des effectifs et des compétences pour le sujet des compétences. En revanche à partir de deux exemples : la gestion d'un corps d'ingénieurs du ministère de l'Équipement et le principe de troisième concours de recrutement des emplois jeunes il met en évidence les possibilités existantes dans le cadre actuel d'une gestion des compétences sans le savoir.

The French Ministry of the Civil Service (*Ministère de la fonction publique*), which is responsible for negotiations on the status of civil servants, has recently launched an inter-ministerial project: The GPEEC (*Gestion prévisionnelle des emplois, des effectifs et des compétences*) which translated is "Employment, Workforce and Competencies Planning". The project aims at promoting human resources planning. Each ministry has been asked to appoint a representative in order to produce a state action plan. The two other major employers of civil servants – regional and local authorities and hospitals – have launched similar actions. The term "competency" has thus officially been put on the public personnel management agenda. In reality, however, the plan has only been carried out on paper: the issue of employment (i.e. number of employees) has been given most attention, as all personnel managers share a common concern: that of the ageing of a large number of civil servants who will be retiring in the next couple of years. Consequently this problem has become the most urgent issue in the debate on new personnel management models.

Experiments in the transfer of competency-based management methods from the private to the public sector in France have been rare and generally without much success. Yet the question of competency-based management has been a key issue in debates in French enterprises, as certain aspects of this type of management are close to the concerns in the civil service. It is therefore relevant to compare practices in the public and private sector.

The aim of this chapter is to review current practices in the public sector in the light of the debate about competencies within the private sector rather than to analyse transfers from the private to the public sector. After briefly summarising the terms of the debate in France, and identifying the main issues associated with the emergence of the specific concept of competencies, we analyse how the competency-based management approach

corresponds to the general principles of personnel management in the French civil service and to a number of innovative experiences in personnel management.

The competency debate in French enterprises

The subject of competencies first surfaced in human resources management (HRM) practices in France during the mid-1980s. This was a response to strong criticism, in the late 1960s, of the reduction of human work to the execution of mechanical and servile tasks. It reflected the fact that new organisational forms were being experimented with, which involved employees and called for their co-operation. Decision-making was being decentralised throughout organisational hierarchies and workers were being granted freedom to take initiatives in the organisation of their work.

In many respects this new practice was a return to earlier traditions when workers had a large degree of autonomy and their skills, expertise and commitment were recognised and valued. The idea was to nurture trust in an employee who was responsible for meeting the requirements determined by the work context including customers, colleagues and all those involved in achieving an enterprise's common goals. However, attempts to define employee motivation and relational skills exposed the limits of an organisation based on job prescriptions. More innovative firms could no longer function with employees who simply carried out instructions. In this respect, the trend was not a return to organisation of jobs in the traditional sense; it was above all an invention of collective occupations, in the sense in which today's firms say they are refocusing on their "core competencies". The competency debate therefore concerns individual qualities but also the organisational methods facilitating their expression and development. Firms have learned that competency cannot be reduced simply to the evaluation of employees. It also encompasses the relationship between employees and their organisations. This can be improved in a number of ways: better training of employees, improving their working conditions, the composition of working teams, the behaviour of supervisors and the clarity of the objectives given to staff. Usinor, the main French iron and steel company and a pioneer in this respect, expressed this idea in an agreement with its trade unions. This saw the introduction of the 'the professional dialogue', a yearly meeting and discussion between an employee and her/his immediate supervisor, [which] is an opportunity for mutual adjustment between the two and the driving force behind competency-based approaches(Lichtenberger, Paradeise, 2001).

The introduction of "competency-based approaches" has been a pragmatic organisational innovation and not the application of a particular existing model. Firms, which embarked on it, finally adopted the practice not so much because they thought it was a principled move but because they believed they could no longer function as they had done in the past. Two main reasons explain the move by the companies. First, there were internal reasons related to loss of motivation by employees. Bureaucracies and organisations with Taylorian methods keep a tight grip on individuals, by enclosing them in a restricted job with prescribed tasks, which leave no space for initiative or the development of employees' competencies. In the 1970s the Taylorian model began to impose high costs on industrial firms due to low morale and the repeated strikes it generated. Firms met the challenge by automating the most mechanical tasks as much as possible. That, in turn, shifted even low-skilled human work towards jobs requiring risk management, initiative in dealing with the unexpected, adjustments to variety and change and customer demands.

Second, there were external reasons related to the growing demands for quality. Firms expanded their products and learned to better serve their customers, who were becoming increasingly demanding. Performance was no longer reduced solely to the skills

of a few workforces or to the rationalisation of the production process. It was based less on cost cutting than on increasing the value of the service produced. As both Usinor and Renault put it, the "customer-oriented" firm, whether in the industrial or service sector, is defined above all as a "producer of solutions". (Gadrey, Zarifian, 2001) In the late 1990s, on the initiative of the *Mouvement des Entreprises Françaises* (MEDEF), the main French employers' confederation, a large comparative study of enterprise practices was undertaken, called "*Objectif-Compétences*" (Medef 1998). Trade union confederations, consultancy firms and universities participated in the project. Two key events were the 10th International Training Day in October 1998 in Deauville and the opening of negotiations on the reshaping of occupational training systems, in 2001. Two main trends emerged throughout the debates. First, there was a move towards competency management and focusing on the transformation of HRM techniques. As with human resources planning, the idea was to redefine the competencies expected from employees and the reward for achieved results. In this way the organisation keeps control over trends in employment by defining job descriptions, in a top down approach, and focusing on the necessary knowledge and appropriate behaviours required.

Second, management by competencies meant focussing essentially on a redefinition of corporate strategy and working within it. Competencies are no longer seen as prescriptions set down by the organisation but rather the way in which employees at each level appropriate the strategy and redefine the organisation. From this point of view, it is the development of employees' competencies that drives the transformation of the organisation. Competency frameworks describe the actions to take and the problems to solve in order to increase the performance of a service, team or firm.

The above dynamic leaves room for multiple definitions of competency, depending on its use. Instructors, organisers and social partners each put forward their own approach during negotiations. One of the most comprehensive definitions is that of Usinor, incorporated into the agreement signed in 1990: "competency is a validated operational know-how" (. (Accord Acap 2000- usinor 1990) Another is that of Medef: "competency is a combination of knowledge, expertise, experience and behaviours applied in a given context. It can be observed when implemented in a professional situation" (Medef 1998). This definition of competency is closer to the US approach than to the traditional French conception that has traditionally been based on "qualifications". An employee's qualifications are related to his/her potential and are linked to a specific work situation and a corresponding educational level. Competency, on the other hand, is related to observed efficiency in performing a job. It is not necessarily correlated with an educational level but includes an assessment of levels of "responsibility" that cannot be directly related to specific 'know-how'.

There are multiple types of competency frameworks. The first, influenced mainly by training needs, aims essentially at identifying knowledge and know-how. These frameworks are similar to those for professional qualifications. The second type is based on a list of behaviours and is used primarily for supervisory or managerial categories, where it is particularly difficult to identify necessary expertise. Frameworks often contain contradictory requirements. For example, being a negotiator implies both listening and defending one's point of view, but this leaves undefined the most important element, that of combining these two capacities. Nevertheless they serve as a basis for discussion *a posteriori*, in order to learn lessons from a given experience. The third type of framework is based on the identification of the most significant activities of an occupation or professional situation. In fact it would be more accurate to talk of 'action', rather than 'activities' in this respect, since professional objectives and problems which need to be solved are described, rather than the activities through which they are encountered or solved. In some cases frameworks are linked to salary scales in which individuals

occupying the same rank do not have the same salary, depending on their level of responsibility.

The issue of formulating competency frameworks has arisen in recent years along with the growing importance in the labour market of competency validation. Since 1991, a French law has provided for any person to draw up a "*bilan de compétence*" ("competency review") in collaboration with an external management consultant. An in-depth analysis of an employee's motivations, skills and professional experience can be made with a view to reconsidering or redefining future career objectives and obtaining assistance in drafting a suitable *curriculum vitae* (CV). In 2001 negotiations between the social partners opened the prospect of redefining and re-evaluating individual qualifications in terms of deployed competency, therefore allowing them to broaden their possibilities of mobility and professional and career development. In late 2001 the "social modernisation law" established the principle of a right for all workers to validate their experience (*validation des acquis de l'expérience: VAE*), and defined a framework of diplomas, degrees, titles and other qualifications that could be obtained in this way. So far, national education institutions have been the vehicle for implementing this policy and all professional diplomas and curricula have been thoroughly transformed and revised in the last few years. The diplomas, however, are designed essentially to validate formal qualifications rather than experience, namely a level of education rather than a degree of practice. The social partners are committed to redefining the qualification system but they only have very limited experience of the occupational structures within firms. Their task is an arduous one and their dispersed experience is difficult to generalise. This latter tendency can be compared to the experience of the British National Council for Vocational Qualifications, with its search for alternatives to traditional qualifications granted by the academic system. Such a national framework, however, now exists in the UK and is being used to assess standards of competence at five levels ranging from the basic level of demonstrated skills in any occupation to Level 5 which corresponds to strategic levels of professional activities and management. The British model has influenced the development of a similar framework in the United States.

General civil service status: different from but not necessarily contradictory to a competency-based approach

At a first glance, the management principles of public sector organisations in France seem far removed from the competency approach. Personnel management in the civil service is based on the principles of competitive entrance examinations and a career service. Recruitment is accomplished through objective competitions (*concours*) among young candidates. There is an official age limit, for a lifetime career, with possibilities of regular advancement within a *corps*, with or without a change of rank, or mobility to another higher *corps* again through competitive exams.

There are exceptions to this model. The general civil servant status applies to only some public employees and other groups have their own status. For example, with the recent switch to a professional army, the 'position' model was opted for. Most military personnel are recruited for three or six years before returning to civilian life. Another example is the employment of contract workers who are recruited, on the basis of qualifications, for a limited period. In most cases, however, they remain in the public service throughout their career without, however, the possibility of changing their position. This mode of recruitment has been sharply reduced in recent years especially in state-run services. There have been several plans to integrate these contractual workers into the *corps* of civil servants and stop new recruitment. Local authorities and hospitals, however, continue using contractual personnel because of advantages of flexibility.

Recruitment by competitive examinations is motivated in France above all by the democratic principle. The aim is to maintain equality of access to the public service and anonymity, in order to avoid discrimination. It is also based on the principle of a meritocratic elite as only the best candidates gain entry. It does establish *de facto* a particular approach to competency. Typically, young people who apply for the *concours* have just obtained their university degree and the examination is based on academic questions and exercises. The *concours* aim at impartiality but do not necessarily test the competencies required for specific positions in the public service. This discrepancy is remedied afterwards, in part, through in-house training but some shortfalls often remain.

Compared to the private sector, we can see in the civil service a real tension between an academic-oriented definition of qualifications, on the one hand, and competencies related to problem-solving capacities in concrete situations on the other. This is a common criticism of the major state institutions which nominate very young and inexperienced individuals into senior positions because they have graduated for example from the *Ecole Polytechnique* or the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*, both elite preparatory schools for entry to the *grand corps*. But the same phenomenon is found in less prestigious positions. Two famous articles on police officers and teachers (Monjardet 1987, Demailly 1987) show that these organisations are divided between those who hold their position on the basis of formal academic knowledge and qualifications and those who emphasise their on-the-job learning experience. A phenomenon related to the current unemployment crisis in France tends to reinforce the value of academic qualifications, resulting in 'over-qualified' individuals participating in competitive entrance exams for lower jobs. For example, graduates with five years at university after the *baccalauréat* (equivalent to A-levels) are applying for positions requiring only the *baccalauréat*. They are then at an advantage in internal competitive exams based on academic qualifications, compared to others who have learned on the job.

A priori, the career system is less focused. In some cases the career is detached from assessment of competencies. That is the case, for instance, with primary and secondary school teachers. Careers are linear, without any change of rank, and the job occupied remains the same throughout the person's career. The result is that career management takes account only of criteria such as years of service and not ability to teach. But in some state institutions there are possibilities for recognition of competencies. Promotion through change of rank is one such opportunity for an assessment of competencies. So too are competitive examinations to change to another *corps*, where they are based not on academic tests but on real working situations. Allocation of jobs plays an important role too. If the head of a service has the freedom to choose among the members of one or more *corps*, the person filling the position can be selected on the basis of acknowledged competencies in former jobs. We also see a difference between grade and function in many administrations. Some staff are given more responsibility than they are supposed to have because their immediate superior acknowledges their competencies. This phenomenon, which reinforces the competency dimension, is nevertheless unsatisfactory because informal recognition such as this is not translated into a salary increase. It may, however, lead to a promotion that bypasses the competitive exam ("*promotion au choix*").

Competency-based frameworks

The idea that professions evolve and that training, recruitment and personnel management should closely follow this evolution have now been accepted for several years in certain administrations. The inter-ministerial Manpower Planning project (GPEEC) has enabled the Ministry of the Civil Service to gather information on initiatives developed throughout the ministries. This approach comprises six different aspects: 1) an inventory of available

human resources; 2) a medium-term projection for retirement; 3) the identification of future missions and related jobs; 4) consequences for employee numbers; 5) an analysis of discrepancies between trends and needs; and 6) proposals to reduce these differences. Only the third point is related to a competency-based approach (*Ministère de la fonction publique et de la réforme de l'Etat*, 2001).

Two types of initiative can be distinguished in this competency-based approach. First, there have been highly ambitious initiatives to define general frameworks of occupations. These consist of a list of all the jobs occupied by staff in an organisation and the identification and description of homogeneous practices. The best example here is the National Police. To cover all the various posts in the police force, 580 jobs have been identified and recorded. For each of these, a job description, with general characteristics, has been drawn up, which can be used for recruitment purposes. All these were validated in 1997. Yet, according to the police services, they have not been used in practice. This contrasts with the private sector where competency frameworks have been used for outlining salary scales and job allocation. The grids developed in the police, despite their comprehensiveness, are not actually used for daily personnel management. Furthermore, trade unions, which originally accepted their creation in order to obtain salary rises, have not supported their use for anything else. Thus, very little use has been made of the framework and, due to major reforms in the police force, the framework is already obsolete five years on.

More modestly, many services or ministries have undertaken studies either to describe existing jobs, in order to facilitate training programmes, or to identify changes in missions and thus to define new competencies which are required. For example, the Ministry of Environment has highlighted the need for "officers responsible for repetitive issues with a lesser strategic importance, defining an own field of responsibility" (*Ministère de l'aménagement du territoire et de l'environnement*, 2000). In the Ministry of Social Affairs, they have stressed the need for 'heads of service' with new competencies. These exercises have been restricted to a general level of analysis and have not been directly related to daily management (Bercot, R., Claude V., Jeannot G., 2000).

There are thus, on the one hand, cumbersome bureaucratic approaches without any transformation in routine methods of staff management and, on the other hand, lighter and probably more useful studies but with limited goals. In contrast to these disappointing examples, the following section describes two cases: the management of a corps of state engineers and the integration of staff with a temporary status, which have been successfully implemented. Although not representative, the two examples indicate the context into which one can incorporate competency-based management in public organisations in France.

Managing learning capacities: the case of state civil engineers

The *corps* of state civil engineers in France represents an interesting case illustrating that the public sector can practise competency-based management 'without knowing it'. It also highlights flexibility within the civil service status. The Ministry of Infrastructure (*Ministère de l'équipement*) consists of two *corps* of engineers, one recruited from the prestigious *Ecole Polytechnique* and the other, in a subordinate position, consists of state civil engineers (ITPE). These two *corps* fill most technical and management positions in the ministry's services responsible for roads and town planning. Although allocation of hierarchical functions has traditionally been segregated between the two *corps*, in recent years senior management positions have been gradually opened up to ITPE engineers.

In this situation of *de facto* competition, the union defending ITPE interests, which works closely together with the ministry human resources division, has opted for a strategy

oriented towards the expansion of the *corps* rather than internal management based on seniority. The main objective has been to enhance the opportunity for members of the *corps* to occupy managerial positions. Promotion to the second ranking level (grade level) which allows access to top managerial positions is therefore very important.

Observations of promotion commissions and statistical analyses of promotions reveal an agreement between management and trade unions around the key principle of competency management. While management officially establish criteria of relevance, for example, by agreeing to geographical mobility towards the east or the north of the country and the unions impose values of equality, effective choices show a convergence on criteria perceived to be characteristic of managerial positions. The main criterion is a capacity for pluri-disciplinarity, that is ability to work on road construction as well as on town planning, which enables management of services across more than one area. Functions related to personnel management as opposed to technical functions are also valued more than before. In our discussions with various actors, we have observed that criteria such as the capacity to assume *ad hoc* responsibilities, to show a capacity for innovation and an all-encompassing vision, now weigh quite heavily. When promotion commissions meet, we noted that criteria concerning the ability to manage staff, identify problems globally and be innovative seem to be more determining than criteria related to the content of posts and geographic and functional mobility. These new criteria are assessed on the basis of evaluations made annually by the head of services.

All these criteria contribute towards the recognition and valorisation of the capacity to occupy senior management positions. This orientation is found not only in promotion. It influences the production of services as well. The fact of favouring mobility from one sector to another involves considerable costs for the organisation. This means that in many situations an engineer is given the management of a service in an area of activity in which she or he has no experience. This also involves a cost in terms of occupational training. One could say in this respect, that the organisation opts for a medium-term objective of enhancing the managerial competencies of its staff, rather than a short-term objective of efficiency.

Today, although managerial competencies are seen as important, they are not enough. Technical competencies are proving to be of increasingly strategic importance. Therefore a parallel careers are being constructed. In fact the previous management model penalised individuals who chose to enhance their technical know-how, because they were more interested in the subject than in promotion. Gradually the technical level of the services of the Ministry were questioned as decentralisation and initiatives of the European Commission (application of the directive on public engineering) put these services into *de facto* competition with others. While there had always been a mode of management of specialists, who worked in research and design departments and were treated comparably, there had been no recognition for engineers who, without leaving the operational services, wanted to accumulate know-how in a particular domain.

The project was therefore formulated to generate competencies of 'generalists in a specific field', that is, engineers involved in operational practices but who, as their careers advance, accumulated different points of view and experiences in a given domain. The personnel management division in the Ministry has planned career paths, which allow an accumulation of technical competencies in a particular domain, which is no longer based on a logic of specialisation related to high-level experts or researchers. For example, in the area of water purification one could imagine an initial post for managing the building of water purification plants, followed by a second post in a service offering consultancy to decision-makers in this domain and then a post in the legal services in charge of the application of laws concerning the pollution of rivers. The incumbent could then be promoted as department manager of the service in charge of the environment or work in a

town responsible for the provision of its water supply. It would also be possible to include in this career path a position in which the managerial component is more important but in a service in which significant actions are undertaken in the specialist field. The person would then acquire technical, legal and organisational capacities in the same field, as well as negotiation and team-leadership skills.

The example of the Ministry of Infrastructure shows that it is possible, in agreement with the trade unions, to conceive promotion procedures which take account not only of the grade and number of years in service, but also competencies or the 'characteristics of an individual that are causally related to effective or superior performance in a job' (Boyatzis, 1982). Initially this would concern managerial competencies and behaviour *vis à vis* staff and outside partners, and then, in a second stage, the capacity to master technical actions.

Recognising competencies in traditional employment: the case of integration of young employees in local authorities

The project *nouveaux services emplois jeunes* (new services for youth between 18 and 26) is one of the noteworthy actions in the field of public sector employment in France, considering the number of its beneficiaries (Law n° 97-940 of 16 October 1997). On 18 January 2002, the Ministry of Employment and Solidarity was proud to announce that 350,000 young people had been recruited within this framework. The question of integrating these young people into the civil service is of interest to us here in so far as it links the supporting of available competencies with a more traditional approach focused on formal qualifications.

Since the 1980s government has increased the number of jobs with temporary status, with the aim of creating posts for the jobless without recruiting new civil servants. Most of the work was community work involving *contrats emploi-solidarité*. The employment contract was intended for disadvantaged persons, in particular young unemployed, long-term unemployed, the unemployed over 50 and recipients of the RMI minimum subsistence income. This employment was typically in part-time jobs paid at the minimum legal wage, financed by the state and made at the disposal of local authorities and other associations. The work was extremely precarious.

The government of Lionel Jospin (Prime Minister 1995-2002) went a step further in this approach with the *nouveaux services emplois jeunes*. In this project the jobs created were full-time, with state aid of up to 80 per cent of the minimum wage (the difference being paid by the employer) and with a guarantee of five years' employment. In order to ensure that this was not simply a disguised way of recruiting new civil servants, the principle was that these new recruits were to be employed in "new services" that did not already exist. These jobs could be situated in associations or local authorities within the public sector. At the local authority level, the jobs included areas such as sports (coaching), urban security (community policing, maintenance of facilities), social assistance (public letter-writer, assistance and advice to immigrants, help with transport), environment (education in sorting waste, maintenance of parks and nature reservations, education in environmental issues), culture (library hosts) and employment support (advice and information). Some jobs correspond to previous state functions that were progressively abandoned for financial reasons and whose social role has been rediscovered e.g. caretakers of buildings. Others correspond to new functions such as education in sorting waste and public letter-writing. In total, 65,000 such jobs have been created in local authorities alone.

The idea behind this project is, if these new services really meet the population's expectations, that this will stimulate the emergence of a market that in the long run would provide employment. This hypothesis seems highly unrealistic and most of the jobs being created are unlikely to leave the public sphere. When the system was launched, many

observers were very concerned, seeing it as a 'time bomb' that would explode when employers got rid of these young employees after five years. At the moment, however, it appears that many of these young people have not remained in these jobs for the full five years and have found other employment. Also, the end of the five years coincides with the beginning of a wave of retirement in the civil service. This project may, therefore, be a clever way of preparing for those departures – provided that the different modes of recruitment can be adapted.

Emplois jeunes was defined by its objectives. There was no formal educational qualification as the spirit of the law was to offer jobs to those who were unlikely to find work by other means. In practice, however, this has not entirely been the case, for in some cases employers have not hesitated to engage highly qualified people, even if it has meant supplementing the salary, thus partly contradicting the spirit of the law. As many as 65 per cent of the beneficiaries employed by local authorities have a *baccalauréat*. The law emphasises criteria of competencies rather than of qualifications. The idea was to promote inventiveness and the capacity to deal concretely with new problems. The development of these *emplois jeunes* has consequently led to the recognition and reproduction of these competencies. Studies have identified the new competencies required in the new jobs and the result has been the definition of training programmes and the creation of degrees corresponding to these new functions. The new degrees stem from new needs in the professional environment as well as from the dynamic of the educational system. The recruitment of 350,000 young people over five years represented a significant job market likely to drive the educational system. Even if the training in this case is provided by educational institutions, definition of its content is based largely on professional criteria.

When the question is raised of the integration of the *jeunes employes* into the services of local authorities, a tension is seen between this pragmatic mode of recognition and development of competencies and the statutory principles of the local public service. Concretely, the relation between a list of occupations defined in practice and a list of formal jobs in the civil service presents several problems as when the *emploi jeune* diverges *de facto* from the philosophy of the 'new service'. However, this does not apply to really new jobs. In that case it is necessary to match new functions, for example education in sorting waste, with old ones such as public health staff or with very broad categories such as technical staff. In any case, the person has to pass the competitive entrance exam, which implies a required educational level. Some young people have shown their ability to deal with problems on the job, whereas they would not have in some cases even been allowed to sit for the exam and in other cases succeeded in the examination which involve educational tests that do not correspond to competencies deployed in practice.

This discrepancy is now leading to proposals for a new mode of recruitment that is challenging usual practices in the public service, with a competitive entrance examination specifically for those who occupied posts in the areas concerned. The principle of such competitive examinations was established in Article 18 of the Law of 2001-2 3 January 2001, completing Article 36 of the Law 84-53 of 25 January 1984. These exceptional terms of recruitment reflect a trend towards a competency-based approach.

Even if the issue in the creation of *emplois jeunes* and in their reclassification as municipal services is 'employment', there is also a question of 'competency'. Unlike typical jobs for which there is a precise job description, the *emplois jeunes* have had to invent their own work. Only those who have effectively managed to meet the challenges have been retained. Young people with little education have thus shown themselves in some cases to be more competent than those with qualifications. This action is largely result-oriented and based on competency frameworks. By creating specific training and then exceptional recruitment procedures, these competencies have been recognised in contrast to traditional educational criteria and methods used in competitive exams in the civil service.

Conclusion

The above examples have shown two approaches in the valorisation of competencies in the French public sector. In the case of the engineers, the action is close to a competency-based approach related to the organisation, even if we are still far away from competency management. In the case of the reclassification of *emplois jeunes*, we are closer to approaches in which professional or occupational competencies and their corresponding demonstrated behaviours are validated. Even if the cases are not typical, they have the merit of indicating how a trend from a qualifications-based approach to a competency-based approach to personnel management can take place gradually and pragmatically, without disrupting the principles of the traditional civil service. In terms of guidelines for action, these examples suggest that personnel managers should focus more on the tools used in the recognition of an individuals' learning during their careers, an essential dimension of the statute, than on traditional exam-oriented competency frameworks, which seem until now to have reinforced bureaucracy more than to remove it.

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