

# REFORMING THE STATE GOVERNANCE: A PERSPECTIVE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT INNOVATIONS AND CONTRACT SERVICE EXPERTISE

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## Abstract

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The article examines current conditions and prerequisites for the development of project management and contract employment in the civil service system with a specific view of the Republic of Kazakhstan experience. Global innovative trends and the Industry 5.0 paradigm have significantly changed approaches to project management in recent years. The innovative value creation allows successfully implementing projects, optimizing the costs of time, money, and human resources, without deviating from the planned quality of the final product of the project (Malik et al., 2019). The research implies several methods (retrospective and comparative analysis, scenario forecasting) to analyze data received from surveys (10,942 civil servants) and interviews with 24 experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations. The findings highlight the main emphasis on improving the quality of human capital and transitioning to “flexible” management tools. However, opponents assume that new methods will bring “chaos” to state apparatus, undermine the foundation of national security, and change the achieved level of checks and balances. Thus, the proposed solutions with two scenarios in mind could be a potential benefit or introduce uncertainty for the country. Based on this assumption, the article proposes key recommendations for the full implementation of these new innovative institutions for the Kazakhstani civil service.

**Keywords:** Governance, Project Management, Contract Employees, Expert Interview, Survey, Civil Service

**Authors' individual contribution:** Conceptualization — A.Am.; Methodology — A.Am. and A.Aitb.; Writing — Original Draft — A.Am., A.Aitb., M.Z., and A.Y.; Writing — Review & Editing — A.Am.; Investigation — A.Am. and A.Y.; Resources — A.Am., Z.T., A.Aitb., M.Z., and A.Y.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Principles of good governance are aimed to improve the quality of the state apparatus. One of the key global trends is the transition to a matrix government structure. The network model of government activities is carried out on the basis of matrix project-oriented structures and cross-functional project teams working in an agile format with the direct participation of representatives of business and civil society. Taking into account the experience of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, as a key idea for reforming the public administration system, it is proposed to move to a network model of government based on the improvement of existing organizational culture and project thinking, as well as to shift from “vertical” to “flat” organizational structures (Yevniyev et al., 2020).

The system for the successful implementation of project management in government agencies is unique for each specific state, making it impossible to apply a template and standard approaches. Thus, according to Grindle (2007) given the limited resources of money, time, knowledge, and human and organizational capacities, practitioners are correct in searching for the best ways to move towards better governance in a particular country context. The governments of developing countries, including Kazakhstan, have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to achieve all the fundamental principles of the concept of good governance (Bokayev, Amirova, et al., 2023; Bokayev & Amirova, 2023). This concept was therefore replaced by good enough governance principles, which give direct attention to considerations of the minimal conditions of governance necessary to allow political and economic development to occur (Grindle, 2007).

The primary aim of the paper is to explore and propose practical strategies for reforming state governance in Kazakhstan by integrating project management innovations and contract civil service approaches. The study seeks to address the following objectives:

1) Identify current trends: to examine the prevailing trends and practices in project management and contract civil services, both globally and within Kazakhstan.

2) Assess foundational prerequisites: to analyze the institutional, regulatory, and human capital requirements necessary for the successful implementation of these approaches in the context of Kazakhstan.

3) Develop and evaluate scenarios: to formulate and assess potential development scenarios (evolutionary and proactive) for integrating project management and contract civil services, considering their feasibility and support from stakeholders.

The overarching goal is to provide actionable insights and recommendations for creating a more flexible, efficient, and innovative public administration system that aligns with Kazakhstan's national development goals and good governance principles.

Based on a literature review, survey, and expert interview results the study proposes two main scenarios for the possible development of two approaches for Kazakhstan: project management and contract civil servants. To achieve these goals, the following research questions will be studied:

*RQ1:* What are the main trends in the implementation of project management and contract services?

*RQ2:* What are the foundations and prerequisites for the development of these solutions in Kazakhstan?

*RQ3:* What scenarios for the development can be proposed? Which scenario will receive the most support from experts?

The study on reforming state governance in Kazakhstan through project management innovations and contract civil services draws upon a combination of theoretical and conceptual frameworks to analyze and propose solutions for enhancing governance systems. These frameworks include:

1) Theories of innovation:

- Classical innovation theory: grounded in the works of Schumpeter (1934) and Kuznets (1971), the study incorporates the perspective that innovation drives economic and institutional development. It explores how introducing new methods, such as project management and contract services, can catalyze changes in governance structures;

- Alternative innovation theories: inspired by thinkers like Rogers (2003) and Freeman and Soete (1997), the study extends the concept of innovation beyond economics to political and social domains. This approach supports the integration of innovative practices, such as Agile methodologies, into public administration.

2) Good governance and good enough governance:

- Good governance: the study references the principles of good governance as a guiding standard, emphasizing transparency, efficiency, and accountability in public administration;

- Good enough governance: highlighting the limitations of resources in Kazakhstan, the framework acknowledges the pragmatic approach of achieving minimal governance conditions necessary for socio-economic development, as articulated by Grindle (2007).

3) Project management framework:

- Generic project management theory: drawing from Turner's (1999) definition of a project, the framework views governance reforms as structured endeavors requiring the organization of resources to achieve specific objectives within constraints of time, cost, and quality;

- Agile and hybrid methodologies: the study emphasizes the adoption of matrix structures and Agile approaches, which focus on flexibility, collaboration, and iterative progress, as a response to dynamic governance challenges.

4) Institutional and human capital theory:

- Institutional frameworks: the study evaluates governance reforms through the lens of institutional soundness, including regulatory frameworks and organizational structures, to ensure effective implementation of project management;

- Human capital development: inspired by works on public sector competencies (Grindle, 2007), the framework underscores the importance of skilled personnel in implementing reforms, highlighting the role of contract employees in bridging skill gaps.

5) Citizen-centric framework:

- Public value theory: rooted in the notion that governance reforms should deliver measurable

benefits to citizens, businesses, and civil society, the framework integrates stakeholder analysis to align project goals with societal needs;

- Collaboration and networking: the study incorporates the idea of fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, viewing project teams as cross-functional units that include government officials, private sector experts, and civil society representatives.

By synthesizing these theoretical and conceptual perspectives, the study provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of governance reforms in Kazakhstan. This approach not only identifies challenges but also formulates practical solutions grounded in theory and tailored to the country's context.

The research addresses Kazakhstan's transition toward modern governance models. It is relevant and significant due to the following reasons:

- Alignment with global governance trends;
- Addressing institutional challenges: Kazakhstan's governance system faces issues such as bureaucratic rigidity, lack of skilled personnel, and insufficient flexibility. By exploring innovative approaches, the study provides practical solutions to address these challenges;

- Contextual adaptation: the research tailors' global best practices to Kazakhstan's socio-political and economic conditions, ensuring that proposed reforms are both feasible and culturally appropriate.

- Post-pandemic adaptation: the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for more agile and responsive governance systems. This study offers insights into how Kazakhstan can build resilience in its public administration.

The study uses mixed methods, including analytical approaches (deduction, induction, retrospective and comparative analysis, and scenario forecasting), survey (10,942 government employees; their perspectives on project management and contract services), and expert interviews (in-depth discussions with 24 experts from diverse sectors).

The study highlights the absence of a unified methodology for project management in the public sector, particularly in Kazakhstan. It also identifies the lack of adequate training, legal frameworks, and motivational strategies for implementing project management effectively. The gaps are amplified by the absence of tailored approaches for integrating contract employees into the existing governance systems.

The authors try to shed light on these research questions by analyzing existing literature, conducting retrospective analyses, survey and expert interviews. The study's contributions as follows:

- Recommendation of pilot implementation for contract services and Agile methodologies;
- Identification of evolutionary and proactive approaches for integrating project management and contract services;
- Recommendation of project goals alignment with national strategic priorities.

The structure of the article is as follows. Section 1 begins with a discussion of various aspects of project management in government activities. Section 2 proceeds with theoretical and historiographical reference. Section 3 presents the research methodology. Section 4 discloses main results of survey and in-depth study of the expert interview results. Based on the utilization of theoretical discussion and research design, Section 5

discusses key recommendations aimed at introducing new approaches in the state governance. And, finally, Section 6 includes conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study examined research papers devoted to project management and contract service, assessing the effectiveness of project activities, as well as the conditions for the success of the project approach in the civil service of Kazakhstan. Within the framework of the civil service system a focus is on obtaining a high-quality public good. Project management is one of the latest innovative practices. And contract service allows realizing the potential.

### 2.1. Theoretical foundation for project management innovations

The public sector project management innovation is a relatively new research niche in the public administration literature, which has been thoroughly studied within various fields of scientific knowledge. A Google Scholar search in August, 2024 found references to 7.8 million publications for project management, and innovation in project management constituted about 73% (or 5.7 million articles) of them. Researchers cover various aspects of this concept, including but not limited to innovation itself, current project management system, advanced information technology and citizen(client)-centricity based on Industry 5.0 paradigm. The literature review is based on the study of publications from foreign and domestic sources on the problems of innovation project management and contract service.

The term innovation is given special attention in the research papers of Rogers (2003), Schumpeter (1934), Kuznets (1971), Galbraith (1999), and Freeman and Soete (1997). In general, two approaches to the theory of innovation could be distinguished: classic and alternative. The first approach aimed at forming the direct content of innovation, the relationship and mutual influence of innovation and economics in their historical sequence (Bokayev et al., 2022; Bokayev, Zhanzhigitova, et al., 2023; Kosherbayeva et al., 2024). Alternative theories assume that the content of innovations is transferred to other spheres of life — political and social (Malik et al., 2019; Amirova et al., 2024). The majority of theories are based on the fact that innovation is inventing something new by introducing changes through specific obstacles.

In turn, Turner (1999) developed a generic definition of a project as an endeavor in which human, financial and material resources are organized in a novel way to undertake a unique scope of work, of given specification, which constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change defined by quantitative and qualitative objectives. And further, Filippov and Mooi (2010) conducted a comprehensive study to characterize the interplay between "innovation", "research and development" and "project management".

The field of project management is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by cutting-edge trends that are reshaping its landscape. The current trends reshaping project management include the growing importance of proactive skills and

digital competencies, the adoption of Agile methodologies in response to dynamic and unpredictable environments, and the integration of advanced technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI) (Adegbite et al., 2023). One of the criteria for project success is the satisfaction of project users. That is why projects in the field of public administration should be based on an analysis of the interests of the population, the non-governmental sector, business representatives, and other subjects of public relations, and not only on solving problematic issues in certain areas. Difficulties in introducing the principles of project management into the activities of state authorities and local governments most often arise due to insufficient flexibility and bureaucratic regulation of government structures by “immutable regulations”, the lack of properly trained specialists, and resistance to any changes on the part of some workers at all levels. Also, the innovation suggests collaboration and networking among key stakeholders. The professionals serve as experts in these networks, but they also manage the interaction between the multiple participants. The place of labor law relations of civil servants in the system of relations between state administration and labor contract, its theoretical-conceptual and legal basis were analyzed in the article. There were touched upon elements which combine the labor of civil servants in the system of relations of state administration and labor contract character (Mammadov, 2023).

Furthermore, based on a literature review by applying the funnel method a complex of criteria (predictors) for effective project management was identified. These predictors include:

1) Institutional framework (Aga et al., 2016; Malik et al., 2019; Qiu et al., 2019; Kartov, 2020; Mammadov, 2023): Is the institutional basis for implementing the initiative sound?

2) External environment (Malik et al., 2019; Baimukhanov et al., 2022): Are there external obstacles to the implementation of the initiative?

3) Internal environment (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Grindle, 2007; Omarkhanova et al., 2022): Is there internal unity and common goals for the implementation of the project?

4) Human capital (Jackson, 1992; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Læg Reid, 2000; Grindle, 2007; Kartov, 2020; Baimukhanov, 2022; Mammadov, 2023): Are there competent personnel to implement the initiative?

5) budget (Kartov, 2020): Are there enough budget resources?

6) methodology (Qiu et al., 2019): Are clear methodological procedures for project implementation approved?

7) Public value (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Omarkhanova et al., 2022): Does this initiative benefit the population as the ultimate beneficiary?

Recent researches in project management and contract service highlights several emerging trends, driven by advances in technology, changing workplace dynamics, and an increased focus on sustainability and well-being.

Researchers such as Pepaj and Batalli (2024), Bajrami and Bajrami (2024), and Rohman et al. (2024) considered project management as a core for public sector transformation both on central and local level of public administration. Effective change management strategies are critical, especially in dynamic environments (Effendi & Ali, 2023; Kurnia &

Setiawan, 2023). As organizations undergo digital transformation and other changes, project managers are expected to integrate change management practices and optimize resource allocation to be effective.

Other researchers (Atzori, 2017; Müller et al., 2024) pay special attention to the increased use of AI and digitization in project management frameworks. AI tools are reshaping project management by automating repetitive tasks, analyzing real-time data, and predicting risks. These technologies enable project managers to focus on strategic decision-making rather than operational details.

The use of analytics tools for real-time data monitoring and predictive modeling is becoming standard (Jati et al., 2023). This helps project managers anticipate challenges and optimize strategies. Agile methodologies, once confined to tech, are being adopted in industries like healthcare, finance, and manufacturing, demonstrating their versatility and effectiveness in varied sectors. Advanced analytics and predictive modeling empower managers to make informed decisions, optimize strategies, and proactively address risks. Data-centric tools enhance efficiency and alignment with organizational objectives (Mangla et al., 2021; Zadeh et al., 2024).

In pursuit of newfangled trends, the ethical aspects of digitalization of project management system are becoming crucial both for public and private sector organizations. There is a growing emphasis on integrating sustainability practices (Chouhan et al., 2024). This includes balancing economic, environmental, and social factors to align projects with broader responsibility goals. This reflects growing regulatory requirements and citizen-centric initiatives (Scoleze Ferrer et al., 2020; Stanitsas et al., 2021). Besides the green growth paradigm, the reflection of internal and behavioral aspects of human capital plays a significant role for sustainable development (Astuti et al., 2023; Mutambara et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence is increasingly recognized as crucial for fostering collaboration and reducing conflicts. Moreover, prioritizing team mental health and work-life balance has become integral to maintaining productivity and morale in a project management system. A special role is allocated to leadership as a factor in building organizational performance (Sun, 2018; Puaschunder, 2018; Mrwebi, 2019).

The data analysis shows that the system for the successful implementation of innovation project management in government agencies is unique for each specific state and makes template, standard approaches to its implementation impossible.

## 2.2. Kazakhstani context: Starting point and conditions

The Kazakhstani civil service system has gone through multi-stage phases of development with a transition from more bureaucratic to strategic management with elements of an innovative model on the way to the principles of good governance.

One of the latest rounds of public administration reform was the adoption of the Program of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan “Nation’s Plan — 100 Concrete Steps” (2015), as well as the Concept for the Development of the Public Administration System until 2030. Over the last nine years, amendments to existing laws,

new laws, and departmental rules have been adopted, and various pilot projects have been launched. The main guideline was the professionalization of the civil service with an emphasis on its strategic characteristics. At the same time, the system acquired a more closed career format. However, some innovations in this reform introduced aspects of open competitiveness and flexibility in the civil service model.

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown the transition to remote work and the increased expectations of the population due to the ensuing uncertainty were especially indicative for Kazakhstan (Bokayev, Amirova, et al., 2024; Bokayev, Amirova, & Torebekova, 2024). The authorities, realizing that the population requires greater openness and information accessibility, as well as flexibility and timeliness of decision-making, initiated a number of projects that were not developed when “Nation’s Plan — 100 Concrete Steps” was announced.

Such an example is admission to work in the civil service for foreign managers, individual specialists from the private sector and citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan — employees of international organizations. Their appointment may be carried out according to special requirements and a separate list of positions. This move makes the civil service as more open and competitive system. Moreover, based on research “Analysis of the practice of the Institute of contract civil servants” (2021), the contract civil servants could potentially be attracted at the following levels: strategic and operational management. However, the most discussed and therefore potential is operational activity, such as solving specific problems, generating and managing changes, specific knowledge and expertise, and project management (Bokayev, Utepova, et al., 2024).

The above-mentioned Concept-2030 lays the foundations for the transition from a linear-functional to a matrix structure of government bodies through the introduction of project management. Project management was introduced beginning in 2013. In 2016, the National standard of the Republic of Kazakhstan ISO 21500-2014 “Guide for project management” (2014) has been entered into force in Kazakhstan. And only five years later the main documents of project management for the public administration system were adopted. However, the most ambitious steps towards its implementation were taken in 2021-2022. At that time, the National Project Office was created at the level of the Prime Minister. An authorized body and procedures for project management were created. However, the conditions for attracting and creating project teams have not been resolved.

Thus, these two approaches for the Kazakhstani civil service system are closely interrelated, since those experts must become effective specialists in managing key projects for the country’s industries.

At the same time, the amendment to Article 43-1 of Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 416-V ZRK/2015 “On the Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (2015) significantly narrowed the original tasks. In particular, project management has been defined as one of the tools for achieving goals established in strategic and (or) program documents. While a contract employee must only be a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan, attracted to a government agency under

a contract for the implementation of national and other projects.

In addition, the Law also provides for so-called international employees. At the same time, citizens of Kazakhstan with more than five years of experience in international and transnational organizations are provided only with non-competitive appointment to administrative positions (Bokayev, Davletbayeva, et al., 2024, Issenova et al., 2024).

Also, the supervision of the Agency for Civil Service Affairs over contract employees remains — namely in terms of coordinating qualification requirements, monitoring the personnel composition of contract employees, and the algorithm for interaction between a contract employee and a government agency. Thus, flexibility and efficiency, which is one of the characteristics of project management, is already losing its relevance.

The next limiting factor is the budget allocated to pay the contract employee. Since remuneration is carried out at the expense of savings provided for the maintenance of a government agency or the implementation of a project. At the same time, the salary amount is determined by the government body, but within the framework of available savings.

A positive aspect is the flexibility of the contract term, which is determined based on the period of completion of the assigned tasks, but no more than one calendar year with the possibility of extension during the period of implementation of national and other projects.

According to Concept-2030, the public sector’s needs for highly specialized knowledge and competencies will increase. These innovations are difficult to cultivate within the current “career” model of civil service (Yevniyev et al., 2020). The innovative capacity of civil servants could play a crucial role in this endeavor (Bokayev, Zhanzhigitova, et al., 2023). Thus, one of the solutions is the introduction of the institution of contract employees and the principles of project management as elements of the positional model. This attempt should be preceded by optimization of the complex hierarchy of the government structure, reduction of the number of civil servants, decrease of budget expenditures, and transition to strategic personnel planning.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is based on the study of foreign and domestic publications on project management issues, as well as survey and expert interview outcomes. The research design therefore incorporates a number of methodological approaches:

- Induction: from particular answers to general conclusions on the issues being analyzed;
- Deduction: from general conclusions to specific, targeted recommendations;
- Desk research: content analysis of the literature (foreign and domestic);
- Retrospective analysis: a historical approach highlighting the mechanisms of project management development through public administration enhancement;
- Comparative analysis: based on the opposite opinion (yes/no) or professional employment of the expert (public sector/private sector), as well as survey participants;

- Scenario forecasting: develop the most promising directions for further research: evolutionary and proactive.

In the course of the study on the further improvement of the civil service system:

- Anonymous survey was conducted (April-May, 2023), in which 10,942 government employees participated;

- A list of interview questions and an algorithm for conducting it were developed;

- Interviewers were selected from among the members of the research team, and they were briefed;

- A pool of 24 experts was selected, from whom consent for the processing of the received data was previously obtained.

According to Table 1, most respondents have bachelor's degrees (83.1%) and are women (63.7%). Thirty-four point seven (34.7) percent of respondents belong to the age group 30-40 (the average age is 39) and 62.9% are married. About 81.1% of participated civil servants work in an executive position at local level of public administration.

**Table 1.** Profile of survey participants

Characteristics		Number, %
Gender	Male	36.3%
	Female	63.7%
Age	20-30	23.5%
	31-40	34.7%
	41-50	24.7%
	More than 51	17.1%
	Secondary school graduate	0.1%
Education	College graduate	7.9%
	Bachelor degree	83.1%
	Master's degree	8.2%
	PhD	0.7%
	Marital status	Married
Single		22.7%
Divorced		11.2%
Widow		3.2%
Occupation	Executive position	81.9%
	Managerial position	17.5%
	Other	0.6%

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Bokayev, Amirova, and Torebekova (2024).

Taking into account requests from individual experts for the anonymity of their answers and ethical requirements, the table below shows the number of experts and their place of work.

**Table 2.** List of organizations participated in the interview

No.	Name of economic sector or organization	Number of experts
<i>Internal experts</i>		
1.	Authorities of the public administration system	7
2.	Quasi-governmental sector companies	2
<i>External experts</i>		
3.	Private sector companies	2
4.	Public associations	2
5.	Astana Civil Service Hub	3
6.	Research organizations and universities	8
7.	Total	24

As follows from Table 2, the invited experts represent various sectors of the economy: government bodies, quasi-governmental and private sectors, public associations, and research organizations. They interact on an ongoing basis with government agencies as part of their activities or they are current government employees.

From all 17 interview questions, the next questions were selected for purpose of the article:

Question 1 (N9 of 17): "Recently, changes were made to the Law "On Civil Service", stipulating that contract civil servants will appear in Kazakhstan. The agreement with specialists will be signed for one year for the implementation of national projects. Do you think that hiring an expert on a contract basis should be considered not as an opportunity to avoid lengthy formal competitive procedures when hiring for the civil service, but, first of all, as a way to introduce human resource planning with a focus on the specific strategic objectives of the department?"

Question 2 (N10 of 17): "Will the institution of contract civil service contribute to the flexibility of the civil service, for example, when formulating a proposal for a potential expert, make the most of an individual approach in determining the terms of employment, the terms of the contract, the limits of responsibility, as well as the procedure for assessing the results obtained and the associated payment terms?"

Question 3 (N11 of 17): "Will this institute provide opportunities for further cascading of project tasks into the functionality of attracted experts?"

Thus, the study suggests multiple methodological approaches to analyze the implementation of project management and contract civil service reforms in Kazakhstan. The research topic potentially could be studied further based on several alternative methods:

- Longitudinal analysis: to provide insights into the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of analyzed reforms. For this purpose, the researchers are invited to collect data across multiple time points to assess the progress of project management adoption and its impact on governance efficiency;

- Case studies: it allows a comparison of the Kazakhstan experience with global best practices or failures of similar governance reforms;

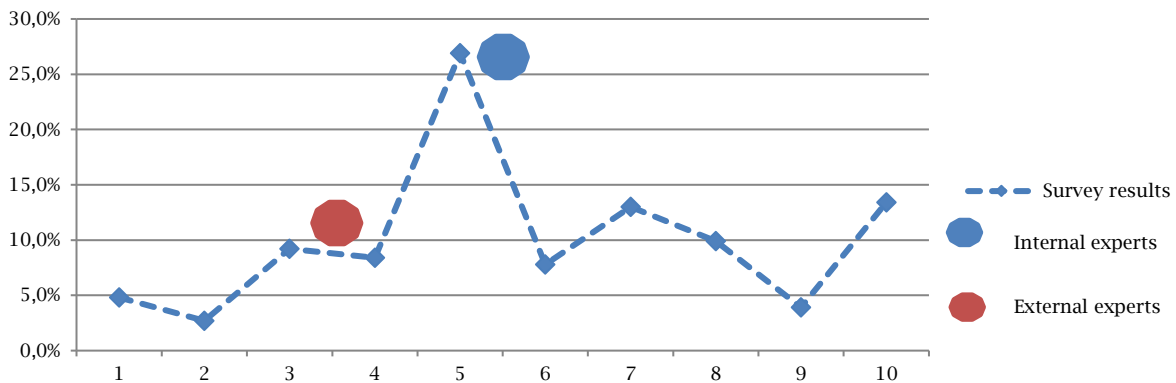
- Comparative historical analysis: it provides a cultural and regional context for evaluating the feasibility of reforms. For this purpose, the researchers will study archival documents, previous policies, and cultural attitudes toward governance and public administration;

- Cost-benefit analysis: to evaluate direct and indirect costs and benefits associated with project management and contract services. It will quantify the economic implications of reforms and other research methods and procedures.

However, the constructed forecasting models are based on a functional grading system, which links wages to the powers assigned to the position, responsibility, and nature of the work and the complexity of the decisions made. The project (payment based on grading system) first started in 2018 and today covers all government agencies. In this connection, the principles and quantitative indicators that were used at the very beginning of the project are laid down as the main assumptions with two scenarios in mind: evolutionary and proactive. A description of the approaches and characteristics of each scenario is given in the following parts of the article.

## 4. RESULTS

We asked civil servants and experts: "How do they assess the general condition and current level of reform of the civil service in Kazakhstan on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a low level, 10 is a high level" (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Assessment of the general condition and current level of civil service reform

According to Figure 1, respondents to the survey tend to assess the current state of the civil service neutrally (the average score is 5.87 and 5.93 points, respectively). At the same time, the assessment of the current state of the civil service according to the opinion of internal experts is quite high (about 6-7 points). However, such an assessment is built in the prism of the development of e-government and digitalization of processes of interaction with citizens and does not cover all aspects of reform. Noteworthy, external experts (representatives of the non-state sector) have an alternative opinion regarding the quality and success of the reforms carried out. Their combined score does not exceed 4 out of 10.

Further, in accordance with the methodological part of this study, experts were asked three key questions about contract employees and project management during in-depth interviews. During the processing of the interview results, two main approaches were identified among experts to this aspect: evolutionary and proactive.

The evolutionary approach is to preserve the current interpretation of the rules for attracting contract experts for narrow-profile tasks. This raises concerns:

- Effectiveness due to the limitation of the expert's actions within the framework of previously approved national projects;
- Effectiveness of interaction between such specialists and civil servants, due to the limited time of the contract itself and possible prejudices among government agency employees.

Therefore, one of the results of the contract employee's activities should be the transfer of knowledge to existing civil servants, and one of the necessary conditions should be the right to adjust the parameters of the implementation of a national project within the approved goal on the principles of project management.

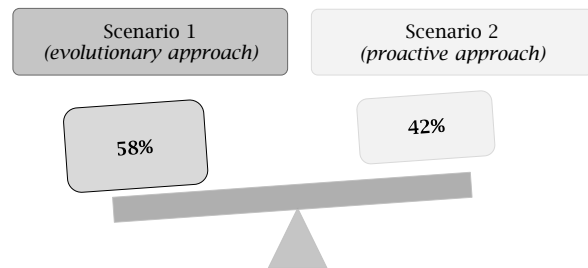
A proactive approach is associated with the possible implementation of the contract system in the work of the civil service everywhere, while experts propose to take into account the following aspects:

- Transition to matrix structures within the framework of project management. In particular, the principles of agile with a focus on results rather than on process or form were mentioned;
- Testing on the example of several government bodies (pilot project);
- Wages for hired experts should be established within the framework of the approved wage fund of

the state body and its subordinate organizations, as well as funds of national projects;

- Grant the right to the government body to determine the qualification requirements for contract employees without coordination by the Agency for Civil Service Affairs;
- Collegial and transparent selection process with creation of a pool (personnel reserve);
- Personal responsibility of the first heads of state bodies for the selection of personnel;
- Recruit mid-level managers to expert positions and positions (heads of departments in akimats and heads of departments in ministries);
- General supervision of contract managers by the National Project Office.

Figure 2 provides additional information about expert choice depending on scenario.

**Figure 2.** "Calibration" of experts' opinions

Systematization of experts' responses demonstrated that the expert community is dominated by opinions about a gradual "soft" transition to contract services and project management. The majority of respondents agree on the need for pilot approbation using the example of one state agency or region, as well as the need to start with executive positions. The next section of the paper will examine in more detail the advantages and disadvantages of each of the proposed scenarios.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Kazakhstan faces a difficult path to rebuild the bureaucratic system to have more flexible structures. The results of the experts' assessment indicate that the country is not ready for a full-scale transition to project management. The regulatory framework has not been shaped and the procedures for attracting contract employees have not been specified (Table 3).



**Table 3.** Criteria-based assessment of each scenario

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Scenario 1</i>	<i>Scenario 2</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
Institutional framework	A regulatory framework has been created for the implementation of project management. Operational management	Lack of concrete procedures for implementation of contractual service. Strategic and operational management	It is necessary to improve the regulatory framework. Identification of controversial issues
External environment	Complication of the structure of society and social relations	Creation of project portfolios in priority areas of the country's development	Strengthen the relationship between strategic and project management. Implementation of priority projects
Internal environment	Rigid organizational structure, duplication of functions due to partial implementation of project management	Identification of ineffective duties performance by employees, violation of work deadlines, insufficient understanding by employees of their functions	A clear distribution of goals by the manager, identification of the teams involved in the project implementation
Human capital	Lack of motivation to change and improve	Reluctance of civil servants to leave their comfort zone	Adoption of a unified methodology and techniques, mentoring, advanced training courses, surveys
Budget	Low return on projects	Selection of the most profitable and least costly project	Understanding the potential of the project
Methodology	Lack of a unified project management methodology		Development of methodological recommendations
Public value	Preference for obtaining a social effect from the project implementation instead of profitability	Focus on achieving strategic priority goals for society	Transparency, public control with participation of civil society institution

As follows from Table 3, each scenario has its own advantages and disadvantages. However, experts unanimously support the introduction of these management tools in the civil service system, taking into account the following conditions:

- Transfer key industry functions to contract employees;
- Administrative (support) functions should be centralized or outsourced;
- Control functions to be retained by civil servants;
- Exclude access to state secrets and material subsidies for contract employees (payment according to the contract);

- Start from pilot implementation with executive positions;
- Link projects and contracts of contractual servants with the strategic objectives of the government body (employer);
- Grant the minister with the authority to reduce the staff numbers and redistribute the additional financial resources among the projects and contractual employees.

Overall systematized conclusions allow us to identify “issue points”, which require more “thoughtful” analysis during implementation (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Systematization of experts' assessment

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Advanced training on project management	Insufficient competence of civil servants
Right attitude towards innovation among civil servants	Lack of knowledge and skills in the field of project management
Analysis of previously obtained results	Bureaucracy
Determining the degree of achievability of the set goals	Lack of effective legal and regulatory framework
Selection of employees for each specific project	Difficulty in assessing key performance indicators
Setting goals and expected results	Frequent adjustments to project tasks
Predicting the degree of effectiveness	Low degree of project replication
	Ineffective selection of projects at the initial stage

As follows from the table above numerous management decisions are necessary in order to improve the quality of training and mentoring, to provide constant information support, organizing interdepartmental interaction. The strict time frame for the implementation of national projects does not leave time to delay these processes. New challenges require the development of the competence of civil servants: flexibility of thinking and readiness for change, the ability to interact within the framework of teamwork, personal effectiveness, and decision-making under conditions of risk and uncertainty. Project management is being implemented slowly in Kazakhstan, and there is no widespread practice of its systematization. The current trends cover the following directions:

- Agile and hybrid approaches (combination of agile and “waterfall” methods);
- Remote and distributed teams (digital tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, Google Workspace, and Trello);

- AI, machine learning (ML), and robotic process automation (virtual reality and augmented reality, IoT);
- Data-driven decision-making (big data, dashboards, Data Analytics);
- Blockchain technology;
- Emphasis on soft skills (leadership, communication, change management);
- Sustainability and social responsibility (United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], green growth, social impact);
- Continuous learning and development;
- Focus on user experience;
- Cloud-based solutions;
- Diversity and inclusion.

In this regard, the further development of project management innovations could unveil potential growth opportunities for the country.



## 6. CONCLUSION

The study sheds light on the evolving landscape of state governance in Kazakhstan, emphasizing the potential of project management innovations and contract civil services as transformative tools. Drawing from theoretical insights, empirical data, and expert opinions, it identifies key trends, challenges, and opportunities for reforming public administration.

Despite notable progress, such as the establishment of the National Project Office and the adoption of project management standards, the findings reveal that Kazakhstan is not yet fully prepared for a comprehensive transition. Challenges include insufficient regulatory frameworks, resistance to change, limited expertise in project management, and a lack of unified methodologies.

The results of the study show that there is no clear understanding regarding the further development of project management institutions and contract civil servants in Kazakhstan nowadays. The “stumbling block” is the question of the scale and timing of the transformation. The “old-fashioned” way of state governance is not ready for rapid changes.

Therefore, the opinion of the advisability of an evolutionary approach to the implementation of these institutions prevails in the highest echelons of the power. Thus, it is expected that expertise in narrow areas will be brought into the civil service to achieve national interests. Supporters of a proactive approach, and to a greater extent, representatives of the private sector, advocate a flexible structure for the civil service. They are ready to move on from bureaucracy. In their understanding, the civil service assumes a compact government apparatus of key leadership appointees, hired project managers and specialists. This will lead to a reduction in the number of civil servants and significant budget savings. Coupled with a revision of the current principles and operating procedures of the state apparatus these initiatives will drive strategic and systematic transformation within the public sector. As a result, the new approaches will help public managers to achieve better public services and outcomes for citizens.

Survey and interview data indicate a preference for a cautious, pilot-based implementation of these reforms, focusing initially on executive positions within specific agencies or regions. This approach aligns with the principles of “good enough governance”, balancing ambition with practicality in resource-constrained environments.

The study highlights the need for strategic investments in human capital, regulatory enhancements, and stakeholder engagement to realize the benefits of these reforms. The integration of project management and contract civil services must align with national development goals, ensuring public value and sustainable impact.

The findings of the study on reforming state governance in Kazakhstan through project management innovations and contract civil service approaches have several significant implications:

### 1) Policy and governance:

- Tailored reforms: the findings underscore the need for reforms tailored to Kazakhstan's unique socio-economic and political context, rather than adopting generalized approaches. The proposed scenarios (evolutionary and proactive) highlight a flexible pathway for policymakers;

- Regulatory enhancements: the lack of comprehensive legal frameworks and procedural clarity necessitates urgent regulatory reforms to enable the effective implementation of project management and contract services in governance.

### 2) Institutional development:

- Capacity building: the study emphasizes the need for investments in human capital, particularly in training civil servants and project managers. Addressing resistance to change and improving competencies are critical for reform success;

- Pilot projects: initiating reforms through pilot projects in select agencies or regions offers a controlled environment to test new methodologies, build institutional capacity, and refine strategies before scaling up.

### 3) Public administration efficiency:

- Matrix and agile structures: transitioning to flat, matrix-based organizational structures can improve inter-departmental coordination and responsiveness. Agile methodologies, if adopted, could further enhance adaptability in a dynamic governance environment;

- Strategic human resource planning: integrating contract civil services with a focus on strategic objectives can enhance flexibility in staffing and align personnel expertise with project goals.

### 4) Societal and economic impact:

- Public value creation: aligning governance reforms with the interests of citizens, businesses, and civil society ensures greater public acceptance and social benefits. Project management approaches focused on public value can improve service delivery and transparency;

- Economic efficiency: reducing bureaucratic redundancies and introducing contract-based roles can lead to significant cost savings, optimizing resource allocation within the public sector.

### 5) Risk and mitigation:

- Resistance to change: institutional resistance, lack of motivation among civil servants, and insufficient flexibility in government structures remain key risks. Addressing these challenges through change management strategies is critical;

- Legal and procedural clarity: the study highlights the risk of inefficiencies arising from ambiguous legal provisions. Establishing clear, standardized methodologies for project implementation and contract employment is essential.

By addressing these implications, the government of Kazakhstan can move toward a governance model that is more adaptive, efficient, and responsive to contemporary challenges. These reforms hold the potential to significantly enhance public service delivery and align the country's governance system with international best practices.

Thus, by systematically and logically solving the aim set at the beginning of the study, answers to all the research questions were obtained. However, the paper is limited in terms of time frame, scope of coverage and objectives. Despite these limitations, future research could adopt longitudinal studies or comparative analyses with other countries to deepen understanding and inform policy-making. By addressing these gaps, Kazakhstan can advance toward a governance model that is efficient, innovative, and responsive to the needs of its citizens.

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