

INTERVIEWS FOR MANAGERIAL POSITIONS IN THE STATE ADMINISTRATION

*Far from Competency
Assessments*



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Interviews for Managerial Positions in the State Administration:
Far from Competency Assessments

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Summary

The subject of this analysis is public competitions for managerial positions in the Montenegrin state administration, with a particular focus on competency assessments, which should be carried out under the existing framework that includes assessment of innovation, leadership, results-orientation, communication and cooperation.

Failure to make a record, i.e. issue minutes of interviews conducted with candidates for such positions is a limiting methodological factor in the assessment of procedures and their application in practice. However, we were able to review reports with key questions and grades given by panel members during interviews, which form part of the public competition procedure, and which were conducted in the period September 2022 - September 2023. Therefore, this analysis is a unique opportunity to present to the general public the list of key questions that are posed to candidates for the most responsible professional positions in the state administration. According to the documentation that we were able to access, the most frequently asked questions are as follows:

1. How do you motivate your team? / What methods do you use to motivate your employees?
 - *The question was asked in 63 out of 108 conducted interviews.*
2. How do you handle crisis situations in terms of interpersonal relationships? / How do you resolve conflict situations?
 - *The question was asked in 19 out of 108 conducted interviews.*
3. How do you make unpopular decisions?
 - *The question was asked in 16 out of 108 conducted interviews.*
4. What qualities should a leader possess?
 - *The question was asked in 12 out of 108 conducted interviews.*

Additional questions or insight into the flow of answers are not available to the public. On the other hand, questions aiming at assessments of general knowledge, rather than competencies, feature frequently, and as such are not adapted to the purpose of the interview. In addition, the reports on competency assessments do not contain explanations of the grades given for the presentation of the written paper, which is part of the assessment process, nor for the oral interview, which should be focused on the five aforementioned competencies. The procedure is further compromised by the fact that the final decision on the selection is made



on the basis of a subsequent, follow-up interview, most often with the head of the employing authority. Questions in the follow-up interview sometimes go beyond the competency framework or repeat its components, but with a complete absence of any criteria or rules.

Therefore, the criteria that the members of the interviewing panel are guided by when assigning grades, and that heads of authorities are guided by when making final decisions, remain unclear. Interviews and follow-up interviews form part of the recruitment process, but depend solely on the subjective approach taken by panel members and heads of authorities. Keeping a record of interviews and introducing the obligation to explain the grading would, in addition to greater transparency, provide additional protection for candidates who apply through public competitions, as well as less opportunity for subjectivity during evaluation, thereby reducing the space for unequal treatment. The reports that we have seen show that competency assessments have not taken root, which points to the need to further strengthen the capacities of all state authorities and the Human Resources Administration, in order to apply the competency framework as a tool that can help to establish a system of merit-based recruitment.

Introduction

The subject of this analysis is the procedure for conducting public competitions, especially interviews, as part of competency assessments for high-level managerial staff¹ and heads of authorities in the Montenegrin state administration. Amendments to the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees,² which entered into force on 1 July 2018, brought about changes in this field, by conduction written paper and a structured interview, evaluating competencies, knowledge and abilities based on the prescribed criteria. Competencies represent a set of knowledge, skills and abilities of employees, which are required for the job. The Law on Civil Servants and State Employees recognises five competencies for managerial positions - leadership, results-orientation, communication, cooperation and innovation.³

Additionally, the KSAO categorisation (*knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics*) is a comprehensive system that clearly points to the need to look beyond mere knowledge assessments. It aims at measuring knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics when hiring civil servants. Knowledge implies a body of information that can be applied in a job, such as foreign languages or knowing how to use a computer. Skills refer to the ability to conduct tasks accurately, and usually focus on e.g. speed of typing, driving ability, and the like. Abilities are categories that include cognitive and physical abilities, and attitude towards other employees such as empathy. Finally, other characteristics include matters related to working styles, personality types, etc.⁴

1 According to the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees, senior managerial staff includes: secretaries of ministries and directors general in ministries, assistant heads of administrative authorities, assistant heads of the services of the Government of Montenegro and assistant directors of legal entities related to: the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund, the Health Care Insurance Fund of Montenegro, the Employment Agency, the Labour Fund and Agency for Peaceful Settlement of Disputes.

2 Law on Civil Servants and Employees (Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 002/18 from 10 January 2018).

3 Manual for Competencies of the Heads of State Authorities and Senior Managerial Staff, Human Resources Administration, 2019.

4 The Regional School of Public Administration, *Professional requirements and competency frameworks in the civil service administrations of the Western Balkans*, August 2022, available at: https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Professional+Requirements+and+Competency+Frameworks_August++2022.pdf/7081381857ab65c0d825c1412bee35de.pdf



Institute Alternative has been trying for years to obtain records of interviews conducted with candidates who have applied, through public competitions, for positions of heads of authority, or senior managerial positions. Such records would enable analysis of how competencies are assessed for the most responsible managerial positions. The Human Resources Administration refused access to such records as unfounded,⁵ stating in the explanation that the Commission for Candidate Screening (referred to in this document as the interview panel) prepares a report on the assessment of the candidate's knowledge, abilities, competencies and skills, rather than a record, although the topic previously triggered opposing views.⁶ Institute Alternative has been consistently underlining⁷ that external supervision of recruitment procedures in the state administration is difficult - from the point of view of the civil sector, and of the candidates, precisely because of lack of access to written papers and records of interviews. The aforementioned reports do not include the answers provided by candidates.⁸

Given the lack of records from interviews, we sent requests for free access to information to the Human Resources Administration, through which we requested reports on assessments of the knowledge, abilities, competencies and skills of candidates for heads of authorities and senior managerial staff for the period

5 Decision No. UPI-08-037/23-2/2 from January 26, 2023.

6 On December 14 and 15, 2022, Institute Alternative organised a Forum on the fight against corruption and political clientelism in recruitment in the public sector, attended by the then acting duty director of the Human Resources Administration, Đuro Nikač, whose quote we hereby share in full: "I would like to share a novelty that was introduced two and a half months ago in the Human Resources Administration, which is that for each assessment of persons in the category of senior management staff or heads of authorities, a record is made in the presence of an authorised record-keeper hired by the court, whereby each candidate has the opportunity to dictate and have his or her answer recorded, and at the end he or she has the obligation to sign the record, i.e. endorse it or not".

Link to the statement: <https://fb.watch/iG0nG9pRoZ/>. Subsequently, we sent a complaint to the Agency for Personal Data Protection and Free Access to Information, on February 17, 2023, due to irregularities and deficiencies in the factual situation. By January 26, 2024, we have not received a response to the appeal.

7 The Human Resources Administration refused access to interviews for managerial positions, Institute Alternative, March 2023, available at:

<https://institut-alternativa.org/en/human-resource-management-administration-denied-access-to-interviews-qa-for-key-state-administration-positions-are-still-secret/>

8 These shortcomings are also presented in our Risk Map of undue influences and corruption in recruitment in the public sector at <https://mapa-rizika.me>

September 2022 - September 2023. The Human Resources Administration adopted these requests for free access to information⁹ and submitted the requested documentation. Below are key data in relation to the submitted documentation, with the aim of underlining certain consistent deficiencies in the process of recruitment in the public administration, particularly in the context of recruitment procedures and professionalisation of the public administration, and new trends in the assessment of competencies for managerial positions. The importance of a transparent public administration is also recognised as one of the ten principles endorsed by the 44th Government of Montenegro, as a concept based on implementation of personnel policy that would be grounded in openness, meritocracy and equal opportunities, taking into account primarily the professional qualities and personal integrity of candidates, and design of professional functions.¹⁰ Optimisation of the public administration and rationalisation of the number of employees was also mentioned in the exposé of the Prime Minister Designate for the 44th Government, Miloško Spajić.¹¹ The first part of this analysis outlines what the implementation of procedures should look like for heads of authorities and high-level managerial staff, including the positive and negative indicators for interviews, which should serve as guidelines for the panel. The second part of the analysis gives an account of what the process looks like in practice, and it is based on reports and questions that were actually used in interviews, as well as follow-up interviews, which are conducted before the final decision on the recruitment is made.

9 Decision No. UPI 08-037/23-23/3 and Decision No. UPI-08-037/23/62/3.

10 D. C. "The PES Presidency adopted the principles for the formation of the Government, they will be sent to potential partners for signing", *Vijesti* online, 19 July 2023, available at: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/666040/predsjednistvo-pes-a-usvojilo-principe-za-formiranje-vlade-bice-upuceni-potencijalnim-partnerima-na-potpisivanje>

11 Exposé of the PM Designate Miloško Spajić for the composition of the 44th Government of Montenegro, 31 October 2023, available at: <https://wapi.gov.me/download-preview/959151c9-edbe-446e-aabb-4e2e41465a46?version=1.0>



- **WHAT SHOULD BE ASSESSED AT THE INTERVIEW, AND HOW COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS ARE REGULATED**

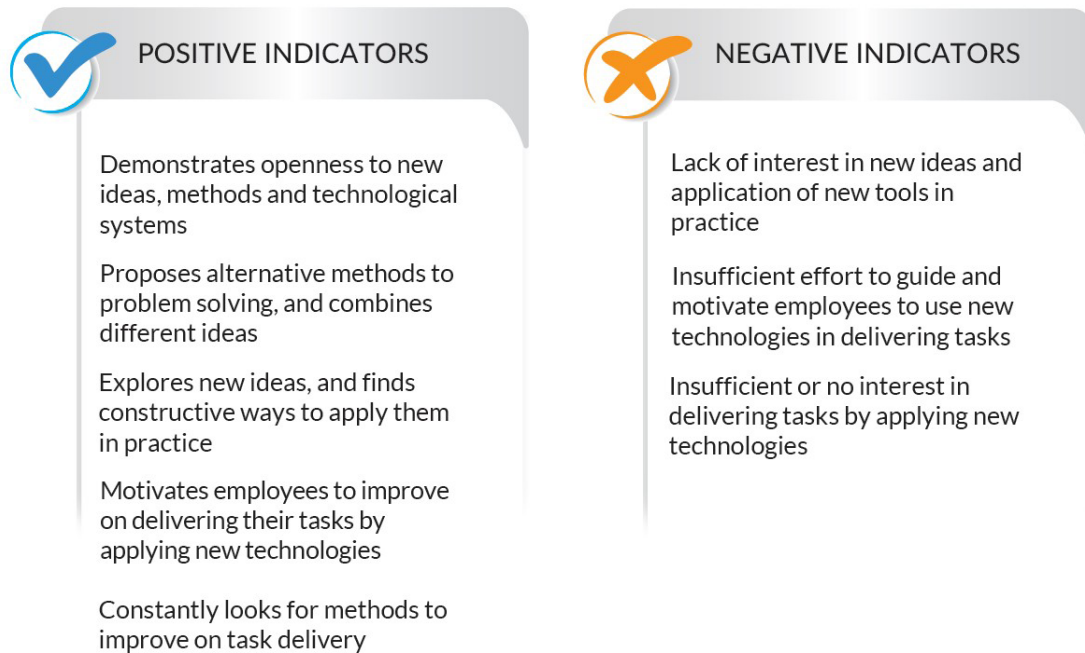
The competency framework includes each individual competency that a candidate must possess, including **leadership, communication, collaboration, results-orientation and innovation**. In 2019, the Human Resources Administration published a Manual¹² that also contains a form for evaluating written papers, and assessing competencies. The form contains criteria, grades and comments/explanation that supplements the grading. In terms of evaluations of written papers, the criteria include knowledge in the field for which the candidate is applying, setting priorities and making proposals, and structuring and systematics. An interview is conducted with each candidate that scores more than 50% on the written paper,¹³ who is subsequently assessed according to the five aforementioned competencies. The panel that is formed for each public competition consists of three members (a representative of the Human Resources Administration, a representative of the employing state authority, who is, as a rule, the head of the organisational unit that the candidate is applying for, and a prominent expert), whereby each panel member asks a certain number of questions. The Manual of the Human Resources Administration contains positive and negative indicators for each of the competencies (Figure 1), as well as examples of questions that should show whether the candidate possesses the desired behaviours for the specified position. The grades of each member of the panel should also contain an appropriate explanation.

12 Manual for Competencies of the Heads of State Authorities and Senior Managerial Staff, Human Resources Administration, 2019.

13 According to the submitted documentation, as many as eight candidates did not pass the written paper, while one candidate met the requirements of the public competition, but did not undergo the assessment process.

Figure 1 (Example of positive and negative indicators for the competency *innovation*, taken from the Manual of the Human Resources Administration)¹⁴

2.5.2 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INDICATORS FOR EASIER ASSESSMENT
OF THE COMPETENCY - INNOVATION



• **WHAT DOES PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?**

According to information submitted by the Human Resources Administration for the aforementioned period, there were 110 reports regarding the assessments of knowledge, abilities, competencies and skills of candidates in public competitions for heads of authorities and senior managerial staff. A total of 188 candidates applied through the competitions. The submitted documentation shows that for 60% of all public competitions, i.e. for 67 such calls, only one candidate applied; 27 public competitions had only two applicants; and nine competitions had three

14 From the Manual for Competencies of the Heads of State Authorities and Senior Managerial Staff.



applicants. In the observed period, documentation was submitted for only seven public competitions that had more than three candidates.¹⁵

However, it should be noted that the reports on the work of the Human Resources Administration, formerly the Human Resources Management Authority, show a trend of increasing competitiveness for the period 2019 - 2022, as there were 277 registered candidates for senior managerial positions in 22 public competitions in 2021. When it comes to heads of authorities, the largest number was recorded last year, with 81 candidates applying through 21 public competitions (Table 1).

Table 1 (Source: Annual reports of the Human Resources Management Authority/ Human Resources Administration)

	Number of public competitions (senior managerial staff and heads of authorities)	Number of candidates who applied (senior managerial staff and heads of authorities)	Average number of candidates in relation to all public competitions for positions of heads of authorities and senior managerial staff
2019	47 public competitions for 79 positions	124	1.5
2020	51 public competitions for 71 positions	152	2.1
2021	37 public competitions for 85 positions	300	3.5
2022	59 public competitions for 125 positions	337	2.7

There are also examples of public competitions where the best-ranked candidate was not selected for the position. From the documentation provided to us by the Human Resources Administration regarding the remaining 43 public competitions involving more than one candidate, it was possible to establish whether and which candidate was selected through decisions published in the Official Gazette of Montenegro and through requests for free access to information for 40 public

15 The competitions are for: assistant director of the Administration for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions (six candidates), director of the Revenue and Customs Administration (six candidates), director of the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund (five candidates), director of the State Archives (four candidates), director of the Labour Fund (seven candidates), general director of the Directorate for Payments in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (six candidates), general director of the Directorate for Protection and Rescue in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (six candidates). The documentation for the public competition without the name of the candidate (general director of the State Treasury Directorate) was also submitted.

competitions.¹⁶ In 31 public competitions, the first-ranked candidate was selected; in two competitions the second-ranked candidate was selected; and in two competitions the third-ranked candidate was selected.¹⁷

16 Public competition for which it was not possible to determine which candidate was selected was for director general of the Directorate for Scientific Research (Ministry of Science and Technological Development) - request for free access to information were not answered.

Through Decision No. UPI - 037/24-215/4 dated February 28, 2024, Ministry of Internal Affairs rejected our request regarding the decision on the appointment to a public competition for the director general of the Directorate for Protection and Rescue, it was established that the requested decision does not exist. Regarding the public competition for the position of Undersecretary for Legal Affairs/Secretariat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was not possible to determine the outcome, because the competent Ministry refused our request for free access to information with the explanation that it contains personal data (Decision no. UPI 4/3-056/24-4-2 from January 24, 2024).

The Ministry of Justice informed us that no one was selected through the public competition for the general director of the Directorate for Criminal and Civil Legislation (Decision number: UPI 01-037/23-941/1 from October 24, 2023).

The Pension and Disability Insurance Fund informed us that the Director of the Fund was not elected due to the incomplete composition of the Management Board of the Fund (Notice No. 01-3043/4 from October 19, 2023).

Through Decision No.: UP/I-02-332/2023-1 from December 27, 2023, the Administration for the Protection of Cultural Property informed us that for the decision on the appointment for public competitions for: director of the Administration, assistant directors - Sector for implementation of the establishment of cultural properties, and the assistant directors - Sector for the establishment of protection of cultural properties are not in the possession of the requested information.

Through Decision number: UPI 037/23-24/2 dated December 28, 2023, the Montenegrin Investment Agency provided us with information that the Human Resources Administration has not yet submitted confirmation of the enforceability of the decision on the selection of candidates, so the decision on the appointment has not yet been made.

17 From the attached documentation, we can establish that Vladimir Bulajić, who scored 35.67 points, was appointed as director of the Revenue and Customs Administration, and that the candidate Siniša Raičević, who scored 37 points, was not elected.

Danko Dragović, who scored 34 points, was appointed general director of the Directorate for the Economic and Financial System in the Ministry of Finance, while Bojana Bošković, who scored a total of 34.33 points, was not appointed.

In the public competition for the director general of the Directorate for Payments in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Marko Radonjić was appointed with 36 points, although Gavro Kaluđerović scored 39 points, and Vesna Korović and Zoran Irić scored 42.67 points. Vesna Čalović was appointed through the public competition for the director of the Labour Fund, having scored 34.33 points, although Jelisaveta Zorić Jović scored 36 points and Ana Mrdović scored 43 points.



Additionally, the documentation provided by the Human Resources Administration, provides insight only into individual evaluations by panel members, according to the specified criteria, but no additional comments or explanations contained in the evaluation, which forms part of the original form in the Manual (Figure 2).

Figure 2 (Taken from the Manual for Competencies of the Heads of State Authorities and Senior Managerial Staff)

Competency assessment form

State authority _____ Position _____ Name and surname of the candidate _____ <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 20px;"> Panel member _____ </div>

Criteria:	Grade	Comment / explanation for the grade
Leadership		
Result-orientation		
Cooperation		
Communication		
Innovation		

Date

Panel member signature

Figure 3 (Example taken from the documentation provided by the Human Resource Administration, on the basis of Decision no. UPI 08-037/23-23/3)

Position:	[REDACTED]			
Candidate's name and surname:	[REDACTED]			
Written paper grade	Meets the criteria			
Chair and members of the panel	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	Total:
Candidate's knowledge in the area for which they are applying	10	9	9	28
Setting priorities and giving suggestions	5	5	5	13
Structuring and systematics	5	5	5	15
Total:	20	18	18	56/3 = 18.67 points
Grades for the structured interview:				
Chair and members of the panel	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Leadership	5	5	5	15
Results-orientation	4	4	4	12
Cooperation	5	4	4	13
Communication	4	5	5	14
Innovation	4	4	4	12
Total:	22	22	22	66/3 = 22.00 points

Total score:	40.67
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This type of evaluation, which does not include additional comments, makes it impossible to assess what criteria the members of the panel are guided by when assigning grades, especially bearing in mind that it is not possible to obtain the answers provided by candidates, i.e. the records, because they are not made, as stated in the answer sent to us by the Human Resources Administration. The interview conducted by the capability assessment panel, a key element of employment assessments in the public administration, therefore still depends on the subjective impressions of the panel members. In addition to greater transparency in public administration employment procedures, the creation of records and explanations of grades would also provide additional protection for candidates who apply for public competitions, and reduce the opportunity for unequal treatment and subjectivity during evaluation.

The competency framework defined by the Law and the Manual represents a structure that touches on each individual competence that an individual must have to work in the public administration. The objective of competency assessments is to find the person who will best meet the requirements of the position and specific work tasks. The five competencies (innovation, results-orientation, communication,



leadership, cooperation) are more closely defined by positive and negative indicators that serve as guidelines for desired behaviours in the workplace. However, the questions that are asked in interviews are generic and are reduced to formality, or a mere knowledge assessment, thus leaving room for subjective interpretation as to what kind of behaviour and abilities are expected for certain jobs. The questions (Annex 1) that we encountered in the observed period are generic, and often refer to aspects that should be covered in the written paper. They do not focus on the readiness of candidates to face current and future challenges that are normally associated with a position. Additionally, there is uncertainty regarding how justified some of the questions that are asked in the interview, particularly in relation to those for which there is no publicly available information, and which could potentially privilege candidates who are already employed in the state administration. A good example would be questions related to knowledge of the internal organisation of a given ministry, given that most ministries do not have publicly available and up to date versions of the Rulebook on Internal Organisation and Systematisation.

Issues such as solving crises in interpersonal relationships fall under the competency of cooperation, but the question still takes a generic format. Given that we have also not been able to obtain follow-up questions that may follow the answers of candidates, the repetition of such and similar questions (Annex 2) indicates that it does not take into account the specificity of the positions, but rather that the same questions are repeated for different public competitions. The question of how to motivate other team members was asked most often, in 63 out of 108 interviews¹⁸ in the observed period, i.e. in 58% of all interviews.

18 It was not possible to determine the questions for two interviews: for the public competition for the Directorate of the State Treasury in the Ministry of Finance because the questions were not provided, and for the public competition for the assistant director of the Information Systems Sector, Revenue and Customs Administration, because the candidate did not pass the written paper.

Annex 1: Examples of questions that better target knowledge competences (Source: documentation obtained on the basis of requests for free access to information):

1. What priority activities would you undertake in the future?
2. Tell us something about the amendments to the Law on Public Procurement, as well as about cooperation with the Commission for the Protection of Rights in Public Procurement Procedures?
3. How do you see the organisation and systematisation of jobs in the Ministry?
4. What do you think are the most significant strengths and weaknesses of the maritime industry in Montenegro?
5. Tell us something about projects that are focused on environmental protection and sustainable development.
6. Tell us something about the amendments to the Law on Public Procurement, as well as about cooperation with the Commission for the Protection of Rights in Public Procurement Procedures.
7. Tell us something about the importance of cooperation between the Ministry of Justice and other state authorities.
8. Tell us something about cooperation of the Ministry of Public Administration with other state authorities and institutions, especially in the context of good public administration.
9. What are the organisational units in the Ministry of Capital Investments, and what would you change in the organisation and systematisation of this Ministry?
10. What are the obligations of the subject that is being audited?
11. Tell us something about the challenges in the context of information systems in this area, from the aspect of technical conditions and security infrastructure?

Annex 2: Frequently asked questions (Source: documentation obtained on the basis of requests for free access to information):

1. How do you motivate your team? / What methods do you use to motivate your employees?
 - The question was asked in 63 out of 108 interviews.
2. How do you handle crisis situations in terms of interpersonal relationships? / How do you resolve conflict situations?
 - The question was asked in 19 out of 108 interviews.
3. How do you make unpopular decisions?
 - The question was asked in 16 out of 108 interviews.
4. What qualities should a leader possess?
 - The question was asked in 12 out of 108 interviews.

• WHO GUARANTEES THE IMPARTIALITY OF PANELS?

The panel for recruitment of heads of state authorities and senior managerial staff has the following composition: a representative of the Human Resources Administration, a representative of the employing state authority, who is, as a rule, the head of the organisational unit where the position is being filled, and a prominent expert. The panel's main task is to determine which candidate possesses the greatest knowledge, abilities and skills to fill the position for which a public competition is being held. The role of prominent experts in the panel is broadly defined by law, meaning that it is not specified whether or not that person can be a politically exposed person, a member of a political party or a civil servant. From the submitted documentation, we could conclude that prominent experts in panels were persons from the executive committees of certain political parties, employees in the state administration, and the like. The lack of legal mechanisms for the selection of prominent experts for panel members affects the integrity of the selection process itself and creates space for additional abuse and bias in the selection of the best candidate.

- **THE PARADOX OF “FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS” WITH SHORTLISTED CANDIDATES**

We have previously underlined that the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees retained a disputed provision, which renders the entire process of “competency assessments”, with all its shortcomings, additionally pointless because the final decision on the appointment of a civil servant is made after a follow-up interview with all the candidates from the list for the selection of candidates (shortlist).¹⁹ In order to analyse such follow-up interviews in the procedures of public competitions for managerial positions, we sent additional 28 requests for free access to information to the institutions that announced them. In the requests, we asked for records of the interviews with candidates from the list for the selection of candidates for heads of authorities and senior managerial staff, for the period September 2022 - November 2023.²⁰

Interestingly, in contrast to the standard interview, regulated in more detail through a specially designed competency framework, **as many as 15 institutions submitted records from the so-called follow-up interviews with candidates from the selection list, which made it possible to observe the content of the questions as well as the flow of answers.** However, these follow-up interviews often focus on the same aspects as the first interview, given that questions related to motivation for applying for a given position and/or to the vision of future work, i.e. priorities in a given position, are repeated.²¹ The fact that there is ambiguity in how this principle

19 It is unclear what the purpose of the follow-up interview with the candidates is, who can conduct that interview on behalf of the state authority, what can be the subject of that interview, to what extent the interview is decisive in the final selection of candidates, as well as whether records are kept of the conducted interview etc. While the Law deals with issues of relevance for the implementation of capability assessments, and particular issues are elaborated in detail in the Decree on criteria and detailed manner of conducting tests of knowledge, abilities, competencies and skills for work in state authorities, interviewing candidates from the selection list is defined in only one paragraph of Article 48 of the Law. See: Milena Muk, Integrity of Recruitment in State Authorities: Assessment of Abilities or Partisanship? Institute Alternative, Podgorica, January 2020, available at:

<https://institut-alternativa.org/en/integrity-of-recruitment-in-state-authorities-assessment-of-abilities-or-partisanship/>

20 The Labour Fund and the Ministry of Justice did not respond to our requests, while 11 requests were rejected with the explanation that the competent institutions are not in possession of the requested information.

21 Such was the case with questions in the Ministry of European Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Media, the Health Insurance Fund, the Ministry of Public Administration, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance.



is applied is also confirmed by the answer provided by the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, which argues that the provision not apply at all to candidates for the head of the first-instance authority and senior managerial staff.

“Therefore, access to the requested information would require preparation of documentation that would be in conflict with the regulations governing the appointment of the heads (...) and senior managerial staff”, the Agency state in its response.²²

The Ministry of Economic Development is of the opinion that the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees does not recognise the obligation to make a record, following the interview with the candidates from the candidate selection list, but instead that the provision from Article 48 paragraph 4 prescribes that, following the interview with all the candidates from the candidate selection list, a selection of the final candidate should be made, and the reasons for the decision should be stated in the explanation of the decision on the selection of candidates.²³ Paradoxically, however, we also noted cases where the questions in the follow-up interview were more detailed and focused on different competencies, than was the case with the first series of interviews, which should play a decisive role in competency assessments and hiring processes for managerial positions. Thus, for example, candidates for the position of assistant director of the Administration for Inspection Affairs were asked eight to ten questions, which related to specific situations.²⁴

22 Decision of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption No. 02-03-2207/2 from December 4, 2023.

23 Decision of the Ministry of Economic Development No. 016-037/23-7230/3 from November 24, 2023.

24 “How do you cope with defeat? How do you think you gain trust in the team? How important is teamwork for this position? How do you define authority and how does it stand out? How do you think you can solve the problem with an inspector who is insufficiently motivated or does not show good results in his or her work, and you notice that there is significant difference in performance compared to others? How would you react if you found out that one of the colleagues in your sector did something that is against the law, but you don’t have evidence, which would make taking action easier? How would you describe yourself in reaction to a stressful situation? Imagine a case covered by the media, in which you are faced with public pressure from the media and other entities that have the right to look back and comment in public. You need to come up with a solution, how would you react in that situation? Would you rather be loved or feared? What would you say is your weakness? What personal competencies and skills do you think you possess that are crucial for performing the work in question?”, Decision of the Administration for Inspection Affairs No.: UP I ZH 0701-037/23-141/23 from November 30, 2023.



Conclusion

The process of conducting an oral interview, as part of the competency assessment for managerial positions in the state administration, is still not sufficiently transparent and adequately implemented. One of the key shortcomings is the fact that records are not made when conducting interviews. The procedure for competency assessments and evaluation of candidates is not sufficiently regulated, and is reliant on the subjective impressions of each panel member, which is all the more reason for there being a legal obligation for the Administration to make a written record of interviews, given the need to create a greater degree of trust in the efforts to professionalise the state administration. Paradoxically, follow-up interviews with candidates from the selection list, as a rather unregulated and obscure institute, are often more documented, in the sense of written records being made. Nevertheless, the documentation we received only confirmed broadly or insufficiently defined legal solutions, such as: lack of explanation by panel members regarding the grades; general and generic questions that hardly cover all five competencies, and therefore hinder a comprehensive assessment of the candidate's abilities for the position; and lack of obligation to select the candidate with the highest score or grade. All in all, the evaluation of competencies, even in areas for which it was first intended - for the most responsible professional positions - did not take root. This points to the need for additional strengthening of the capacity of all state authorities and the Human Resources Administration for the application of the competency framework, as a tool that can help establish a system of merit-based recruitment.

Recommendations

01

The competent Ministry of Public Administration and the Government of Montenegro should prescribe a legal obligation for the Human Resources Administration to prepare written records of interviews, in order to enable the highest degree of integrity and transparency during employment in the public administration;

02

The competent Ministry of Public Administration and the Government of Montenegro should prescribe the obligation of the members of the panel for competency assessments, to provide an explanation of assessments for each of the competencies, which are the subject of assessment during the oral interview;

03

The Human Resources Administration and state authorities that are recruiting a head or senior managerial staff should ensure that interviews within the framework of public competitions for managerial positions, which are a method of competency assessment, be focused on actually assessing competencies, rather than general knowledge and facts;

04

The competent Ministry of Public Administration and the Government of Montenegro should prescribe a norm that members of the panel for competency assessment must not be politically exposed persons;

05

The capacities of the Human Resources Administration and other persons who participate in the panel for competency assessments should be strengthened through targeted training and other types of expert (in-house) support - underlining the importance and purpose of the competency framework and its application in the context of recruitment in the state administration;

06

The competent Ministry of Public Administration and the Government of Montenegro should abolish the so-called institute of follow-up interviews with the candidates from the selection list, and ensure the selection of the best-ranked candidate, based on an improved competency assessment.



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Appendix

List of authorities and institutions to which we sent requests for free access to information, through which we requested the following: *Copies of the records of interviews with candidates from the list for the selection of candidates for heads of authorities and senior managerial staff in line with paragraph 4, Article 48 of the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees for the period September 1, 2022 - November 10, 2023.*

Authority/institution to which the request was sent	Answer
Ministry of Energy and Mining	Request rejected due to lack of information
Ministry of Defence	Request rejected due to lack of information
Agency for control and quality assurance of higher education	Delivered
Ministry of European Affairs	Delivered
Agency for Peaceful Settlement of Labour Disputes	Delivered
Audit Authority of Montenegro	Request rejected due to lack of information
Health Insurance Fund of Montenegro	Delivered
Pension and Disability Insurance Fund	Request rejected due to lack of information
Labour Fund	No answer
Administration for Inspection Affairs	Delivered
Secretariat-General of the Government of Montenegro	Request rejected due to lack of information
Montenegrin Investments Agency	Request rejected due to lack of information
Agency for the Protection of Competition	Delivered
Agency for Prevention of Corruption	Request rejected due to lack of information

Authority/institution to which the request was sent	Answer
Ministry of Health	Delivered
Ministry of Internal Affairs (Mol)	Delivered
Ministry of Sports and Youth	Delivered
Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs	Delivered
Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare	Request rejected due to lack of information
Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation	Delivered
Ministry of Spatial Planning, Urbanism and State Property	Delivered
Ministry of Justice	No answer
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	Request rejected due to lack of information
Ministry for Human and Minority Rights	Request rejected due to lack of information
Ministry of Culture and Media	Delivered
Ministry of Public Administration	Delivered
Ministry of Finance	Delivered
Ministry of Economic Development	Request rejected due to lack of information



About Institute Alternative

Institute Alternative was founded in 2007 in Podgorica with the mission of strengthening democratic processes and good governance in Montenegro, through research and analysis of public policy options, as well as monitoring the work of public administration.

We function as a research centre (think tank) and work on good governance, transparency and accountability through three main program strands: I) public administration reform; II) accountable public finances; III) rule of law.

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