

An Overview of the Human Resources Activities in Central Government Institutions

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Abstract: *Specialists consider that the quality of human resources management influences organizational performance and encourage public managers to come up with solutions in order to increase human resources activities efficiency. The aim of the present paper is to provide an in-depth up-to-date analysis of civil servants' perception regarding the implementation of human resources activities in Romanian central government public institutions. In order to have a clearer picture of human resources management particularities in Romanian central government institutions civil servants have been questioned regarding the quality of human resources activities such as performance appraisal interview, career development plan, training needs analysis and mobility within civil service, job analysis or new employees' induction. The paper brings forward and discusses the results of the research activity we have conducted and presents the conclusions we have formulated based on the ascertained facts.*

Keywords: *civil service; human resources management; performance appraisal; professional training; career development.*

JEL: *C83, J24, M5, O15.*

Introduction

Recent research in the area of human resources management argues that the quality of the human resources activities influences organisational performance improvement and that the mere existence of human resources policies and practices is less important than how they are implemented. In a period when governments need to reduce costs and, at the same time, have to improve institutional design in order to facilitate public administration reform and policy and provide a proper response to citizen demands (Teles, 2012), public managers should pay more attention to implementing mechanisms that encourage human capital development. (Androniceanu et al, 2011).

Our paper presents the results of the survey we have conducted within several public institutions of the Romanian central government. The aim of our research is to provide an in-depth up-to-date analysis of civil servants' perception regarding the implementation certain human resources activities are implemented

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in public institutions (professional training, performance appraisal, career development).

1. Theoretical background and state of art

The study of Purcell and Hutchinson (2003) shows that line managers play the most important part in human resources management as they put into practice human resources policies through communication, problem solving, paying attention to employees' suggestions, coaching, by showing respect and treating subordinates fairly. Such behaviour from line managers triggers employees' voluntary behaviour determining them to work harder by acting as leaders who give legitimacy to the strategic development of human resources (Manole et al, 2011).

Purcell and Hutchinson (2003) have associated career opportunities, professional training opportunities, performance appraisal, teamwork, ethical values and involvement in decision making process, life-work balance with high levels of commitment to the organisation, job satisfaction and motivation. (Androniceanu, Abaluta, 2009). Employees' low level of commitment, job satisfaction and motivation has been associated with the deficient implementation of human resources policies rather than with their absence. Purcell and Hutchinson (2003) argue that the most efficient organizations are those able to maintain their good performance over time and to create a clear connection between human resources policies and performance.

The results of the study of Vermeeren *et al.* (2008) show that human resources management is important not only for the results human resources activities generate (such as the feeling that the performed activity is important, job satisfaction, intention to quit current job), but also for organisational performance. Furthermore, their study shows that there is an indirect relationship between human resources management and performance, determined by human resources activity results, and argues that public sector institutions need to pay attention to the influence human resources management has on organizational performance.

In the study regarding institutional and administrative capacity of ten EU member states (Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom), the European Commission shows that the analysed countries present major deficiencies in the human resources management area. The main shortcomings signalled by the international organisation are the lack of abilities and competences at all hierarchical levels and the low efficiency of civil servants professional training during the last years (European Commission, 2011).

In a recent study regarding human resources management in Romanian public institutions, Androniceanu and Ciobanu (2012b) have shown that there have been some improvements in the human resources activities during the last years, but the rhythm of these changes has decreased compared to the period of pre-accession to the European Union, given recent political and socio-economical

events. Furthermore, these transformations have produced limited positive impact on civil servants' performance level mainly because they represent results of numerous legislative changes (Androniceanu and Ciobanu, 2012b) which have not been accompanied by cultural change.

Professional training is considered to be the solution to increasing civil service professionalism but practice has shown that its impact is sometimes limited. In the above mentioned study, the European Commission (2011) has identified several weaknesses of the professional training in Romania: top management civil servants do not attend training programmes on fundamental themes or on issues of actuality, the impact of participating to professional training is not evaluated and the persons who acquire knowledge through professional training leave public system for better paid jobs in the private sector. The European Commission (2011) has reached the conclusion that the situation of civil service professional training in Romania is characteristic for other countries too. They state that the main problem in this area is the lack of structural connection between professional training impact and organisational efficiency; in other words, professional training in public institutions focuses on the individual while its connection to the organisation is weak (The European Commission, 2011).

Brown *et al.* (2010) consider that organizational effectiveness depends on the quality of the performance evaluation process too and that the design and implementation of performance appraisal mechanism significantly influences the results obtained both at individual and organizational level. Specialists consider that inappropriate individual performance appraisal process represents a continuous challenge for organisations (Heathfield, 2007), that the quality of the process depends on line managers' attitude towards this activity and on how they approach this issue. Heathfield (2007) has noted managers' reluctant attitude towards performing appraisals which they dislike more than dismissing people. Brown *et al.* (2010) bring into discussion the fact that managers make mistakes when they evaluate their subordinates (hallo effect, over - emphasis on recent performance, central tendency etc.), they do not wish to give negative feedback, postpone undertaking appraisals or perform the evaluation based on their own values.

The fact that performance appraisal is perceived as a process that requires a significant amount of time and effort, that generates reduced satisfaction and increased stress for the managers has led to managers evaluating their subordinates in an arbitrary and superficial manner as they fear that the impact of the process is not equivalent to the effort invested in its completion (Brown *et al.* 2010).

An important aspect signalled by Demmke (2007) is that 98% of public sector employees are evaluated as "very good" in the annual performance appraisal. The author considers the answer of the Romanian representatives according to whom "the results of the civil servants are overestimated in their individual performance appraisal and they are generally evaluated with top marks" does not apply only for Romania but also for the situation in other countries of the European Union. (Androniceanu, Nastase, 2009).

Androniceanu and Ciobanu (2012a) consider that the major weakness of the performance appraisal activity in Romanian public institutions is that neither executive civil servants nor management civil servants are aware of the importance of this process for professional and personal development. By consequence, performance appraisal is perceived as an auxiliary activity that has to be fulfilled because it is a legislative obligation and not as a continuous process or as a human resources management tool that could be used to improve civil servants performance. Human resources from public sector should be prepared to meet the requirements of the business environment and to become more active and efficient in designing the cooperation in a globalised society. (Androniceanu, Dragulanescu, 2012).

Regarding career development system in the civil service, Bossaert (2003) considers that the main developments of the EU Member States in this area have been going from personnel administration to a more flexible and individual focused human resource management granting the necessary attention to civil servants' individual profile and skills, to creating a connection between individual performance and career advancement and to ensuring the necessary premises for a diversified career development by encouraging mobility within the public sector and between the public and private. Bossaert (2003) sets out the prerequisite conditions to build a motivating career development system in the public sector: the existence of a promotion policy based on the principles of individual performance reward and merit recognition, employees' professional development opportunities through mobility, training, job enrichment and coaching.

The aim of our paper is to present the results of an in-depth analysis of human resources activities in Romanian public institutions based on which to conclude whether Romanian civil service follows the professionalization trends set by developed EU countries in the area of civil servants professional training, performance appraisal and career development system.

2. Study regarding human resources management in Romanian central government institutions

The data presented in this paper is part of a wider in-progress study regarding human resources management and civil service in Romanian central and local government and has been collected between the 1st and the 15th of July 2013. The survey has been conducted within three institutions of the central government.

We have chosen to use the survey for this initial stage of our study as our aim has been to collect comprehensive information regarding the subject of our analysis, information that can be subsequently used to design more in-depth qualitative research instruments.

2.1. Presentation of the research process

The aim of our paper is to present an overview of the way main human resources activities such as civil servants professional training, performance

appraisal, career development are implemented in public institutions. As previously mentioned, the quality of human resources activities influences employees' performance and we intend to analyse the quality of human resources activities in Romanian central government institutions in order to determine the factors that could contribute to an increased professional performance level. We have chosen to analyze these activities as they represent essential elements of the human resources process whose proper implementation produces a significant impact on any employee's work performance and translates into improved organizational performance.

The sample of our survey has been composed of persons who occupy a civil service positions - the beneficiaries of the human resources activities performed by the public employer. The analysis we provide is based on civil servants' perception and opinions regarding the implementation of human resources activities. We have chosen to collect the necessary information using a questionnaire which contained several types of research questions that tackled different aspects of the human resources activities area. The questionnaire has been disseminated electronically within three institutions of the central government. We have considered this method of collecting information to be the most appropriate as it allows for anonymity of those who fill in the questionnaire and enables them to respond in a more honest way. The questions included in the questionnaire have been designed using a evaluation scale in order to be able to appraise civil servants' opinion regarding the quality of the analysed human resources activity.

The collected information has been statistically processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This programme has been used to create the research data base, to check and validate the data and to synthesize it into tables and charts.

2.2. Research methods

The questionnaire used to collect the information contained 13 questions out of which the following 10 have been considered relevant for the topic of our present paper:

- identification questions - 5 closed questions regarding respondent's position within the civil service (management position, executive position, special attribution position), educational level (high school degree, bachelor degree/long term university education, master studies, advanced studies), civil service seniority (less than 3 years, between 3 and 5 years, between 5 and 10 years, between 10 and 15 years, more than 15 years), area of activity, public institution dimension (less than 50 employees, between 51 and 100 employees, between 101 and 150 employees, between 151 and 300 employees, more than 301 employees);

- 5 questions regarding professional training, career development system and performance appraisal system in the civil service - each question containing 4 to 9 items to be evaluated using a 1 to 5 scale (1 - strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree).

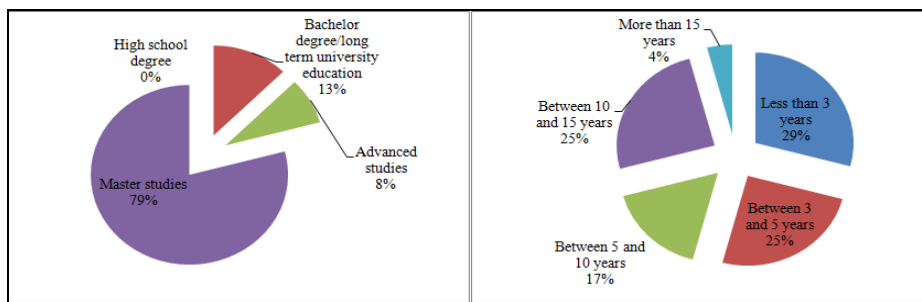
The questionnaire has been electronically distributed within three institutions of the central government.

2.3 Research sample

During the period 1-15 June 2013, there have been received 24 answers from 1 management civil servant, 10 executive civil servants and 13 civil servants with special attributions ("public managers"). All respondents pertain to large public organizations (with more than 301 employees); some areas of activity of the respondents are: economic development; budget, finance and public investments; public policy; human resources; control; European funds administration; organizational management.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the respondents (percentage) according to their educational level and their civil service seniority.

Figure 1. Respondents' classification according to educational level and seniority within civil service



The images above show that our sample consists preponderantly of persons who are at the beginning of their career within the civil service, 29% of our respondents have been working for less than 3 years within a public institutions and 25% of them have a civil service seniority of 3 to 5 years. 79% of the respondents have graduated master studies, while 8% of them have a diploma in advanced studies (post-university studies). Based on the data presented we can conclude that our sample is mostly formed of young, well prepared civil servants.

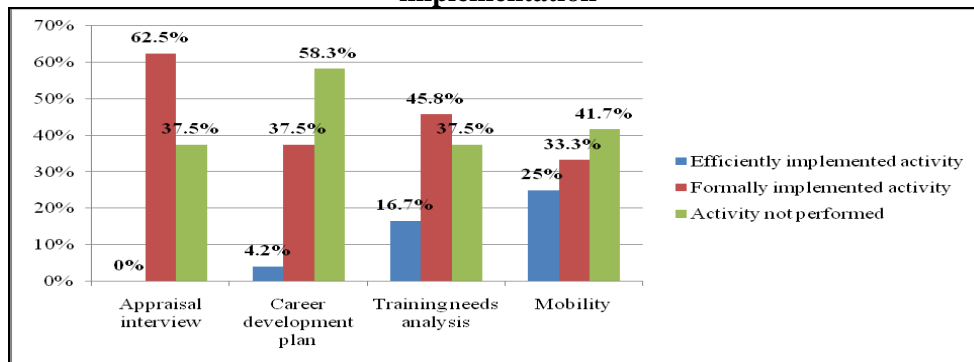
2.4 Results and analysis

When asked whether activities such as performance appraisal interview, career development plan, training needs analysis and mobility within civil service

are effectively implemented in the institutions of the central government, the questioned civil servants have declared that the afore-mentioned activities have either never been performed or are being carried out formally. 58.3% of the respondents appreciate that career development planning or job analysis are not performed at their workplace, 41.7% of the questioned civil servants consider that mobility within the civil service is not implemented within public institutions and 37.5% consider that training needs are never analysed. 62.5% of the respondents have declared that performance appraisal interviews are formally implemented while 45.8% consider that training needs analysis is only formally performed (statements illustrated in figure 2).

These high percentages of civil servants who consider that the human resources activities are being only formally implemented or have never been implemented at their workplace show that employee centred activities are hardly performed in Romanian central government institutions. Regarding performance appraisal interview, we need to remark that none of our respondents has declared that this activity is efficiently implemented, which could mean that public managers do not discuss or analyse together with their subordinates the results of their professional activity or do not take this opportunity to actually set future realistic objectives for the members of their team.

Figure 2. Civil servants' opinion regarding human resources activities implementation



Almost 16.7% of the respondents have appreciated that their training needs are properly identified. However, this is only one element of the **professional training** activity. In order to evaluate the efficiency of the professional training within public institutions, we have included in the questionnaire items regarding:

- The identification of the training needs during annual individual performance appraisal.
- The correlation between the subject of the training programme and the area of activity of the participant.

- The of the participation to the training programme on professional activity.

Each of these primary variables has been defined based on a five level scale where 1 = training needs are never identified during annual individual performance appraisal/ the subject of the training programme is not correlated to the person's area of activity/ the training programme produces no impact on person's professional activity; 5 = training needs are always identified during annual individual performance appraisal/ the subject of the training programme is strongly correlated to the person's area of activity/ the training programme produces a significant positive impact on person's professional activity. The distribution of the three primary variables within the sample is illustrated by Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the primary variables regarding professional training within the sample (percentage)

	Item	1 (strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (strongly agree)	No answer
1	Training needs are identified during the annual individual performance appraisal (PTAE1)	12.50%	33.33%	25%	25%	4.17%	0
2	The subject of the training programme is correlated to the area of professional activity (PTAE2)	20.83%	4.17%	25%	37.50%	8.33%	4.17%
3	Participation to the training programme produces a positive impact on professional activity (PTAE3)	29.17%	12.50%	25%	25%	4.17%	4.17%

For each of the three primary variable has been identified the mean value (in order to measure the central tendency). Table 2 shows the medium level of the professional training activity efficiency in Romanian central government institutions.

Table 2. Level of the professional training efficiency on a scale from 1 to 5

Item	Mean value
Training needs are identified during the annual individual performance appraisal (PTAE1)	2.75
The subject of the training programme is correlated to the area of professional activity (PTAE2)	3.09
Participation to the training programme produces a positive impact on professional activity (PTAE3)	2.61
Professional training activity efficiency (PTAE)	2.81

Using the three primary variables we have designed the aggregated variable PTAE (professional training activity efficiency) based on the following equation:

$$PTAE: N \rightarrow [1,3], PTAE=1/3(PTAE1+PTAE2+PTAE3) \quad (1)$$

An important number of the questioned civil servants have declared that their professional training needs are not usually identified during the annual performance appraisal process (mean value of the primary PTAE1 variable 2.75) which can be explained by two aspects mentioned earlier: 1) the performance appraisal process is only carried out formally and little attention is paid to actually diagnosing an employee's professional training needs - which is one of the elements that has to be considered when performing performance appraisals; 2) 45.8% of our respondents appreciate that training needs analysis is formally performed, while 37.5% of them declare that this activity never take place (see figure 2).

Our respondents consider that their participation to the training programmes does not influence their professional activity positively (mean value of the primary PTAE3 variable 2.61) even if they attend training programmes on subjects correlated to their area of activity (mean value of the primary PTAE2 variable 3.09).

The values presented in table 2 show that the aggregated PTAE variable presents a mean value of 2.81 which highlights the fact that important improvements need to be made in this area, especially concerning employees' training needs identification and professional training impact. We have seen above that civil servants usually attend professional training programs related to their area of activity, however their effect on professional performance is limited either due to the quality of the courses or because the employee's professional training necessity has not been met by the attended program.

Romania has been a member of the European Union for 6 years and numerous efforts have been made to align Romanian civil service to the European principles, however the results of our study show that in terms of career development, Romanian **civil service** can still be characterised as extremely rigid

and traditional. More than half of the participants to our survey (54.2%) agree and strongly agree that the civil service career development system relies to a large extent on civil service seniority and 66.7% of the respondents consider that the principles of merit recognition or rewarding good results are not embedded in the current system of career development. 66.7% of the respondents consider that, at the moment, they do not have the opportunity to develop their professional career through internal horizontal or vertical mobility while 54.2% of the respondents consider that they are not even offered the possibility to improve their professional skills through professional training or through diversification of the attributions of the occupied position.

Even if this type of seniority based career system is convenient in terms of its costs - it is a repetitive process that involves minimum time and financial resources, and prevents a person from occupying a certain position before having gained valuable experience, it does not create the necessary premises to motivate public employees, to encourage initiative and active participation in the work place. Androniceanu (2012) considers that the time allocated by an individual to career development is limited and that employees should be encouraged and oriented towards identifying their own path and optimal direction for their professional development. Such changes have to be accompanied by enhanced institutional capacity and flexibility that would create the necessary conditions for greater internal mobility and provision of efficient professional training.

We have previously shown that, in the opinion of the participants to our survey, performance appraisal interview is either carried out in a formal manner or does not take place at all. Appraisal interview is only one stage of civil servants' performance appraisal process which is why we have included in our research instrument further questions regarding this activity. The answers to these questions have been in line with the answers to the earlier mentioned question and confirmed that performance appraisal is an inefficient activity, carried out formally in order to honour legislative provisions (70.8% of the respondents approve this statement). However, performance appraisal is at times used as an instrument to motivate morally or financially civil servants - 25% of our respondents consider that they benefit from a transparent and equitable/correct evaluation, and that their managers use performance appraisal as a motivational tool within the team; 25% of the respondents consider that performance appraisal has some influence on their professional activity while 20.8% agree that performance appraisal produces significant effects on their professional activity.

An important part in the performance appraisal process pertains to the line manager who should dispose of the skills and knowledge to conduct an equitable and yet motivational evaluation of its subordinates. The results of a recent study conducted by Androniceanu (2013) show that nearly half of public managers involved in the research encourage their subordinates "by recognizing individual contributions and by celebrating their accomplishments," hence comporting an ethical behaviour that is absolutely necessary when transformational reforms are

implemented. By applying the same principles during professional appraisal interview together with granting the necessary time resources to perform this activity, the quality of performance appraisal in public institutions would considerably improve, the work environment would become more motivational and competitive triggering higher levels of individual performance.

3. Recommendations

One of the premises for improved organizational performance is high quality workforce which could be attracted and preserved within the organization by providing a motivational and competitive work environment and the opportunity to continuously develop professionally. Based on the facts ascertained following our research and presented in the previous section of the paper, we appreciate that some measures should be undertaken in order to improve human resources activities quality within Romanian central government institutions.

First of all, we agree with other human resources specialists that line managers play an important part in human resources activities implementation and consider that an increased awareness of top and middle management level regarding the crucial role line managers play in the proper implementation of human resources activities would encourage line managers to pay more attention and assign more financial and time resources to performing these activities.

Secondly, we consider that the results of activities such as performance appraisal or professional training should better reflect upon an individual's career development. Currently, civil servants perceive advancement as an entitlement and not as a reward for hard work, determination and capabilities and these are only some of the disadvantages of a strictly seniority driven career system, a system that breeds lack of initiative. We consider that redesigning civil service career development system so that greater internal mobility would be allowed and having increased importance placed on professional training according to institutional future needs are absolutely necessary measures in order to increase individual satisfaction and performance.

Conclusions

Romanian public sector has been the subject of numerous structural changes during the last ten years, a decade which has been divided between the attempts of Romanian authorities to accomplish the accession requirements to the European Union, on the one hand, and the attempts to reduce the functioning costs of the public sector apparatus in the context of economic crisis. Even if all these transformations produced significant impact on the situation of the human resources within public institutions, the process of management human resources has not received a great amount of attention from public managers, either of top or medium level.

The results of our research show that Romanian authorities did not manage to inculcate upon the national civil service the European principles. Even if national legislation establishes the conditions of conducting professional training, career development and performance appraisal, it sets a connection between the three activities and the exact role of the line manager, there is a considerable gap between legal provisions and their actual implementation. However, further improvements have to be made not only in terms of human resources activity implementation but also regarding career development mechanism as the system in place does not contribute effectively to building a motivational, competitive and attractive work environment.

Inferring the statement of Brown *et al.* (2010) and taking into consideration the facts ascertained by conducting this survey, we conclude that the price paid by Romanian public institution for carrying out poor human resources management activities is low employee satisfaction, low commitment to the organization and increased expression of the desire to leave the institution.

The aim of this article is to present a realistic picture of how human resources management activities are implemented in Romanian public institutions and to bring into the academic discussion how this situation might influence the overall performance of public organizations. However we cannot draw conclusions regarding the functioning of the human resources management system in Romanian central government institutions, in general, given the limited sample of our research, which is why we consider that further theoretical and empirical research should be undertaken.

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